

The Phoenix School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123576
Local Authority	Telford and Wrekin
Inspection number	292719
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	918
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Clarke
Headteacher	Neil Stonehouse
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2002
School address	Manor Road Dawley Telford TF4 3DZ
Telephone number	01952 386700
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Phoenix is a small but growing comprehensive school situated on the outskirts of Telford. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is nearly twice the national average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is higher than that found nationally. Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and no pupils are at the earliest stages of learning English. The school has sport partnership hub status and has received a healthy schools award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Standards are rising and it is increasingly popular with the local community. It is particularly successful in integrating vulnerable pupils in school and it works outstandingly well in partnership with other agencies to meet all pupils' needs.

Most pupils join the school working at levels below those found nationally. By the time they leave at the end of Year 11 they have achieved standards close to the national average. The school is inclusive and nearly all pupils leave with at least one GCSE qualification. Standards have been rising over recent years and the progress pupils make in school is generally good in most subjects including English and mathematics. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics is showing a general trend of improvement, although there were not quite as many pupils attaining at this level in 2006.

Personal development is good. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall although a minority of parents expressed concerns over pupils' behaviour when regular teachers are absent. Teaching and learning are good and at their best outstanding. However, there are some gaps in learning caused by staff absences or vacancies and on occasions the school has struggled to find well qualified staff to cover lessons. This has prevented standards from being higher and pupils' progress from being better than it is. The curriculum has benefited from innovations which have given pupils more vocational choices and this has increased their enjoyment of school. Pupils have access to a very good range of activities additional to daily lessons through the extended school and extra-curricular provision.

Systems for tracking pupils' progress are very good but not all pupils know how well they are doing in lessons and what they need to do to improve their performance. Pastoral support is very good, especially for vulnerable pupils. As a result, pupils feel safe and confident in school and able to approach adults if they have any worries or concerns.

The leaders and managers of the school know its strengths and weaknesses well. There is a clear focus on raising standards. Alongside this is a passionate commitment to ensuring that all pupils are fully included. The governing body plays a full part in supporting the school and contributing to its improvement.

The Phoenix has made good progress since the last inspection and has strong capacity to improve further. It provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' progress and raise standards by ensuring greater consistency of teaching by well qualified staff.
- Ensure that all pupils are given clear guidance about how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve their performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are broadly similar to the national average. When most pupils join The Phoenix from primary school their attainment is below average. Pupils are still working at levels below national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3 but by the time they leave school at the end of Year 11 they have achieved standards in line with the national

average. There has been a rising trend in recent years of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades at A* to C although the proportion of pupils achieving five good grades including English and mathematics fell in 2006.

The inclusive nature of the school is reflected in the high percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* to G grades which has been significantly above average in recent years. The school has had consistently fewer pupils gaining no passes than the national average.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below average in English, mathematics and science. The proportions of pupils achieving the higher levels are not as high as national averages. Pupils make better progress in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 and overall their achievement is good. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although their appreciation of cultures other than their own is a less well developed area. Pupils progress well in their acquisition of personal qualities, benefiting from many additional activities and visits as well as the carefully planned personal, social and health education and citizenship programmes. They take on responsibilities as mentors and prefects willingly. They enjoy and learn from the opportunities they have to work in groups, for example contributing to the very active school council. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school, and their attitudes to learning are positive. All pupils, including the older ones, are responsive to the merit system, and are pleased to receive rewards for good work. They are prepared well for life after school as they acquire a useful range of skills, both social and academic.

Pupils' attendance is satisfactory. It is just below average, but the school has a good record in integrating pupils from elsewhere who attend part time in order to remain in education. Pupils are polite, friendly and confident. Their behaviour in and around the school is good overall, although the school's own surveys and the responses to the parents' questionnaire indicate some concern about behaviour, especially in lessons taken by temporary staff. The pupils cooperate well, and any minor incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with effectively. Pupils say that bullying and racist incidents are rare and that they are dealt with quickly. They discuss such issues maturely and perceptively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are generally good and pupils make good progress in the majority of lessons; some teaching is outstanding although it is more effective in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Where there have been difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers with sufficient skill and subject knowledge, pupils have not achieved as well as where the teaching is maintained at a consistently good level by well qualified staff.

