

Phoenix Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133961
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	328780
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	213
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Britton
Headteacher	Robert Juniper
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2009
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bybrook Road Kennington Ashford TN24 9JD

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Phoenix Community Primary School opened in September 2003 following the amalgamation of an infant and a junior school. It is similar in size to most other primary schools. In September 2008, it moved into a new building which it shares with a Surestart Children's Centre. The school runs a breakfast club, attended by about 55 pupils. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. These include a number of pupils with moderate learning, behavioural, emotional and social, or speech, language and communication difficulties. A very high proportion of pupils join or leave during each academic year. Most pupils are White British, with other ethnic backgrounds, mainly Asian and eastern European, represented in small numbers. More pupils are at an early stage of learning English than in many schools. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its Reception class. A new headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team have taken up their posts since the last inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This satisfactory school has a number of strengths and is improving rapidly. Since its last inspection, the school has further developed its good care, guidance and support for pupils, so that there is a strong sense of community and positive ethos which contributes effectively to pupils' good personal development and well-being. The focus of senior leaders on strengthening teaching and learning has resulted in much improved standards over the last two years. One parent rightly commented, 'During the last three or four years, Phoenix has developed into a progressive and stable environment for learning with an atmosphere of trust and care.' Most parents are wholly positive about the school's provision. They praise the way in which staff encourage and support children, not just academically, but also their personal and emotional development. Some parents of children who have joined the school during this year commented particularly on how successfully their children had settled into the school, praising staff for 'going the extra mile' to help.

Children get off to a good start in Reception. Pupils' attainment when they begin Year 1 is generally below that of most pupils of their age. They make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2, although standards remain below national averages in literacy and numeracy. For two years following the last inspection, pupils did not make enough progress from Years 3 to 6, but this situation has been reversed and the overall trend is one of improvement. Good teaching and a sound curriculum have enabled many pupils to make good progress this year, which has made up for earlier lost ground. Achievement is satisfactory overall and standards by the end of Year 6 are approaching those expected nationally. However, standards in mathematics remain lower than in English, where the attention to developing pupils' writing skills has been particularly successful. Pupils enjoy their learning and are keen to do well, although they do not always present their work neatly enough and good handwriting is not sufficiently well promoted.

Teachers manage their classes well, so that even those pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties behave well. Pupils cooperate well with each other because they know what they need to learn, enjoy the many fun activities and are very willing to take part in discussion. Beyond the classroom, pupils are keen to contribute to the school community by taking on responsibilities such as school councillors, 'play heroes' or 'peer mediators'. Their good social skills and developing literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills give them a sound base for secondary education. Although the vast majority of pupils attend well, the attendance of a few pupils is very low and has a detrimental effect on their achievement.

The school's partnership with external agencies and the outreach activities to work with families make a major contribution to community cohesion. Good leadership and management are seen in the way senior leaders accurately evaluate the school's effectiveness and the success of the action taken, especially during the current year with the leadership team fully in place, to bring about improvement. All staff share the school's clear drive for improvement, believing that 'satisfactory' is not good enough, which together with recent higher standards give the school a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Reception class with a range of experiences, some having attended local nurseries, while others do not have any formal pre-school experience. Children's skills and abilities vary from below to above what is usually seen for this age, but starting points overall are low, largely because of the proportion of children each year with low speech and communication skills. Children thrive and enjoy learning because of good teaching and exciting activities. For example, when they learn to think through and solve a problem by looking for their missing 'Attendance Bear'. Teachers plan an effective balance of activities between those directed by adults and those children choose for themselves. Children make good progress. This year, children's attainment as they prepare to join Year 1 is broadly in line with the expectations for their age, although a number still have weaknesses in their early literacy skills, and children's numeracy skills are below expectations. Adults take care to encourage children to develop their listening and speaking skills and, because children are well known by adults, planned activities match their needs well. Good use is made of the outdoor area and plans are in place to extend and develop this area further. Children develop good social skills, behave well and work happily together because they are well cared for. Good leadership and management are seen in the bright and vibrant classroom and growing range of opportunities provided for parents to understand the school's approaches to learning, for example to develop literacy skills. Plans are in place to extend the partnership with parents further by visiting children at home before they start school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attainment in mathematics by implementing the plans to provide more practical approaches to the teaching of the subject.
- Develop presentation skills and handwriting, to support the gains made in other writing skills.
- Raise the attendance of the small number of pupils whose attendance is low.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

From their below average starting point, pupils make satisfactory progress. While standards in the Year 2 assessments are generally below average, pupils gain a momentum in their learning as they go through the school and reduce the gap between their performance and national averages. The unvalidated results for this year show much higher performance in the Year 6 national tests than last year, and pupils have done particularly well in reaching the higher levels. Taken over time, this represents satisfactory achievement overall for pupils because of the lower rate of progress they made in some years. Pupils are now achieving more consistently throughout the school. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those who are at an early stage of learning English or who join partway through their primary education, make progress in line with other pupils. This is due to good support by teaching assistants, and in some cases, these pupils make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Teachers' relationships with pupils and the high expectations they have of them make a major contribution to pupils' good personal development. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, helped by the school's calm environment and caring ethos, which gives pupils frequent opportunities in assemblies and in lessons to reflect on challenging issues. Pupils are keen to play their part in helping others through school charity collections and the school council, for example in deciding how to spend money on new facilities such as the timber trail in the playground. Pupils generally make healthy choices when eating lunch and many take part in the varied sports clubs such as rugby, netball and athletics after school. The school's work to develop pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles has been recognised in recent Healthy School, Activemark and Travel Plan awards. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that minor bullying incidents such as temporary 'falling out' are dealt with quickly, and they know who to go to for help. Most pupils attend well and overall attendance has shown recent improvement because of the effective procedures to monitor and encourage attendance. However, overall attendance is below the national average due to a small core of pupils with very low attendance, and some pupils are taken on holiday during term time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Staff have worked well with the local authority to introduce programmes designed to accelerate pupils' progress and have successfully improved their practice. Teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now good, although it is taking time to fully overcome the legacy of past underachievement and enable pupils to reach their full potential. Teachers motivate pupils well so that they are keen to learn. As a result, pupils listen carefully to teachers as they provide information or instructions. Pupils understand the 'learning intentions' shared with them at the beginning of the lesson and assess for themselves how well they have achieved during the lesson. This helps pupils to understand the quality of their work and what they have to do to improve further. Marking is regular and values pupils' efforts by showing them what they have done well, but also picks up errors and misconceptions well. In most lessons, particularly in Years 3 to 6, work is matched closely to pupils' earlier skills and knowledge. However, in some lessons, work is not set at different levels which closely match pupils' starting points. Good use is made of information and communication technology to enliven learning, for example using software programs or video clips to illuminate learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

