

The Phoenix School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134272
Local Authority	City of Peterborough
Inspection number	328874
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	90
Sixth form	25
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	Mrs Maggie Short
Headteacher	Mr Phil Pike
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Clayton Site Orton Goldhay Peterborough Cambridgeshire PE2 5SD
Telephone number	01733 391666

Age group	2–19
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2009
Inspection number	328874

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Currently, 52 of the school's pupils have severe learning difficulties and 38 have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many of the pupils have additional needs such as complex medical conditions or autistic spectrum disorders. Other than the very few undergoing assessment, all pupils have statements of special educational needs. A few pupils are looked after by the local authority which also provides respite care for some others. The majority of pupils are White British. However, a number of different minority ethnic groups are represented within the school's population. The largest group are of Pakistani heritage but increasing numbers are of Eastern European heritage. A small minority of pupils are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The very few children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a class with pupils in Years 1 and 2. The school has gained a number of awards, including Investors in People, Healthy Schools, Activemark and Sportsmark, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Inclusion Charter Mark. The school provides extended services for its pupils and their parents and carers, such as family learning programmes, a breakfast club and an after-school club.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. First-rate leadership and management have ensured that the school has built substantially on the many strengths identified during the previous inspection. As a result, pupils' achievement is now as exceptional as their personal development. Central to this success are rigorous systems to evaluate the school's performance. These support the constant drive for improvement that stems from the commitment of leaders and staff to providing the best possible education for each pupil. As one parent observed, 'The school is determined to get it right for my child'. Pupils enjoy school hugely. They smile as they arrive, eyes lighting up as they spot a member of their classroom team. They take enormous pleasure in all manner of activities, such as 'doing good writing' or simply being with their friends.

Owing to the nature of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities, the standards they reach are exceptionally low when compared to those in most other schools. However, from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, pupils' progress is outstanding, in line with the quality of teaching. Teachers collect a variety of detailed information from their assessments of pupils' learning. They make full use of this in order to match lessons exceptionally closely to the needs of each individual. Consequently, all groups of pupils achieve equally well. Superb relationships with staff help to ensure that pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are consistently encouraged to look out for each other and frequently respond with acts of kindness and consideration. These represent just one element of pupils' remarkable contribution to the school and wider community. More structured opportunities include the school council's involvement in collating each pupil's preferences and helping to plan last summer's 'perfect day'.

Individual pupil's personal and learning needs are at the heart of the exceptional curriculum. For example, massage and aromatherapy help pupils with complex needs to relax so they are better able to learn. Pupils have very varied opportunities for physical activity, either during lessons or through the remarkable range of lunchtime and after-school clubs. Because there is something for everyone, for example, wheelchair skating, bowling alongside a computer program, or playing football, pupils are very successfully encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and discover productive ways to use their leisure time. Sixth form students' achievements in each aspect of their curriculum are celebrated by them gaining accreditation. In contrast, there are only limited opportunities at the end of Year 11 for pupils to gain similar recognition for their equally outstanding achievement.

Pupils are adamant that staff look after them really well and parents and carers have full confidence in the care the school provides. Leaders take every possible step to keep pupils safe, ensuring that the quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Exceptionally strong partnerships with a host of agencies and professionals, including the school nurse, contribute significantly to the support offered to pupils and their families. Pupils are also expected to take increasing responsibility for their own safety. For some, this means having the ability and confidence to communicate their likes and dislikes while others learn to use public transport safely. Their being as independent as possible helps to prepare pupils extremely well for the next stage in their lives. The school's outstanding work to promote community cohesion provides an extra dimension because, as parents have noticed, pupils learn that they each have a role to play in the world beyond school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students' exceptional achievement is marked by accreditation such as the school's own diploma, Youth Achievement Awards, and the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award. These demonstrate vividly the outstanding progress students make in important areas including literacy, numeracy and in wider aspects of learning, for example, self-help skills and solving problems. Teaching and the curriculum, which are both outstanding, are tightly focused on equipping students for their life beyond school. This goal is achieved by designing and planning detailed individual programmes, building on what each student has learned already and challenging them to develop as far as possible academically and personally. Students have frequent opportunities for learning in the community, for example, going shopping, following college courses or undertaking work experience. These significantly enhance students' personal development and enable them to apply their skills in real-life situations. For example, higher attaining students learn to use mobile phones in order to alert staff if their bus to college is running late. By being closely involved in planning for the next stage in their education, students come to recognise their own strengths and potential and leave school as confident young adults. The sixth form is led and managed extremely well. The leader ensures that the staff team works together closely and constantly seeks ways to further improve what students are offered.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The records of pupils who have now moved further up the school help to confirm that children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Their progress in communication is often particularly impressive and forms a platform for their achievement in all areas of learning. Bilingual teaching assistants provide focused support for individuals but staff ensure that all children are helped to discover the means of communication that suits them best, for example, by using signs or choosing between symbols. Learning opportunities are matched extremely well to children's needs. Their learning difficulties and lack of mobility mean that it is rarely possible for children to decide how to spend their time. Nevertheless, staff give them lots of opportunities to make choices, for example, by reaching towards the toy they prefer. Children learn outside on a daily basis, enjoying the stimulating outdoor area. Children's personal development is often exceptional. They benefit from learning and playing with slightly older children. Outstanding leadership and management ensure that children's safety and well-being are given top priority. Staff establish very close links with children's families. Parents' knowledge of their children and their interests is fully used when staff plan activities and begin to set targets for each child's learning and development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that by the end of Year 11 pupils' achievements are fully recognised through accreditation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Progress in learning to communicate is a strength because staff are so adept at establishing the methods best suited to each pupil and adapting these as pupils' skills develop. For example, pupils who communicate by signing learn to join words together in order to ask for a particular

