

Inspection of an outstanding school: Phoenix School

49 Bow Road, London E3 2AD

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 April 2024

Outcome

Phoenix School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Phoenix School is a place where pupils flourish and thrive. They are valued, happy and kept safe by highly knowledgeable and dedicated staff. Relationships between pupils and adults are warm and respectful. This creates a palpable sense of care and community across the whole school.

Pupils behave well. They are taught what is expected of them and supported to meet these expectations. They learn to communicate and regulate their different emotions appropriately. Pupils' sensory needs are fully considered by staff, who use a range of activities designed by occupational therapists to promote regulation. These include sensory spaces, outdoor activities, swimming and working with nature. Bullying is a rarity, but should it happen, pupils are confident that staff will help them and keep them safe.

Pupils learn to communicate their choices and opinions in different ways. This ensures that all pupils have a voice and are listened to. They participate in a vast range of activities, work experience and educational visits. They learn how to keep themselves safe in the community and when online.

Pupils on all sites, including students in the sixth form, are expected to achieve well and supported to achieve their very best. They are encouraged to be independent. This generates confidence among pupils, who meet the high expectations set for them.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils learn the full range of subjects expected nationally and make strong progress from their different starting points. This is because leaders have identified the important knowledge and skills pupils need learn, practise and apply before moving on to more complex ideas. For example, some pupils start to communicate using a small set of symbols and images. These are gradually expanded, so they can communicate with confidence. Alongside this, pupils learn to recognise the way sounds are represented through letters. This helps pupils to build their vocabulary and supports early reading.

Teachers set interesting and ambitious tasks to motivate, engage and extend pupils' learning. They provide ample opportunities for pupils to repeat and reinforce knowledge, so they know and remember more over time. Consequently, pupils typically enjoy learning and feel confident and happy in school. Assessment is used effectively. Staff check what pupils know and have learned. This information is used to refine the curriculum and to gauge how well pupils are progressing towards targets outlined in their education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Staff are highly trained and expert in a range of communication systems. This is due to strong collaboration between staff and the speech and language therapist team. Together, they know pupils extremely well and have very high expectations of what they can achieve. This means they can adapt resources and the environment to support pupils to learn effectively.

Pupils are well supported to learn to read. This includes learning to recognise their name, important signs, symbols, key words and gestures. For those that are ready to learn phonics, the school's chosen programme is implemented with accuracy and precision. This helps pupils to read with increasing fluency and confidence. Pupils readily apply their knowledge of phonics when reading everyday items such as menus or instructions.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. This is because clear and well-communicated systems are consistently applied. Staff and pupils alike understand what is expected. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, are supported to understand and regulate their emotions. Strong routines help pupils to focus and reduce any anxiety they may have. Improving attendance has been a key focus for school leaders. Relationships between home and school are strong. This enables staff to explore with families any barriers pupils face in coming to school. Effective systems are in place, including working with external agencies, to support families in overcoming any such barriers.

Pupils' wider development is exceptional. A comprehensive programme of visits enhances the curriculum and provide pupils with opportunities to apply their learning in the outside world. A range of artistic and cultural organisations facilitate practical workshops. These include working with prestigious orchestras, musicians, artists, dance companies, galleries and museums. The curriculum is designed to help pupils learn about different faiths and festivals, such as Diwali, Eid and Christmas. Parents and carers are welcomed into the school to participate in these lively celebrations. Pupils benefit from the opportunity to attend overnight residential visits. For example, older students stay on the coast, and independently plan their meals, shop for ingredients as well as research and plan their activities. The careers programme and preparation for adulthood is exemplary. Through a range of interviews, work-related learning, pupils, and students in the sixth form, are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Leaders at all levels, including those responsible for governance, support staff to make a significant difference to the lives of pupils and their families. Leaders are highly considerate of well-being and workload. Staff are extremely positive about the support and development opportunities they receive. They enjoy working at Phoenix School and value being part of this special community. Phoenix is a happy school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in November 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	100987
Local authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	10296697
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	508
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Laura Worsley
Headteacher	Veronica Armson (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.phoenix.towerhamlets.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act, 2005.

Information about this school

- Phoenix school is a community special school catering for three to 19-year-olds.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. The majority of pupils have autism noted as their primary special educational need. There are a small proportion of pupils listed as having moderate and severe learning difficulties.
- The school is situated over four sites. The provision for primary age pupils is based at Bow Road, London E3 2AD with a satellite provision based at Marner Primary school, Devas Street, London E3 3LL. The provision for secondary age pupils and the post-16 provision are based at Paton Close, London E3 2QD with a secondary satellite provision based at Bow School, Twelvetrees Crescent, London E3 3QW.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not currently use an alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and communication, mathematics, and personal, social, health and economic education. To do this, they met with subject leaders, held discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. Other subjects were considered as part of this inspection.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school and priorities for improvement.
- The inspection team met with senior leaders, a selection of subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. They also spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and their responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Una Buckley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Shaun Dodds

Ofsted Inspector

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