Pupils are encouraged to work independently and the school actively supports the development of thinking skills, pupils' own understanding of how they learn and what they must do to improve. Most lessons are well planned, although there is not always enough attention paid to the full range of skills and abilities of pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3. Pupils' work is

marked thoroughly in some subjects and most books clearly show how well pupils are progressing and what their individual targets are. This is not uniform across all subjects, however, and not all pupils clearly understand how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve their performance.

Pupil progress is very well tracked and recorded by most teachers and access to those records is available to parents. Homework is regularly set and marked, and is at times used very creatively to enhance learning and stretch the most able, such as in English and music.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum that offers sufficient opportunities for all pupils to pursue their learning in areas that interest them. Statutory requirements are met. Provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) is good. Regardless of ability, all pupils have the chance to take up the subjects they wish at GCSE. As a result, they are well prepared for their future employment. They enjoy the challenges offered to them by the out of school curriculum, through after school clubs and additional activities. For instance, many pupils enjoy the challenge of producing and running a theatre production, editing the school magazine or making and marketing a board game to be sold locally. After school clubs thrive, allowing pupils to become involved in new activities, such as cheerleading and learning to be a dance leader.

There is a well-structured, work-related curriculum that includes vocational subjects as well as activities that are planned within the academic curriculum. Those who experience difficulties in attending school have an individual curriculum designed for them that allows them to progress well and remain in education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a caring and inclusive school that provides good guidance and support for all its pupils. Pastoral guidance and support are very good, especially for those who have learning difficulties or disabilities or whose behaviour causes concern. Excellent care is taken of children who are vulnerable. They are identified early and supported to continue and succeed in school by expert staff. One student, reflecting the views of many, commented that the teachers 'make you feel valued'.

Academic guidance and support are satisfactory. Good systems ensure that pupils' progress is tracked effectively. It is recorded centrally and targets are set accurately. Most pupils are aware of the targets they have been set and the progress they are making. However, some are not because not all teachers and subject areas follow the school's clear procedures.

Pupils feel safe and secure. Risk assessments are completed properly and the required checks take place on all staff. There is a good attention to developing pupils' awareness of healthy lifestyles, and physical activities are encouraged, leading to The Phoenix having received a healthy schools award. The school provides good information for pupils about potential choices of courses and careers. There are excellent links with a wide range of other institutions and agencies to meet pupils' needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school rightly judges its management and leadership to be good. Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and successfully focus attention on raising standards. They give a high priority to the quality of teaching and learning. To support this a good tracking system has been put in place for monitoring pupils' progress although the school recognises that the use of this is not fully embedded. The issue of recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff is a challenge to the school. Nevertheless, the school strives with considerable success to make sure that all pupils are fully included in all that the school does.

The governors support the school's professional leadership well. Together, governors and senior staff ensure a sound financial basis on which to move the school forward. They provide a shared vision and measured approach to the school's development. The use of a committee system ensures all aspects of the school are monitored by governors as well as the senior staff. The 'developing, planning and review' committee strongly and critically supports the leadership.

Leaders at all levels share the vision of a school for its community and have in place agreed strategies for raising standards both of teaching and pupils' progress.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Phoenix School, Telford, TF34 3DZ

You will know that we recently inspected your school and I thought you would like to know what we found. You go to a good school. Most of you have said you enjoy school and feel safe and secure. You make good progress in your work by the end of Year 11. By the time you leave, nearly everyone has gained at least one qualification at GCSE. The good teaching you receive, particularly at Key Stage 4, enables you to do this. At times, however, your learning has been disrupted when it has been difficult for the school to get suitable cover for absent teachers or teachers who have left.

Whilst we were in school you behaved well and showed very positive attitudes to each other and your learning. However, some of you and your parents expressed concerns about behaviour, particularly when your regular teachers are not present in lessons.

The school takes good care of you, especially those of you who have additional needs. You are offered a good range of subjects to study that meets your needs. Senior staff lead the school well and work hard to ensure you are all included and do as well as you can. Most of you know how well you are doing in subjects and what you need to do to improve. However, not all of you are as sure as you should be about this. This is because the necessary information is not always recorded in your exercise books or planners.

We have asked the school to do two things that we think will improve the school further. These are to make sure there is greater stability of staffing to ensure you all get access to regular teachers and do as well as you can and also to check that you all know how well you are doing in each of your subjects and your next steps for improvement.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us and to show us around your school. We all enjoyed our visit and wish you every success in your future.

Yours faithfully

Mark Sims Her Majesty's Inspector