

Phoenix Schools

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135460
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	329094
Inspection date	4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Trawford
Headteacher	Neil Toplass
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Odell Road Leamore Walsall WS3 2ED
Telephone number	001922 712834
Fax number	001922 493505

Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

Following reorganisation by the local authority, the Phoenix SEBD School was opened in January 2008. Prior to this, it was part of an all-age special school. A new headteacher and governing body was appointed at this time. All pupils have social, emotional and behaviour difficulties and nearly a third of pupils have additional needs. Most pupils arrive at school having spent a period of time out of school and with negative experiences. Well over a third of pupils are entitled to free school meals and approximately a quarter of pupils are in public care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Phoenix School is a good school. The school has made good progress over a short period of time and is improving very rapidly. The school presents a calm, positive learning environment, which builds pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem very well. Pupils enjoy school and they value the supportive relationships they have with staff. The headteacher has set ambitious and challenging plans with the aim of making the school outstanding within three years. He provides clear and confident leadership, with the strong support of the governing body.

Pupils enter the school with well below average attainment, due to the nature of their complex emotional, social and behaviour difficulties and gaps in their learning. However, they make good progress academically and make vast improvements in their behaviour and attitudes. As a result, some are able to successfully re-integrate into mainstream schools. Teaching is good and this is one of the main reasons why pupils make good progress. However, the school acknowledges that despite some good practice, personalised learning objectives, particularly in English and mathematics, are not sufficiently well established and opportunities are sometimes missed to promote more rapid individual progress.

Parents value and appreciate the good work of the school. One parent commented, 'My son has thrived while he has been at Phoenix.' They are confident that any problems affecting their children are dealt with quickly and feel that their views, and those of their children, are carefully considered. The personal development and well-being of pupils is good. They enjoy school and develop positive attitudes to learning and to each other. The pupils quickly take the school's motto of 'Respect yourself, respect other people, respect the school' to heart and as a result their behaviour improves markedly. The curriculum matches pupils' learning needs well and increases their enjoyment. However, while spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, it is not as strongly promoted as other aspects of pupils' personal development. The care support and guidance given to pupils is outstanding. The school has excellent links with a range of partners that enables barriers to pupils' learning to be addressed very effectively. The headteacher provides outstanding personal leadership and management. He has set high expectations to which both staff and pupils have responded positively. The governing body is supportive and good teamwork has been established at all levels. Given this and the rapid rate of improvement that has already been secured, the school has an excellent capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish the use of personalised learning objectives for pupils across all teaching and learning, especially in English and mathematics.
- Promote the spiritual and cultural development of pupils more strongly within the curriculum provided.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress, usually from exceptionally low starting points. The school has rightly decided to make literacy a priority for improvement, as pupils' literacy skills, particularly writing, are often poor on entry to the school. As a result of intensive work in this area, pupils' literacy attainment has risen substantially with some pupils achieving average standards by the end of Year 6. The school has set challenging targets for pupil progress. These targets have only narrowly been missed. Nevertheless this still represents good progress given the complex

