

The Phoenix School

Great North Road, Grantham, NG31 7US

Inspection dates 5–6 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The trustees, Acting Principals, other leaders and managers provide good leadership. They have made sure that students achieve well and that teaching is good. The academy is well placed to improve further.
- Students' behaviour improves considerably during their time at the academy and they develop positive attitudes to learning. Students behave well and feel safe. Those in Year 11 show outstanding maturity and readily take on responsibility.
- Eagle Hall House provides very effective support for the academy's most challenging students. It enables them to make good progress personally and academically.
- Students in the rest of the academy achieve well, including the most able students. The large majority go on to education, training or employment when they leave.
- Teaching is good, with some examples of outstanding teaching. Lessons are planned well to provide the right level of challenge for students.
- The curriculum promotes students' achievement and personal development well.
- Opportunities to go on educational visits and to take part in special events make an outstanding contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The academy does a great deal to promote British values and to prepare students for life in modern British society.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The academy does not analyse the vast amount of data it collects about students' achievement as well as it could. This makes it difficult for leaders to be precise when judging the academy's effectiveness and the impact of teaching on students' learning.
- Teachers do not always make sure that their marking informs students about how to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team sampled 17 lessons across all classes, visited Eagle Hall House and looked at students' work on both sites. Together with talking to students about their work and checking their progress over time, this provided a balance of evidence about teaching and learning.
- Meetings were held with the Director/Chair of the Trustees, the Acting Principals and other senior leaders.
- There were insufficient responses to the online survey, Parent View, for these to be taken into account.
- Inspectors considered the 13 completed staff questionnaires.
- The inspection team observed the academy's work and looked at a range of documentation. This included the academy's self-evaluation and development plans; records of students' attainment, progress and behaviour and attendance; and systems for protecting and safeguarding students.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Terence Cook

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Phoenix converted to become an academy school on 1 March 2013. Prior to this, it was known as The Phoenix School. When the predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted in May 2012, it was judged to be good.
- The academy provides for students who have a statement of special educational needs for complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Some have mental health difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorders and oppositional defiance disorder. Many students have additional learning difficulties.
- The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding is high. Pupil premium funding is for pupils in the care of the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Nearly all students are White British and none speak English as an additional language.
- In February 2014, the academy established an alternative learning centre at Eagle Hall House near Lincoln. Here, pupils who find it difficult to cope and engage in the main school are educated within a small, flexible learning environment where there is a higher staff ratio and a learning environment that is individually tailored to their needs. At present, eight students attend this provision.
- The Principal retired in August 2014 and became Director/Chair of the Trustees. He was a member of the Department for Education 2011 Working Party on academies.
- To provide consistency, the two Vice Principals have taken over the role of Acting Principals for this year. The trustees intend to appoint a permanent Principal following a staff restructuring process in the summer of 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and raise students' achievement by:
 - setting consistent expectations across subjects for how much progress students should make, given their starting points
 - taking greater account of national expectations when analysing data to arrive at a clearer view of how well students have achieved and, therefore, how well the academy is performing
 - using this information to target even more closely any areas where some students could make better progress.
- Make sure that teachers' marking and advice always makes clear to students what they need to do to improve.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The academy is led and managed well. Trustees, leaders and managers are ambitious for the school and have established an atmosphere in which teaching can flourish and students are expected to behave well. Leaders work continuously to improve and develop provision to raise students' achievement and promote their personal development. The academy has an experienced team of staff who work well together and have students' best interests at heart.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Leaders and managers look at students' work and observe lessons to make judgements about the work not only of teachers but also of teaching assistants. In addition, the Acting Principals visit lessons on a daily basis to keep a check on teaching and learning. A focus on making sure that work is matched to the next steps of different groups of students when observing lessons has made this a particular strength of teaching.
- The management of teachers' performance is rigorous. Teachers have clear targets and any underperformance is tackled effectively. Staff have good opportunities to develop their practice through training, and the academy has a strong record of training teachers.
- The academy makes good use of its pupil premium funding to support the students for whom it is intended. It has used the funding to provide individual tuition, to run special support programmes and to fund experiences that extend students' horizons. Spending has a good impact on students' learning and development.
- The curriculum promotes student's academic achievement and personal development well. It includes good opportunities for them to develop their basic skills and to prepare for the world of work. Students receive thorough careers advice and have good opportunities to take part in 'taster' days at local colleges to help them decide about their future. An excellent programme of visits, including residential trips, and special events does much to promote students' learning and to extend their awareness.
- The academy works in partnership with a national television company and has had many national sporting figures working with students, providing inspirational assemblies, workshops and lessons. It involves students in community projects and they have been involved in the planning and delivering of the Regional Special Olympics.
- The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in all its work and has highly effective systems for teaching them about British values. It has full International School status and holds the Unicef Respecting Rights Award. Students explore their own and other people's beliefs and feelings, and learn about the importance of tolerance and respect. Leaders ensure that there is no discrimination and they do much to promote positive relationships.
- Students are taught about their responsibilities as a citizen in British society. They learn the differences between right and wrong, both in terms of their actions and the actions of others. The school takes students to the Somme and to the Holocaust Centre, as well as giving them access to direct experiences of other cultures in modern Britain.
- The academy has close partnerships with other schools, for whom it provides training in behaviour management, and with external agencies. It works closely with parents to improve students' attitudes and attendance. The academy provides parents with support throughout the year and at weekends and evenings through its helpline, which is managed by the pastoral support manager.
- The academy has robust systems in place for making sure that students are kept safe. Leaders carry out careful checks on all adults who work with the students, and make sure that staff are regularly trained in safeguarding and child protection. Teachers identify possible risks associated with different activities and the academy makes sure that students are well informed about how to keep themselves safe.

