

# The Phoenix School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123576
<b>Local Authority</b>	Telford and Wrekin
<b>Inspection number</b>	340372
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 May 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Clive Kempton HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	858
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Graham Clark
<b>Headteacher</b>	Neil Stonehouse
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25 April 2007
<b>School address</b>	Manor Road Dawley Telford
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors, one of whom focused on ensuring that safeguarding requirements were fully met. The inspectors visited 27 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of governors, 12 senior/middle leaders, 10 groups of students, and seven parents. They observed the school's work, and met with external agencies, including a representative from the local authority and a group of six outside professionals associated with the school. They scrutinised 143 parent questionnaires (the responses are shown in the annex to this report) as well as staff and student questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following questions:

- How clear are the improvement plans written by senior staff to raise standards?
- How does the school identify underachieving students and what do they do to help them improve?
- Why do students get better results in mathematics than in English?
- How good is the teaching?
- How well behaved are the students?

## Information about the school

The Phoenix is a small secondary school, located at the heart of Dawley Sport and Learning Community. It serves a large area which is socially and economically diverse. Most of the students are White British and a small proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average, as is the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school works in partnership with local primary schools to provide a range of facilities and activities which are available to the public. In 2005 it was designated as a Sport Partnership Hub School and in 2007 a Healthy School. Unlike most secondary schools, it currently has no specialist status but has submitted a plan to become a Sports and Science college.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

### Main findings

The Phoenix is a satisfactory and improving school at the heart of the Dawley community. Students, staff and parents are proud of the school. One parent commented, 'I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the school to anyone.' It has many good features, including:

- the care, guidance and support provided for all students
- the way the curriculum is appropriate to meet students' needs
- the outstanding procedures that ensure students stay safe
- the good behaviour of students in lessons and around the school
- the contribution students make to their local community.

The school was judged good at its last inspection in 2007, but since that time the attainment of students when they start the school in Year 7 has declined each year. Despite this issue, the school has managed to improve attainment at GCSE year-on-year to an all time high in 2009 where 52% of students gained five A\*-C grades, 29% including English and mathematics. Although both these figures are below the national averages, school data shows that attainment will rise again in 2010 to improve on the school's previous best and continue the improvement trend, although not yet enough to make the step change required to catch up with national averages. This is why the school is currently judged to be satisfactory and its capacity to improve is also satisfactory.

There is a great determination from the headteacher, senior managers and staff to improve the school and everyone pulls together for the sake of the students. All involved with the school work very hard. One teacher commented, 'I am proud to be a member of Phoenix School. Everyone gives their utmost efforts to drive the school forward.' All members of the school community talk about its supportive qualities and the help they get, from the students as they move from Year 6 to Year 7 to the new teachers who join the school. This support can also be seen in the way that vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at least as good as, and in some cases better than, other students. The senior team are generally accurate in their self-evaluation of the school and their judgement of its overall effectiveness matches that made by inspectors.

Two of the reasons why the school has not made quicker progress are due to the inconsistency of teaching quality and the lack of clarity in school improvement planning. Aspects of teaching were judged to be inconsistent at the last inspection and this remains the case. Teaching observed jointly with senior staff during the inspection ranged from outstanding to inadequate. In some lessons, students do not get sufficiently involved and are not challenged enough, and a number of parents still feel

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that too many supply teachers are used. The plans the school writes to drive improvement and raise standards are too bulky and the intended outcomes of the plans are insufficiently clear or measurable.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching by ensuring all is at least satisfactory and 75% good or better by devising a questioning strategy in lessons to ensure that:
  - all students understand the work they are given and their learning is regularly checked and consolidated
  - students of all abilities are appropriately engaged and challenged
  - all students answer or ask at least one question in every lesson.
- Ensure that the school improvement plan is succinct, has termly milestones to measure the impact of its actions, and is sharply focused on the few key priorities that will raise standards.
  - About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

Students join the school with prior attainment that is well below average. In 2009, 52% of students gained five good grades at GCSE. This continued the strongly improving trend between 2006 and 2008. For the same measure, including English and mathematics, results also showed a rise. Results in English were slightly below those in 2008, whereas in mathematics they showed continuing improvement. Despite this general trend of improvement, attainment levels remain well below the national average.