snack. Pupils often reach comparatively high levels in aspects of personal, social and health education such as interacting and working with others, because they have such excellent opportunities to develop and practise these skills. Actions taken by the school such as ensuring that each pupil's comments are recorded weekly in their home-school book have successfully accelerated progress in writing. The school's very challenging targets in English and mathematics were met in 2008. Pupils with the most complex medical conditions do very well to maintain their skills for as long as possible. Boys and girls with profound and multiple learning difficulties move forward in very small steps or apply their skills in different contexts. Their achievement is just as outstanding as that of pupils with severe learning difficulties. Successful strategies to manage the behaviour of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders enable them to benefit from lessons and so make outstanding progress. Pupils whose first language is not English make very rapid progress because the school seeks out adults who can communicate with them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' extremely positive attitudes are reflected in attendance rates that are exceptionally high for schools of this type, where so many have chronic health problems. When possible, pupils follow healthy lifestyles. Each morning, all pupils from Year 10 onwards take part enthusiastically in fifteen minutes of vigorous activity followed by personal hygiene routines and a drink of water. Pupils learn about personal safety, often acting out roles so they know how to respond in difficult situations. From helping to tidy the classroom or being a good friend, pupils move on to making more formal contributions to the community. Older pupils distribute the healthy fruit snacks to classes and the school regularly raises funds for charities at home or abroad, by growing plants or making sweets to sell. Outstanding progress in key areas such as their ability to use information and communication technology combine with pupils' exceptional social skills to enable them to cope with changes such as moving on beyond school. Excellent relationships between pupils who originate from different countries or have different disabilities demonstrate clearly what some pupils articulate, 'Everyone different, everyone important and special'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Plans for lessons are extremely clear, showing exactly what each pupil is intended to learn. Teaching assistants make very strong contributions to learning and are always fully aware of their role in lessons. Teachers maintain a close overview of what each pupil has accomplished. They make good use of the time when drawing the lesson to a close by inviting staff to share successes and difficulties experienced by particular pupils. Subsequent lessons are adapted to take this assessment into account. Staff teamwork, including the support of pupils' personal care needs, is excellent and ensures that time for learning is used to the full. Teachers frequently use resources extremely well, including interactive white boards, to motivate pupils and help them to learn. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 delighted in choosing and handling character dolls, hats, pebbles and breadcrumbs, making supreme efforts as they retold the story of Hansel and Gretel.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

As pupils move up through the school, each subject is adapted so that they follow topics that are relevant to their age and take full account of their learning difficulties. During Years 10 and 11, pupils' work contributes to the diplomas they receive when they leave the sixth form, although there is not enough formal recognition of what they have achieved by the end of Year 11. The curriculum incorporates a number of additional courses such as hydrotherapy, horse-riding and the use of rooms that stimulate pupils' senses and enable them to control their environment. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to learn from practical activities and first-hand experiences. Frequent visits and visitors help to reinforce learning and promote personal development extremely well. For example, a week of international music and dance involved daily workshops by visiting professionals or school staff. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed dancing to Bhangra music and African drums as they learned more about diverse cultures. Lunchtime and after school clubs are enormously popular and wide-ranging and they reflect pupils' varying needs. The school loses no opportunity to involve the community. During World Book Week, lunchtime supervisors read stories to pupils in Portuguese, Polish, Urdu and Swahili.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Procedures to keep pupils safe are comprehensive and policies are followed scrupulously. Current government safeguarding requirements are met. The school nurse plays a central role in coordinating the arrangements for pupils with medical needs and organising staff training, for example, in administering medication. Staff are also thoroughly conversant with methods of safely managing pupils' behaviour and devise individual support plans when required. Regular attendance is promoted vigorously. The parent liaison officer is a key link in the school's support for families. Regular opportunities are provided for parents to work with their children on activities such as gardening, discovering new ways to support their learning. The school points parents towards other sources of help for advice on topics such as housing or respite care. Whenever possible, pupils are involved in their annual reviews and in planning for their future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

As a parent remarked accurately, 'Staff blossom under the headteacher's leadership'. He is particularly skilled at identifying staff's potential and then developing their skills so that they can take on leadership tasks. The outstanding contribution made by leaders at all levels provides the school with outstanding capacity to improve further. The members of the senior team provide excellent support and set extremely high standards by the way in which they fulfil their responsibilities. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's work effectively involves governors and subject leaders and provides a highly accurate view of the school's strengths and where there is scope for more development. Outstanding governance entirely supports the school's exceptional efforts to provide equal opportunities for all pupils and ensure that no groups are disadvantaged. Governors join the headteacher to observe lessons and have produced this year's school profile. The school's highly successful work to promote community cohesion involves support for other schools and for people who have newly arrived in the area from other countries. International links extend to Europe and beyond.

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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	16-19
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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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

16 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Phoenix School, Peterborough, PE2 5SD

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited your school. We enjoyed our time with you very much. This is what we found out.

Phoenix is an outstanding school. You all learn such a lot because your teachers give you work that is just hard enough. They also make sure you get any extra help that you need. You are kind to each other and help your friends and the staff. You grow up to be excellent young citizens.

The school gives you exciting things to do. We really liked watching you learn drumming and dancing. The staff take wonderful care of you but they also teach you how to keep safe.

The sixth form students get certificates when they leave. We have asked the school to give awards at the end of Year 11 as well, to show how much these pupils have learned since they joined Phoenix.

Your headteacher and the staff work very hard to make the school better and better. We want to send them and each one of you our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Eaton

Lead inspector