During this academic year, the school has been changing its curriculum to provide pupils with an approach which matches their needs and interests more closely and which makes stronger links between subjects, but this is still in development. During the inspection, the school was involved in a valuable initiative where pupils joined their teacher for the following year to discuss their new 'learning journey' and to make suggestions about the things they would want to research and explore. However, pupils currently do not have enough opportunities to use and reinforce skills and knowledge learned in one subject in another, for example to apply their writing skills learned in literacy lessons directly to other subjects. The approach to presentation

and handwriting is not sufficiently coherent across the school, reducing the fluency with which pupils develop their writing. Currently, the basic curriculum is enriched by some special events such as science week or African drumming, giving pupils more in-depth study and opportunities to share their work with other year groups. These events do much to add to pupils' interest and the relevance of learning. Organisation giving pupils opportunities to work in smaller teaching groups in Years 5 and 6 has contributed well to improving progress in these years. Extra-curricular clubs meet pupils' interests and age ranges well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support that the school gives its pupils is good. Some elements of pastoral care are outstanding, such as the support for vulnerable pupils. The school's well coordinated support staff use a very wide variety of programmes and approaches to help pupils with emotional difficulties and other vulnerabilities to gain self-esteem and greater social skills. The school's caring ethos helps all pupils to feel valued, which in turn makes them want to help others. Several pupils train as 'peer mediators' and 'play heroes' to help younger pupils cooperate happily. The school fully meets all statutory requirements for safeguarding and child protection. There are very effective arrangements for key transition points, including entry to the school and moving on to secondary school. Teachers set and monitor targets for pupils' academic performance regularly. The school uses a wide range of programmes and activities to support pupils if they are seen to be falling behind. Now, as pupils are making more consistent progress, there is less need for such intensive support. Marking is regular but pupils are not systematically required to respond to issues raised by the teacher. However, pupils have a good general awareness of what they have to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Parents recognise the input of a wide range of staff as being important contributors to the school's progress and development in the comment, 'The headteacher is certainly due congratulations for the school's achievement. Although the crew is only as good as its captain, the captain is only as good as his crew.' The headteacher has set a very clear agenda since he took up his post and has been successful in establishing a strong senior leadership and staff team. Senior leaders have made sure that there has been no loss of momentum in improving standards while the school faced the disruption of moving into the new building. Staff are ambitious for the future. Targets set are increasingly challenging and the school is now beginning to achieve these more consistently. The school plans and evaluates its own effectiveness rigorously. The school places itself at the centre of the community and has carried out an audit to identify local community needs, helping it to make an effective contribution to community cohesion, for example by offering breakfast. The school gives pupils good opportunities to learn about the wider world, different faiths and the diversity of cultures in the United Kingdom. A range of activities have been introduced to help parents to play a greater part in their children's learning, for example by running workshops for parents about how numeracy is taught, or through an English as a foreign language group or cookery club. Governors provide strong guidance and ensure that statutory requirements are met, and hold school staff to account in a supportive way. The school has managed its finances well during the transition to the new building, and has used its resources well to develop the school environment to provide good

opportunities for outdoor learning. Staff and resources are well deployed to give satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Phoenix Community Primary School, Ashford, TN24 9JD

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited you recently. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and seeing you at work. Phoenix gives you a satisfactory education so that you make reasonable progress. The new school building is making a real difference and you have many more exciting things to do at playtime.

Your behaviour is good and this helps you all to get on really well together. The school is a friendly and safe community. Many of you help others well, for example as 'play heroes' or 'peer mediators'. We enjoyed hearing about the after-school clubs and it is good that many of you take part in these. Attendance has improved and many of you enjoy competing for attendance awards, but it is lower than it should be. We hope that you and your parents will make sure that you do not miss school unless it is absolutely necessary.

We are pleased to see that things have been improving at Phoenix, thanks to the good leadership of the headteacher and other staff. This means that you are making more progress in lessons. You are doing particularly well in making your writing interesting, but we noticed that sometimes your handwriting is not very clear. We have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to make your handwriting better and to improve the presentation of your work. They are also looking for new ways to help you to do as well in numeracy as you do in literacy and your other subjects. We are sure that you are looking forward to the new 'learning journey' we saw you planning for after the summer holiday.

Please thank your parents for returning the questionnaires. It was very helpful to hear what they had to say about the school. We wish everyone at Phoenix School well for the future, and Year 6 pupils success in their new school in September.

Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector