

The Phoenix School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134272
Local authority	Peterborough
Inspection number	381657
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2012
Lead inspector	Jeffery Plumb

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maggie Short
Headteacher	Philip Pike
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2009
School address	Clayton Site Orton Goldhay Peterborough PE2 5SD
Telephone number	01733 391666
Fax number	01733 391477
Email address	office@phoenix.peterborough.sch.uk

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb

Additional Inspector

Lynda Morgan

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 10 lessons taught by 10 different teachers. Five were joint lesson observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors listened to a group of pupils read and examined three case studies of pupils to determine the quality of provision made for them and its impact. The lead inspector met formally with the school council and spoke with many pupils in lessons. The arrangements for supporting pupils to get on the buses safely at the end of the school day were observed. Meetings were held with teaching staff, the school's family liaison officer and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors met informally with a few parents and carers. Inspectors observed the school's work and examined a number of documents, including progress and attainment data, the restraint log, safeguarding policies and risk assessments, equality and diversity policies, feeding plans, intimate care plans, statements of special educational needs, attendance figures and the school improvement plan. Inspectors took account of the responses of the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They took account of 45 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as those completed by staff. They looked at the questionnaires, formatted using symbols, which were submitted by the pupils.

Information about the school

The Phoenix School provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many have additional needs, including autistic spectrum disorders and complex medical needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are seven children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, all are of Reception age. An above-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and from families where English is an additional language, are above average. There are six looked after pupils. The school has gained a number of awards, including Inclusion Charter Mark, Basic Skills Quality, Sports Active Mark and the International Schools Award. The school provides extended services for its pupils and their parents and carers, such as family learning programmes, a breakfast club, an after-school club and respite care during school holidays.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. Parents and carers are right to be delighted with what this school achieves for their children. Their views are typified by the parent who said, 'An excellent school, my son is doing exceptionally well since joining. The school makes me part of the family. I cannot find any faults. All provision in the school is perfect.'
- Pupils' achievement is outstanding, both academically and in their personal development. From low starting points on entry, all pupils make outstanding progress in their development of communication, mathematical and relevant life skills. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage gain readiness to learn skills.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. Challenging activities are tailored to pupils' specific learning and developmental needs as identified in their statements of special educational needs. Teachers are highly skilled at removing barriers to learning so that pupils develop excellent self-help and communication skills. In the few lessons where teaching is good rather than outstanding, teaching assistants occasionally do not always consistently challenge pupils.
- Often pupils enter the school with challenging behaviour due to the frustration of not being able to communicate their needs. They are helped to overcome this through a curriculum which focuses on enabling them to become confident and effective communicators. Dignity and respect for each pupil pervades this school and pupils behave exceptionally well as a result. They have outstandingly positive attitudes to learning. Pupils feel safe. Attendance, despite some pupils having long stays in hospital, is above average.
- Effective and motivational leadership enhances pupils' learning and development of life skills. Monitoring is rigorous and leads to decisive action to maximise pupils' achievement. Management of performance is exceptionally

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effective in providing targeted professional development to equip teachers to improve their teaching. Teachers are highly skilled and imaginative in the manner in which they support pupils to express their needs.

- The sixth form is outstanding. The curriculum is relevant and the quality of teaching is excellent. Consequently, sixth form students, within their capability, leave equipped with the skills required to be as independent as possible at college.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the small amount of good teaching to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that the senior leadership team builds in formal planning time at the start of the day for class teachers and any supply teaching assistants who are working in classes on that day
 - ensuring that teaching assistants working with targeted groups of pupils in lessons always consistently challenge them so as to accelerate learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' progress is outstanding relative to their low starting points. All pupils, except for those with very complex medical needs, make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Most exceed the rate of progress expected nationally in these core subjects for pupils with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties. Pupils' progress is exceptional in the acquisition of life skills, such as feeding as independently as possible, washing hands before meals and moving freely within their capability. Parents and carers are thrilled with the progress their children make. They report that 'their children's progress in life skills is more important to them than their progress in the three 'Rs'.' Pupils make outstanding progress in information and communication technology (ICT) and science. Higher achieving pupils, with support, find and use the correct keys, edit text, and copy and paste when using the computer. All experience technology; for some that is touching a plasma screen and 'gazing' at the effect of their touch; for others, it is being engaged with a blender as it makes a 'smoothie'. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make rapid gains in their learning. Post-16 students make outstanding progress taking their individual capabilities into account, particularly in their development of college-readiness skills.

