

Inspection of a good school: Phoenix Academy

Odell Road, Leamore, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 2ED

Inspection dates:

24–25 September 2019

Outcome

Phoenix Academy continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Over the last few years, there has been instability in staffing. This led to inconsistencies that had a negative effect on pupils' education. It is only recently that things have started to improve.

Many pupils, before joining Phoenix, had negative experiences of school. It takes time for them to settle. But when they do, most start to make progress. Pupils learn about a variety of interesting topics. Teachers rightly spend more time helping pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Planned educational trips make their learning more memorable. Some subjects are not as well planned, and pupils do not achieve as well in these areas. Leaders are working hard to address these weaknesses.

Staff show a lot of care towards pupils and keep them safe. Most pupils enjoy school and willingly take part in learning activities. A few pupils with very challenging behaviour find it more difficult to remain focused. They sometimes refuse to take part or follow instructions. Some staff are skilled at managing these situations, but others are not. Sometimes bullying happens, but teachers deal with it quickly, so it is less likely to occur again.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders found it difficult to put in place plans for school improvement because of the many staffing changes. Inconsistent practice crept in. The curriculum was not well planned. Teachers sometimes did their own thing and did not help pupils to build on prior learning. Staff did not manage pupils' behaviour well. As a result, pupils' behaviour deteriorated, and effective learning did not take place. It has only been in the last year that leadership has become more stable. New leaders are now working together well to bring about positive changes to the school. More recently, leaders focused their attention on improving English and mathematics. Teachers now plan sequences of learning that get

more difficult. However, some do not always consider pupils' special educational needs as well as they should. This means that pupils do not make the strongest possible progress.

The reading curriculum does not meet pupils' needs. Teachers assess pupils' reading abilities and know where pupils have gaps. Sometimes teachers do not have the expert knowledge to teach them well. This is especially true of those pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. Pupils' attitudes to reading are generally quite poor. Leaders encourage pupils to read, for example by celebrating World Book Day. They also ensure that all classrooms have book areas where pupils can select books. Despite this, some pupils do not develop the skills they need to become confident readers.

All pupils study a broad range of subjects. Until very recently, leaders had not planned carefully enough how learning would be ordered. Leaders have begun to look at and update teaching plans to make them fit for purpose. For example, in physical education (PE), pupils now build on their skills lesson by lesson. This helps them to achieve well. Pupils said that they have noticed a big difference in their PE lessons. They are learning more and take part in a wider range of sports. Teachers also provide pupils with a rich variety of other experiences. These help them to develop into well-rounded, responsible citizens. Every Friday afternoon pupils choose an enrichment activity. This might be designing a mug in craft or cooking on an open fire in forest school. These fun activities help pupils to work together and develop broader interests.

Some staff do not support all pupils as well as they could to manage their behaviour. This means that some pupils lose control and must be held to stop them hurting themselves or others. Pupils are confident that teachers will sort out any bullying issues if they occur.

Leaders take positive action to keep teachers' workload manageable. The local academy committee (LAC) governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. The trust acted quickly to try and resolve staffing and leadership issues. However, no one challenged leaders enough about how well the school was reducing the number of times pupils had to be held.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff place a high priority on keeping pupils safe. Staff receive training to ensure that they understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff look out for signs that might suggest a pupil is at risk of harm. They report their concerns without delay. Record-keeping is thorough. Leaders work alongside other agencies to provide the right support for pupils. Pupils learn about how to keep safe through the curriculum. Pupils say they feel safe in school. They know that there is a trusted adult who they can talk to if they are worried.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The teaching of reading is not as effective as it could be for a number of reasons. Pupils do not practise their reading often enough to develop confidence and fluency. Pupils are not encouraged to take books home to read. Some staff have not been adequately trained in the teaching of phonics. Teachers sometimes give pupils books to read that do not match closely to the sounds they have learned. Some pupils do not change their books frequently enough. Leaders need to ensure that staff are adequately trained to teach phonics well. Teachers need to support pupils to read more often for pleasure.
- The school has adopted the trust-wide behaviour policy. This does not fully reflect the needs of pupils at this special school. Some inconsistencies in teachers' approaches to managing behaviour do not help pupils. There are a significant number of physical interventions (when pupils are held). This number is decreasing, but it is still too high. Leaders need to make sure that there is greater consistency in how pupils' behaviour is managed and supported. They need to find ways to further reduce the number of physical interventions. The trust should ensure that LAC governors keep closer checks on how successful leaders are in improving behaviour.
- Some teachers do not use the information in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans well when organising learning. Teachers' specific plans to support pupils to change their behaviour are sometimes vague. Leaders need to ensure that all staff pay close attention to the objectives in a pupil's EHC plan when devising learning and behaviour plans.
- Teachers' planning and delivery of some subjects do not help pupils to build their learning progressively. For example, in personal, social, health and economic education, leaders have not thought carefully enough about how pupils' knowledge will be developed. Leaders need to ensure that teachers have the subject knowledge to be able to create units of work that help pupils learn more and remember more.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Phoenix Academy, to be good.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	143382
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10111722
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	45
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Bernard Dickenson
Principal	Jenny Thompson
Website	www.phoenix.attrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This is the school's first inspection since it converted to an academy in December 2016.
- The school is part of the Academy Transformation Trust.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Almost every pupil has an EHC plan.

Information about this inspection

- Subjects considered as part of this inspection were reading, mathematics and PE. Inspectors carried out lesson visits to see these subjects being taught, and they looked at pupils' work. Inspectors talked to pupils about their work. They spoke to teachers who taught these subjects and held discussions with subject leaders. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors met with the executive principal, principal and assistant principals. An inspector also met with the chair of the local academy committee. An inspector held a

telephone conversation with the chief executive officer of Academy Transformation Trust.

- Inspectors took into account 18 responses to Ofsted’s survey for staff and six responses from the Ofsted pupils’ survey. There were insufficient responses to consider parents’ views from Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors talked to pupils to gather their views about school, behaviour, their safety and learning.
- Inspectors explored safeguarding arrangements by reviewing safeguarding records, checking the safety of the school site, talking to staff and pupils about how they keep safe and checking the school’s single central record. They met with the school’s designated safeguarding lead and deputy designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Tim Hill, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Kim Ellis

Ofsted Inspector

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