difficulties pupils face. Pupils also perform well in a range of other subjects such as physical education and creative subjects. Different groups of pupils, such as those who are in care, perform equally well, because their progress is carefully monitored so that any underperformance can be quickly identified and addressed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils thoroughly enjoy participating in a wide range of physical activity and sports. They particularly like the coaching and fitness sessions that are run by the local football club. They develop a good understanding of healthier lifestyles through growing their own food and cooking it. Pupils' emotional health and well-being develops well and they have access to a school counsellor if required. Pupils gain good awareness of the importance of keeping safe, for example by listening attentively to the local police officers talk and demonstration of the dangers of knife crime and carrying a weapon. They feel safe in the school environment where behaviour is good. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and they are very keen to participate in lessons by asking questions and trying hard. The good attendance of pupils is testament to their enjoyment of school. Pupils take pride in the opportunities to make suggestions to improve the school. The regular 'pupil voice' meetings have resulted in the adoption of a school uniform and the use of go-karts at lunchtimes, which pupils eagerly look forward to. Involvement in the wider community is good and pupils have taken part in an environmental project and charity fund raising events. Pupils are well prepared for their next phase of education through the strong emphasis on improving their basic skills. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, but the school knows that these aspects need to be planned more often and more rigorously. Pupils' moral and social development is good. Through the establishment of clear and simple school rules, they quickly gain an understanding of right and wrong. Pupils develop their social skills well, through the ample opportunities provided to work cooperatively in lessons and through other experiences including lunchtime.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers are skilled and confident in managing pupils' behaviour. Issues are dealt with sensitively so as to avoid confrontation where possible. Further support, provided by the behaviour support manager, is used effectively. Staff have established very good relationships with pupils and this does much to engage them successfully in lessons. Lessons are stimulating and teaching is lively. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to make lessons interesting. For example, interactive whiteboards are used effectively to stimulate interest and learning. Teachers also make good use of both whole-class discussion and paired work through the use of 'talking partners', where pupils refine their ideas in cooperation with one another. In one English lesson, pupils were absorbed as to how an author created a sense of isolation in a text. Pupils were highly motivated to answer questions in class discussion, to discuss ideas with their partners and create their own writing. While lessons have a general learning objective, the use of personalised learning objectives in most lessons is not widespread. Consequently, there are occasions when individual progress is not as rapid as it could be. Classrooms are bright, attractive and provide a rich stimulating learning environment for pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has recently been reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of pupils effectively. It provides good opportunities for healthy and safe lifestyles to be promoted. Pupils' understanding of their local communities is enhanced well, although their understanding of the wider world receives less emphasis and this limits their spiritual and cultural development. Literacy has had a high priority in the curriculum which has paid dividends in pupils' improved attainment. Careful attention is given to addressing pupils' social and emotional needs throughout the curriculum, including circle time. Pupils enjoy participating in the after school clubs and they particularly enjoy visiting sports and music specialists. The curriculum is very effective in equipping pupils with basic skills. This in turn enhances their confidence, motivation and self-esteem, and enables some pupils to return to mainstream schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school has established very strong links with a range of partners to benefit pupils. For example, a link with a local college has enabled an outdoor garden and sensory area to be developed. Links with parents are very good and the school has recently appointed a parent support assistant, to strengthen home-school liaison further. The support provided is very well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils' behaviour is consistently very well managed and has been improved through the establishment of a behaviour support manager. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and pupils feel safe and confident due to the exceptional levels of supervision. They are respected, listened to and valued, and pupils respond well to this positive and constructive approach. Pupils who are in care receive very good support and monitoring to ensure they are achieving as well as possible. All pupils are given good guidance on how to improve their work through the monitoring of their progress and helpful marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Staff and governors are highly committed to ensure school improvement is rapid and firmly embedded into the culture of the school. The headteacher and senior staff have a very accurate and informed view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, in order to achieve its ambition. Governors provide strong, critical support. The school development plan is well judged and lays out clear priorities for improvement and rightly emphasises the need to improve pupils' attainment in basic skills. A significant factor contributing to the rapid improvement of the school has been the rigorous and honest analysis of assessment data. This has led the school to undertake informed, perceptive and highly effective actions to raise pupils' attainment, particularly in literacy. The use of challenging targets across the whole school is good and has contributed to substantial improvements in pupils' progress and attainment. A measure of the confidence that the local authority has in the school is the recently established unit for permanently excluded pupils. Community cohesion is promoted well. The school is actively increasing its effectiveness with hard to reach groups, through the appointment of a parent support assistant and through its extended services. The headteacher has worked hard to improve the fabric of the school accommodation to ensure it provides a welcoming and uplifting learning environment for pupils.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	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

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

5 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Phoenix SEBD School, Walsall WS3 2ED.

I enjoyed my visit to your school, and meeting and talking with you. The staff look after you exceptionally well, to ensure you are safe and enjoy school. Many of you said that you liked the staff and you feel able to confide in them and that they are always ready to help you. You make good progress in improving both your behaviour and academic skills. I was impressed by how well you behave, even though for some of you, this is a challenge. Your attendance at school has improved and is good. The school works closely with your families and others who care for you, which helps you to be better prepared for school.

The range of activities provided for you is good. The teaching you receive is good and teachers work hard to make lessons interesting. You are taught the right things and the school has emphasised the importance of developing your skills in literacy. You enjoy the experiences and activities on offer after school and the range of visitors that come into school such as the police and sports coaches. This brings learning to life for you and has helped to make your schooling enjoyable.

The headteacher, along with the other staff and the governors, have done a good job in making your school good and it is getting better all the time. You can play a part in helping the school to be even better by continuing to work hard and following instructions carefully.

To improve the school further, I have asked your teachers to make sure that they set you personal learning targets, especially in numeracy and literacy lessons, and to teach you more clearly about different cultures and faiths.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Frank Price Lead inspector