Pupils' progress in lessons, across all subjects, is outstanding. Individualized learning programmes taught consistently ensure that each pupil reaches his/her full potential. Equality of opportunity for all pupils to access learning is a core value of the school, however complex their needs. Pupils from families where English is an additional language achieve as well as their peers. Pupils in wheelchairs and those with walking

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frames dance as well as their peers who walk unaided because they are fully included in physical education lessons. Each pupil excels in communicating their needs and choices in all subjects, because they have the opportunity to express themselves by eye pointing, speaking and the use of signs, symbols, switches and electronic voice boxes. Equally, the development of pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum is outstanding.

Quality of teaching

Exceptionally well-planned activities, based on very effective assessment, successfully meet pupils' specific learning needs. For example, in a reading lesson, the use of a wide range of activities and individually planned learning outcomes enabled each pupil to make rapid progress. Some signed accurately a key word in the text about the sea, others pointed at symbols and words using their eyes, and others anticipated the feeling of a squirt of water as a spray can was held close to their faces. High expectations in another lesson for pupils with severe learning difficulties resulted in them completing quality pieces of persuasive writing using symbols and words. Relationships in lessons are excellent and contribute to pupils becoming confident learners. In almost every lesson, teaching assistants make an exceptionally valuable contribution to pupils' learning. On very rare occasions though, teachers do not ensure that teaching assistants who provide emergency supply cover consistently challenge pupils and this slows the learning. Overwhelmingly, parents and carers are of the opinion that their children are exceptionally well taught. Pupils who are able to talk using words say that their teaching is 'fantastic'; all show this through their enthusiasm to participate in lessons.

Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the 14 to 19 department is outstanding. Early on, children learn to share, take turns, and focus their concentration for an increased length of time. Consequently, they become ready to learn and to be more independent. Flexibly planned and innovative, the curriculum provides an outstanding basis for relevant and interesting teaching, which successfully develops pupils' life skills. For example, Year 11 and sixth form students develop personal hygiene skills, learn to shop and prepare a meal as independently as possible. The teaching of literacy and numeracy pervades all subjects. Pupils experience counting as they wait for their transport at the end of the day, weigh ingredients in food technology, select the correct size wellington boots when going outside in the rain, and communicate with each other and their teachers effectively in all lessons. Sixth form students pitch a stall weekly in their local shopping centre. They gain confidence in communicating with the public and learn to handle money. Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. Excellent examples include supporting pupils' wonder and amazement as they track glowing objects with their eyes in science and participate in activities to help them experience faiths other than Christianity in religious education.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. Careful positioning and modifications to

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furniture remove physical barriers to learning for pupils and so enable them to engage with a range of interesting activities. Teaching assistants massage the hands and stretch the fingers of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties enabling them to reach out and operate devices to communicate answers to challenging questions. This promotes their independence. Similarly, pupils with severe learning difficulties engage with learning fully because it is relevant, challenging and fun. Children who, when they started the school year in Reception, were very distressed were calm as they responded to appropriate sensory stimulus provided for them. For some, this was the comfort a vibrating toy, for others, a piece of relaxing music. Glowing eyes and smiles pervaded classrooms.