Since the last inspection, students' progress has generally been satisfactory. However, the rate of progress is now improving. Despite having lower starting points when they joined the school, attainment by the current Year 11 is set to rise significantly above that of 2009. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress and some particular groups, such as those with visual or hearing impairments, are making good progress. Behaviour and attitudes to work have improved and are good and productive. Most students work well and make at least satisfactory progress, evident from observations of their work in lessons and from scrutiny of their assessed work. Students are keenly aware of their targets and appreciate the good quality of marking their work receives. They are well motivated by the school's system of recognition and rewards. In a few lessons students show passive behaviour, often when teaching is uninspiring.

In school, students work very safely and have confidence in the instructions they are given to undertake those activities where there are risks. Their good behaviour is also a

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factor enhancing the benefits they gain from lessons and their general enjoyment of work in school. Students report that there is little bullying and it is dealt with effectively. Very few lessons are spoiled by poor behaviour. Students are health conscious. Most know the dangers associated with poor diet, smoking and such risks as substance abuse. Many students choose to use the school canteen with its healthy menus and its popularity is growing. As well as participating in the two hours per week of physical exercise offered by the curriculum, half of all students are engaged in some form of voluntary participation in sport or exercise, often taking advantage of the wide range of school extra-curricular provision. Almost every student makes some contribution to the school or local community by helping others, and this commitment has been nurtured through the many routes the school offers to encourage voluntary participation and responsibility. The general pattern of attendance is broadly average, although swine 'flu and inclement weather dented attendance figures for several weeks during the past winter.

Students gain satisfactory skills and maturity for future work or study. Indicative of their commitment is the very good attendance recorded by Year 10 students during their period of work experience. They have been helped to work and play co-operatively together, gaining a good understanding of what is right and wrong and applying responsible moral values. Students leaving the school have been excited by what their learning has revealed and it has stimulated their curiosity. However, school has given them few opportunities to work alongside their peers from different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds; thus their cultural awareness is weaker.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>3</b>

## How effective is the provision?

The best lessons are planned well and meet students' differing needs. Many teachers make good use of engaging and stimulating contexts, together with their good subject knowledge, to add pace and interest to lessons. In one outstanding English lesson, Year 9 students became fascinated by the task of interpreting medieval English poetry by Chaucer and gained a deeper understanding of how their own language had evolved. However, a minority of teachers miss the chance to help students make more rapid progress by not assessing their understanding through effective questioning and using this information to plan work that is appropriately challenging. Despite many strengths in teaching observed during the inspection, there remain some inconsistencies. In a few lessons, students did not learn as well as they might because they were not clear about the purpose of the task, or how to measure their own success.

The curriculum has been extended well, through close partnership work with various providers, to ensure that there is a sufficiently broad vocational pathway, accessible to all students, which complements the more traditional academic curriculum. This has been successful with a wide range of students. One student described off-site days as 'something to look forward to'. There is particularly good provision in sport. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of visiting speakers, and visits to various diverse locations which form an inspirational part of students' learning experiences. For example, Year 9 and Year 10 students worked with professional actors and performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

High quality of care, guidance and support is seen in the personal support provided for all students through a well-managed form tutor system. The school works very well with partner organizations to support the most vulnerable, and the Inclusion Centre has been used to good effect to enhance the learning experience of vulnerable students. Much work takes place with partner primary schools to ensure a smooth transfer of students from Year 6 to Year 7. Key Stage 4 students report that good information, advice and guidance had been instrumental in enabling them to make good choices when selecting courses to study after Year 9.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>

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<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>
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## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher leads with vision and purpose and is well supported by the extended leadership team. Their determination to embed ambition and drive improvement is communicated well to staff, although it is not yet rigorous enough, especially in the clarity of strategic planning and the use of measurable success criteria. Curriculum leaders are developing their middle management skills by writing an evaluation of their subject performance, although the clarity of the success criteria in their development plans is inconsistent between departments.

Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are promoted throughout the school. There are no significantly underachieving group of students, and those who need extra support are identified and well provided for.

Safeguarding procedures are outstanding. The school has identified two additional members of staff to support the deputy headteacher responsible for safeguarding. This means that students are well supported and secure. The school takes effective steps to ensure students' safety. Policies and procedures are very clear and monitored regularly by governors.

Community cohesion is currently satisfactory and developing. The school itself is a cohesive community and increasing links are being made with the local Dawley community. However, students' awareness of the wider British and global communities are less well developed, although links with schools in different contexts are being planned.

Governance is good and holds the school to account for standards. Governors are involved in many aspects of the school's work. There are a good range of partnership links with outside professionals who speak very warmly of their links with the school. One commented that the Phoenix is, 'A school that cares about Telford as a whole.'

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>



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<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority questionnaires completed by 143 parents were very supportive of the school and all that it does to help their child succeed. The largest area of agreement (95%) was the way the school keeps their child safe and inspectors agree; 92% feel that the school keeps them well informed about their child's progress; and 90% that their child enjoyed school. The question where parents and carers were most concerned was the extent to which the school took account of their concerns, although 81% felt the school did take account of their views. To pursue this issue, inspectors held a meeting with a small group of parents and asked what they thought about this and other issues. All present felt that the school was very open to their suggestions if they went to the school and thought that the lower response to this question could be because some parents did not know how they could express their views. The headteacher has agreed to inform parents of how they can express their views in the next school magazine. Sixteen percent of parents were unsure how they could support their child's learning. The headteacher has agreed to repeat the advice provided to ensure all parents are aware of how they can support their child's learning.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Phoenix School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received insert 143 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 838 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	23	96	67	11	8	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	30	21	106	74	5	3	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	41	29	90	63	9	6	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	45	31	80	56	11	8	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	28	20	99	69	10	7	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	18	90	63	22	15	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	17	100	70	16	11	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	31	22	97	68	5	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	20	102	71	4	3	4	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	20	90	63	18	13	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	14	96	67	14	10	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	43	30	87	61	6	4	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	31	85	59	7	5	4	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



21 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Phoenix School, Telford, TF4 3DZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to me and the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection and what you and the teachers can do to make the school even better.

You go to a satisfactory school that has got lots of good features. The reason it is satisfactory at the moment is because your examination results are not as good as they could be compared with other schools, especially in English and mathematics. These are very important subjects as they will help you when you move to college, university or get a job. Your teachers and other adults in the school really care about you, work hard to prepare interesting lessons for you, and want you to do well. You have a good headteacher who leads the school well. You have lots of opportunities to take on leadership roles in the school, such as sports leaders and mentors, and this is developing your confidence and self-esteem. A few of you have too much time off school and are finding it hard to catch up when you come back. This is getting you into bad habits. You get on well with each other and with all the adults. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. In Year 10 and Year 11, you have lots of opportunities to follow courses that you find interesting and prepare you for your future. Many of you enjoy the independence of going to other schools, colleges and other settings for specific courses such as Engineering, Hair and Beauty and Equestrian studies. The school makes sure you are safe and most of you are developing healthy, active lifestyles. Most of you know what is good for you, although a few chose not to follow the good advice you are given.

In order to make your school even better, I have asked the headteacher and senior staff to do two things. First, make sure that teachers ask more questions in lessons and every one of you should answer or ask at least one question in every lesson that challenges you to think harder; and second, make sure that the plans the senior staff write to improve your examination grades have clear targets and success criteria.

I wish you all the best of luck in the future. Remember that success will only come with hard work.

Yours sincerely

Clive Kempton

Her Majesty's Inspector

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