

## PROTECT - INSPECTION

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Mrs Maxine Hepple  
Headteacher  
The Phoenix Centre  
Eldon Street  
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Dear Mrs Hepple

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 June 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit

As a result of the inspection in November 2008, the school was asked to:

- improve the accuracy, reliability and use of assessment information to ensure it becomes an integral part of teaching and learning
- improve the quality of differentiation in teachers' planning so that the needs of all learners are met all of the time
- improve attendance, particularly for the older students.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement. Standards are low due to the pupils' disrupted educational history. Achievement remains inadequate as, for example, the Year 11 pupils have finished Key Stage 4 with limited external accreditation.

The use of assessment to inform teaching and learning is developing steadily. The collection and recording of data are now more effective. However, the use of data to tailor learning still remains too variable. It is good that pupils have tests on entry to the pupil referral unit (PRU). However, ongoing assessment relies on the teachers' assessment skills and senior leaders are aware of the need for more staff training to further develop the accuracy and reliability of teachers' assessment. Additionally, senior leaders are working to ensure that pupils' performance data from their previous schools is passed on more promptly to the PRU. This includes data from the end of key stages and estimates of the pupils' potential to attain in examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. The PRU has been proactive in considering a range of data

management systems and recognises the need to ensure that more valid and reliable procedures are put in place.

Teachers' planning reflects the school's work in breaking National Curriculum levels down into small learning steps. In science learning is tailored to match the pupils' individual learning needs and this helps to sustain their engagement. Consequently, they are making satisfactory and often good progress towards challenging targets. Their work is effectively marked and makes pupils aware of how to improve. Learning is also planned at the right level for individual pupils in English and physical education. However, in-school variation remains as, despite improvements in planning, too much learning is pitched at a general rather than an individual pupil level. When this happens the pace of learning drops and pupils become disruptive, leading to inadequate progress. The centre is now in the position to provide more challenge and ensure that pupils' attainment is far higher by the time they leave the centre. This includes the need to introduce more level 2 qualifications for the higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 4.

Although attendance is improving, it remains inadequate. Attendance at Key Stage 3 this year is 69% compared to 58% last year. It has improved from 40% to 53.7% at Key Stage 4 over the same period. Senior leaders are aware of the need to boost attendance to over 80% in 2009/10 to help raise standards. The improvement in attendance has been helped by the reduction in exclusions from 764 sessions lost in 2007/08 to 454 this year. Senior leaders are aware that this figure is still far too high and that a significant reduction is required again next year. The link between poor attendance and underachievement remains strong, especially for the older pupils. Senior leaders provided information to support their view that attendance will improve markedly when the current Year 11 pupils leave. It is inappropriate that some pupils are provided with limited taught time during the week but senior leaders are confident that this is only a short-term arrangement.

The support and guidance provided by the local authority have been satisfactory. The management committee is taking a more prominent role in the drive to improve the centre. The lead officer has provided valued advice and guidance to assist the development of assessment systems. The recent introduction of an electronic recording system will enable the more effective tracking of pupils' attendance. In addition, the local authority has supported staffing changes including the appointment of a manager for work-related learning. They are supporting essential training to help build sustainable improvement at senior leadership level. The Key Stage 4 Engagement provision is now separate from the Phoenix Centre. Senior leaders are very positive about the support and challenge provided by the school improvement partner (SIP).

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

David Smith

Additional Inspector