Skilful support, involving pupils with a wide range of complex needs, has enabled them to draw up a charter of dignity and respect for each other. Consequently, within their capability, they have an ownership of the school's behaviour policy. Given their complexity of needs, they behave outstandingly well. No racist incidents or any other form of prejudiced-based bullying have been recorded over recent years. Pupils feel safe, secure and supported to be themselves without prejudice within an accepting and embracing school environment. Higher-achieving pupils, able to speak, summed up the ethos of the school when they said, 'We are all different, but equal'. Within their capability, they know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils with severe learning difficulties understand the importance of being wary of strangers and of taking great care when crossing the road. Those in wheelchairs, who have the cognitive ability and good use of their hands, propel themselves around the school site independently and safely. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, through gesture and facial expressions, state a preference for which adults they want to support them with their intimate care needs. Using words, pointing, signing, nodding heads, and operating electronic communication aids, all pupils express that they have an adult who they trust within school. Parents and carers could not speak more highly of what the school does to keep their children safe, to improve their behaviour and support them in developing independence.

Leadership and management

Senior and middle leaders work in an exceptionally effective partnership to raise pupils' achievement and promote their personal development. The training and development of newly qualified teachers, particularly in equipping them to work with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, is cutting edge. However, lack of formal planning time first thing in the morning, between class teachers and supply teaching assistants, drafted in to work at short notice, very occasionally results in the support given to pupils not being as high quality as it could be. Parents and carers are given extremely valuable support in helping their children to develop excellent communication and self-help skills. The quality of care, including partnership working with health professionals, is outstanding. The three after school clubs and short breaks opportunities managed and delivered by the school staff are excellent. Governance is highly effective in challenging and supporting school leaders.

Self-evaluation is thorough. Analysis of performance continually informs planning for

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improvement. A recent audit of the performance of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders has led to changes which have significantly improved pupils' expressive language. Feedback to teachers following rigorous monitoring of their teaching has resulted in every teacher planning specific and relevant learning outcomes for each pupil in every lesson. The capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

A creative and relevant curriculum is provided. The curriculum makes a very valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Personal, social, health and citizenship education addresses disability awareness and promotes positive images of a range of cultures and beliefs. Equality of opportunity lies at the heart of this school. The vision that every pupil will succeed is translated into practice. Pupils who are very sick are included fully in a positive educational experience. Never complacent, the school ceaselessly reviews the curriculum so as to tailor it to better meet the needs of each individual. Management systems to ensure pupils are safe and secure are robust. Safeguarding and child protection procedures meet statutory requirements and risk assessments are thorough and detailed.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



9 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Phoenix School, Peterborough, PE2 5SD

Thank you for welcoming me and my colleague to your school. We greatly enjoyed our visit and found that The Phoenix is an outstanding school.

- You express your views and answer questions with confidence; some of you point, others use signs and yet others words. You learn how to shop, handle money, plan and cook tasty meals. You learn how to have a say in how your school should be run and what can be improved.
- The teaching is outstanding. Interesting activities are planned to meet the needs of each one of you. You are helped to overcome worries and frustrations and as you do so, your behaviour becomes excellent. You show wonderful respect towards one another. You feel safe.
- You are exceptionally well cared for. You are helped to feed yourselves, to wash your hands before mealtimes and to use the toilet as independently as possible. Your headteacher and all adults in the school help you to count, measure when cooking, and select the right size 'wellies' when you go horse riding. By the end of Year 14, you are equipped to do as much as possible for yourselves when you go to college. You are supported to move by yourselves and to find your way around the school. Those of you who can use your hands to write use words and symbols to produce stories and shopping lists. Your progress in reading by gazing with your eyes at pictures, pointing at words and reading text is outstanding.
- Your use of computers to help you write and your operation of toasters and blenders using switches help you to develop life skills.
- The leadership of your school is outstanding. To make your school even better, we have asked your headteacher to make sure that the teaching assistants, particularly when they are new to your class and do not know you very well, always help you to do your very best work.

Yours sincerely

Jeffery Plumb
Lead inspector

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