

# Inspection of Phoenix Independent School

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

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Inspection dates: 11 to 13 March 2025

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## **Overall effectiveness**

**Good**

The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a school where adults go above and beyond to help pupils thrive, both academically and socially. Pupils rise to these high expectations and achieve well. One pupil, summing up the views of others, said, 'Here they treat us like human beings. They genuinely care about us and help us to do well.'

A significant number of pupils join the school with a history of poor school attendance and engagement. All staff understand this and work closely with pupils and their families to build trusting and positive relationships quickly. Staff have high expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. Staff teach pupils what positive behaviour looks like and this helps to ensure that pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent.

The school prioritises getting to know pupils as soon as they arrive. There is an extensive transition and induction process which ensures pupils settle in well. Right from the moment pupils join, they are encouraged to think about their futures. The extensive careers programme helps pupils to consider their next steps carefully.

The school has established a comprehensive personal development programme that supports pupils to develop confidence, independence and resilience. Pupils develop skills that they never thought they would have. For example, pupils achieve qualifications in climbing, kayaking and first aid. These experiences help pupils leave the school well prepared for their future.

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

Across the school, staff are ambitious for pupils. Staff want pupils to experience success and leave with qualifications in subjects including English and mathematics. As soon as pupils arrive, the school quickly addresses their individual needs and barriers to learning. The curriculum prioritises the basic skills in English, reading and mathematics. Learning is well sequenced and builds up pupils' skills and knowledge over time. Pupils, most of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are supported to ensure they achieve academic success.

Reading is a high priority across the school. Books that pupils study are appropriate to their stage of understanding and reading ability. The school has identified pupils who are at an earlier stage of learning to read and has begun to put support in place. However, support for struggling readers is not fully established across the school. This means that some pupils are not getting the precise support they need to be able to learn and apply phonics consistently.

Many pupils arrive at Phoenix with significant gaps in their learning due to the amount of schooling they have missed. Teachers use a range of appropriate strategies to check what pupils know and can do. In the main, these systems are used well. However, at times, checks on pupils' learning are less effective. This means some pupils' learning is not closely matched to what they can and cannot do.

Sometimes the work is too easy and at other times too hard. Consequently, a small number of pupils do not learn as well as they could.

There are high expectations for all aspects of pupils' behaviour. Leaders know that some pupils arrive with poor attitudes to learning, due to prior negative experiences of school. The clear and concise behaviour and attendance policies mean that pupils know what is expected of them. Staff model empathy and compassion and pupils respond incredibly well to this. In a very short space of time pupils learn to behave with the utmost respect and consideration for others. Their attitudes to learning are exceedingly positive. Pupils take pride in celebrating their excellent behaviour and high attendance.

The provision for pupils' wider development is exceptional. The school has meticulously considered ways to support pupils to become resilient, independent and active members of society. The school's 'days of service' allow all pupils to make a positive contribution to their local area. For example, pupils painted the local Sea Cadet hut, did some gardening for local residents and made lunch for vulnerable people in the community.

Pupils benefit from a comprehensive careers programme. This starts from the moment pupils start at the school, when all pupils complete a careers action plan. Leaders ensure that every pupil recognises and understands their talents and potential. As a result, all pupils transition successfully to further education and training.

The school is led very well. The proprietor is driven by a moral purpose to ensure all pupils achieve success and are ready for the next stage of learning. Staff share this view. Morale across the staff is high. Leaders support them with their workload and well-being. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. The school meets all the independent school standards consistently. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- At times, assessment strategies are not used as well as they could be. As a result, some pupils develop gaps in their understanding. The school should ensure that teachers are supported to check what pupils know and can do and to adapt learning as appropriate.
- The proprietor has begun to think about ways to support pupils with gaps in their phonics knowledge. However, this is in the early stages of being implemented. This means that some pupils do not read as fluently as they could. Leaders

should ensure that staff have the expertise that they need to quickly address any gaps in phonics knowledge so that all pupils become confident readers.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137892
<b>DfE registration number</b>	861/6007
<b>Local authority</b>	Stoke-on-Trent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10342078
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	25
<b>Proprietor</b>	Shelley Jamieson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Shelley Jamieson
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£19,950 to £23,750
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 922303
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.phoenixlearning.co.uk">www.phoenixlearning.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@phoenixlearning.co.uk">office@phoenixlearning.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 to 29 June 2023

## Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school caters for pupils with a history of disrupted schooling, mainly owing to behavioural and social difficulties.
- Many pupils join the school at various points during the academic year.
- The school does not have a governing body. The headteacher is also the proprietor of the school.

## 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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered other subjects, including personal, social, health and economic education, as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor, who is also the headteacher, and other senior staff. They also had formal meetings with groups of staff and spoke with pupils.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- To check the school's compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors carried out a range of activities, including meeting with leaders, a site walk to check the premises, looking at the content on the school's website and scrutinising the school's records and documentation.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors evaluated responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

## **Inspection team**

Eve Morris, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Matt Fletcher

His Majesty's Inspector

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