

Inspection of Phoenix U16 Independent School

Unit E, Metro Business Park, Clough Street, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire ST1 4AF

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a calm and caring school. Pupils enjoy coming here, and most attend regularly. Many pupils who attend the school have not had positive relationships with school in the past. Leaders are acutely aware of this. They work closely with parents and external agencies to better understand the individual barriers to pupils' learning. They use this knowledge to good effect, to build trust, and to re-engage pupils with education. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site.

Leaders recognise the role that parents play in their children's education, and build strong, trusting relationships with pupils and their families. Consequently, if pupils or families have a concern, they freely share these with leaders. Leaders actively promote pupils' wider personal development. The school's curriculum helps pupils to develop, respect and tolerance for others, as well as a growing sense of self-belief.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils. Pupils who struggle to read when they join the school are well supported to make improvements in their ability to read. However, there is still work to be done to make sure that the planned curriculum matches leaders' aims. Leaders have not made sure the curriculum is always taught well. Consequently, pupils do not always gain the knowledge they need to be successful.

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

Across most subjects, leaders have thought carefully about the knowledge they expect pupils to learn. They have made sure that new learning builds on the things pupils have already been taught. However, in some subjects, leaders have not identified the small steps in learning that pupils need to take to be successful. This hinders pupils' progress. Additionally, in some lessons, the activities chosen by teachers do not support learning well. As a result, pupils struggle to remember the things they have been taught.

In some subjects, teachers use assessment well to understand pupils' starting points. Where this happens, teachers adapt their teaching to take account of prior learning. However, in some subjects, teachers do not spot gaps in pupils' learning as they emerge. Because of this, misconceptions remain, and in some cases are reinforced. This is a barrier to pupils' progress. Leaders have not acted quickly enough to resolve these shortcomings in the curriculum.

Pupils with special educational needs and or/disabilities (SEND) are generally well supported here. Leaders work closely with the local authority, parents and commissioning schools to unpick pupils' barriers to learning. They have clear processes in place to closely monitor changes in pupils' needs. Through this work, leaders are beginning to identify pupils' previously unmet needs. Leaders have provided staff with extensive professional development opportunities to make sure they know how to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Consequently, most teachers adapt their teaching well to make sure these pupils can access their learning.

However, in some instances, the curriculum is not as well adapted to meet pupils' needs as it could be. This hampers pupils' learning.

Leaders ensure that those pupils who are at an early stage of reading get the help they need. This is beginning to have a positive impact.

Leaders are rightly proud of their work to promote pupils' wider personal development. There are a range of carefully planned opportunities that help to develop pupils' understanding of their social and moral responsibilities. For example, pupils take part in numerous 'days of service', such as baking cakes and planting flowers for elderly members of their local community. Pupils also benefit from a range of trips and visits to museums. Leaders have thoughtfully designed these experiences to broaden pupils' horizons. Pupils value these opportunities. Currently, the range of work-related opportunities available to pupils is limited. Leaders are taking appropriate steps to combat this. Leaders work closely with pupils as they move on to the next stage of their education. Because of this, many pupils make successful next steps on leaving the school.

Leaders have not made sure that the risks to pupils are reduced in certain activities. For example, risk assessments for off-site visits do not always take account of the specific risks associated with the pupils or the activity. Consequently, risks are not minimised.

The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, has high ambitions for pupils. These are shared by all staff. The proprietor receives a range of information about the school. However, they do not always make good use of this information in order to challenge weaknesses in the school's provision. In addition, the proprietor has not made sure that leaders meet all the independent school standards. The school meets its duties under schedule 10 of the Equalities Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding policy is available on the school's website and is compliant with the latest government guidance. Staff have a clear understanding of individual pupils' needs. They are vigilant to any changes in pupils' behaviour which may suggest a child is at risk of harm. Leaders act quickly to involve social services and other agencies when concerns are raised. Leaders follow clear systems to manage allegations about members of staff.

Leaders work with a range of external agencies, such as the police, to develop their understanding of risks to pupils within the community. Leaders use this information to good effect to adapt the curriculum.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some of the schools' processes for carrying out risk assessments are weak. For example, off-site risk assessments do not always take account of all the actual risks associated with the pupil or the activity. The proprietor should ensure that the risk assessments produced by leaders:
 - are carried out effectively
 - record risks carefully
 - contain clear and appropriate actions to mitigate risk.
- Leaders have not identified the precise knowledge that pupils need to learn across all subjects. As a result, pupils are not always taught the things they need, and new learning does not always build successfully on the things pupils already know. This hinders learning. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum in all subjects defines, in detail, the knowledge that pupils need to learn to enable them to make strong progress.
- Teachers do not always use assessment effectively in order to identify misconceptions and gaps in pupils' knowledge. This means that, too often, learning moves on before pupils have understood everything they need to, and at times misconceptions are further embedded. This holds pupils back. Leaders should support teachers to use assessment effectively, to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge and adapt the curriculum and their teaching appropriately to make sure these gaps are closed.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

School details

Unique reference number	137892
DfE registration number	861/6007
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10254663
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	22
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Shelley Jamieson
Headteacher	Shelley Jamieson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£18,050 to £25,650
Telephone number	01782 922306
Website	www.phoenixlearning.co.uk
Email address	sjamieson@phoenixlearning.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	9 to 11 November 2021

Information about this school

- Phoenix U16 Independent School provides full-time education for pupils between the ages of 14 and 16. Of the pupils registered, some are dual registered with other education providers.
- The school operates from a building in the Etruria area of Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, which was originally the offices and canteen for a group of companies in the late-1990s.
- Pupils are referred to the school by local secondary schools and the local authority.
- Pupils attending Phoenix U16 typically have a range of social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, and have either been excluded or at risk of exclusion from their previous setting.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the proprietor, who is also the headteacher, and other leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, English, science and personal, social, health and economics education. For each of these subjects, inspectors met with leaders and/or teachers, carried out visits to lessons, spoke to pupils and looked at some of their work.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally at various points during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors toured the school premises to check their suitability.
- Inspectors spoke to a number of parents and considered responses to Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses to the pupil and staff questionnaires.

The school's proposed change to the age range of pupils/its premises/the maximum number of pupils.

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is **the school is unlikely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- Leaders have not established a rigorous approach to assessing risk across the school sites. The risk assessments that have been created lack sufficient detail to identify the specific risks associated with all activities that pupils and staff may engage in across the new site.
- The new premises are not maintained to an acceptable standard. Rooms in the new building suffer from damp and black mould. There are several exposed wires falling from a ceiling in one classroom. These pose a potential ligature risk. There are trip hazards around the school site that are not clearly marked. These pose a risk to the health and safety of pupils. Leaders have failed to consider the numerous risks associated with the site.
- There is insufficient outdoor space for pupils to play safely. The outdoor space is accessed via a narrow external walkway. The outdoor space, and the external walkway, are cramped, with uneven flooring.
- Leaders have not made sure that there is adequate external lighting.

The school is unlikely to meet the following standards

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
- 27 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
- 27(b) external lighting is provided in order to ensure that people can safely enter and leave the school premises.
- 29(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable–
- 29(1)(b) pupils to play outside.

Information about the material change inspection

- The proprietor has proposed to change the school's age range from 14 to 16 to 11 to 16, to increase the number of pupils from 25 to 50, and to open an additional premises on a new site.

Inspection team

Alexander Laney, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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