

Inspection of Phoenix Academy

Marshfoot Lane, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 2PH

Inspection dates: 2–3 October 2019

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Early years provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a rapidly improving school. Pupils, parents and carers who talked to inspectors were very clear that the school is much better than it was in the past. Pupils enjoy learning about new things. They appreciate the help they receive from staff when they are 'stuck' or are finding things difficult.

Older pupils in particular are positive about the changes that they have seen in the past two years. They feel safe in school and free from bullying, although readily admit that they sometimes fall out with each other. They said that teachers have high expectations of both their behaviour and their engagement in learning. Inspectors' visits to classrooms, scrutiny of pupils' work and observing pupils at breaktime and lunchtime proved this to be the case.

Pupils are proud of their school. They were happy to share their learning with inspectors. They enjoy their trips outside school, especially to local historical sites such as Newhaven Fort. When asked, some pupils thought that they would like more after-school clubs or better board games when they have wet breaktimes. However, others said they were very happy at school, and that they could not think of anything that needed to be better.

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

Leaders and those in positions of governance have high aspirations for every pupil. They are determined that the school will shake off the legacy of the past so that current pupils fulfil their full potential. Leaders' vision for providing a high-quality education is becoming a reality. Discussions with pupils showed that they have a growing pride in their school. They enjoy coming to school, although some pupils still do not attend as regularly as they should.

The curriculum is designed well but is still evolving. Leaders are not afraid to make difficult decisions. They have set clear priorities for improvement, especially where the curriculum is concerned. This has meant that some subjects have not developed as quickly as others since the school joined the STEP Academy Trust in 2017. For instance, provision for the arts and for foreign languages is not yet as strong as leaders intend. However, the quality of teaching and learning in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as some other subjects, is now strong. Key texts provide staff with a starting point for teaching. These are sequenced well, enabling pupils to build on previous learning as they move through the school. As a result, pupils are enjoying success in classrooms and their behaviour is much better.

Leaders ensure that staff benefit from a wide range of effective personal development. Improving teachers' subject knowledge and ensuring that all staff have high expectations of pupils have been key to the growing success of the school. Strong links to local schools within the multi-academy trust provide staff with extra advantages, not least sharing good practice.

In the past, pupils have not been well prepared for their move to secondary school. Their achievements in reading, writing and mathematics have not compared well to other primary schools. This picture is improving rapidly, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. For instance, younger pupils learn to read quickly because staff are trained well and know this is key to pupils' future success. Older pupils enjoy reading. Most talk with clarity about the books that they have read. Year 5 pupils happily shared their views about the new text they are reading together, confident to make comparisons with books they had read previously as a class.

The wider curriculum is also an emerging strength. Pupils' personal development is served well. Pastoral care is strong here. Pupils are supported successfully by staff when they find learning hard. The use of a carefully adapted scheme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) also helps pupils understand the impact of prejudice and lack of tolerance, for instance. Well-chosen texts help them to understand about different cultures and how other peoples' lives are different from their own.

Children get off to a good start in the early years. Routines are well established, despite children being very new to the school. Staff know children well. Their assessments are thorough and have already enabled key priorities to be identified for individuals and this year's cohort as whole. Children are already enjoying phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) lessons. Other areas of learning are provided for well, including developing children's understanding of the world around them through role play and discovery.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff know that it is their collective responsibility to keep pupils safe. The culture to keep pupils safe is strong, because the highest priority is given to their welfare, health and safety.

Leaders have ensured that systems and procedures to keep pupils safe are fit for purpose. Staff training is up to date. Staff know what to do if they have concerns.

Those who have additional responsibilities are experienced and diligent in their work. Although relationships with outside agencies are strong, leaders are not afraid to challenge decisions when they have concerns about the safeguarding of pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculum. They have prioritised what subjects should be taught and when. Most subjects are now covered well across the school. This is particularly the case in reading, writing and mathematics. This

is equally true of science and some foundation subjects, including history and geography. However, some subjects are less well developed. This includes languages, which is not currently taught. Leaders' plans to widen the curriculum should be implemented without delay.

- Despite the quality of teaching being much better than it was in the past, pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 are not as strong as they could be. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics still lags behind that of most other primary schools. Leaders know that pupils need to make even better progress if the legacy of poor teaching and learning from the past is to be overcome.
- Despite leaders' efforts, overall attendance is not as good as it could be. Rates of persistent absence are too high. Leaders should redouble their efforts to reduce absence, so that all pupils can benefit from the good and improving quality of education the school now provides.

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're 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	145016
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10111106
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Rama Venchard
Headteacher	Tim Mills (executive headteacher) Alun Evans (headteacher)
Website	https://phoenixstepacademy.org/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This was the first inspection of the school since it became part of the STEP Academy Trust in January 2017. The previous school had been part of the Lilac Sky Schools Academy Trust.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included meetings with leaders, teaching and support staff, pupils and parents. The lead inspector met with representatives of the multi-academy trust, as well as the chair of the local academy committee. He also talked to a member of the trust board on the telephone.
- When considering the quality of the curriculum, inspectors focused on reading, mathematics, history and science. This included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time.
- Throughout the inspection, inspectors assessed the school's culture to keep pupils

safe. A wide range of documentation was considered, including policies and staff training records. The single central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children was also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lynda Welham

Ofsted Inspector

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