■ The academy collects a wealth of data about each student's attainment and progress. Individual teachers make judgements about how good each student's progress has been, but this is not matched consistently to any clear set of expectations about the amount of progress students should make. This allows leaders to make sure students receive equal opportunities and identify those who are doing well or less well within individual subjects. They are, therefore, able to put necessary support in place. However, the existing system does not give a clear picture of overall progress. This makes it difficult for leaders to be precise in judging the impact of teaching on students' learning or comparing the academy's performance with that of schools nationally.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The Director/Chair provides excellent, strong leadership of the trustees and has a clear vision for the future. Trustees bring valuable skills to their role and have a thorough knowledge of the academy's work. They hold senior leaders closely to account and designated trustees work with senior staff to develop practice in specific areas of the academy.
- Trustees have a detailed knowledge of teaching and make sure that teachers' pay reflects their performance. They receive detailed information about data and make sure that pupil premium funding and the Year 7 catch-up allocation are used to good effect. Trustees provide very careful management of the academy's finance.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They join the academy with a history of poor behaviour and negative attitudes to learning. During their time at The Phoenix, their behaviour improves considerably and the academy turns many students' lives around.
- The management of behaviour is good, with elements that are outstanding. Staff make expectations for behaviour clear and students have very detailed behaviour plans. Leaders carefully analyse patterns and closely track the behaviour of individuals, regularly setting students new targets.
- Though fixed-term exclusions were high for a time when the academy took a large group of students in from a local school that was having difficulties in 2013, these have declined significantly since then. The academy follows clear procedures when individual students need to be physically restrained and keeps appropriate records. Students know the difference between right and wrong, and learn in a calm and harmonious environment.
- The opening of Eagle Hall House has greatly improved the behaviour of the most challenging students. They have responded well to the peaceful atmosphere of the provision and to programmes of study tailored to their individual needs. During the inspection, students from Eagle Hall House behaved exceptionally well on a trip to the leisure centre at a hotel complex, showing consideration for members of the public as they swam in the pool.
- The academy provides very good opportunities for students to take responsibility as they grow in maturity. The roles of academy ambassador and sports ambassador provide an excellent outlet for Year 11 students who are ready to act as role models for other students. Younger students sensibly represent their classmates as members of the school council, which is active in identifying what is working well and what could be improved.
- There is occasional low-level disruption in class but staff deal with this promptly so that it has little impact on other students' learning. There are also times when some students are passive in class. However, most students' attitudes are positive: they are punctual to lessons, prepared and eager to learn. As a result, behaviour in lessons is usually good and it is outstanding in Year 11, where students are exceptionally focused and highly motivated.
- Students join the academy with a history of poor attendance. It improves considerably during their time at The Phoenix and nearly all students attend regularly. Eagle Hall House brought about a dramatic improvement in the attendance of the small minority of students who were previously persistently absent.

Staff are rigorous in following up absence and the overall attendance rate has improved since the academy opened so that it is now closer to the national average.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students say that they feel safe and a great deal of work goes onto making them aware of how to keep themselves safe. The academy works with other agencies to raise students' awareness of a variety of risks. For example, the police came in to train students in anti-bullying and internet safety.
- Students are clear about different types of bullying. They say that there is a small amount of bullying, mostly name calling, but they know how to deal with it or who to go to for support if they are concerned about anything.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is good, including in English and mathematics, and there is some outstanding teaching.
- Teachers are thorough in the way they assess students' attainment on entry and use this information to set detailed individual targets. All pupils are assessed in relation to their literacy and numeracy needs and have an individualised learning programme. Teachers review students' targets termly and set new ones when they are ready to move on.
- Students benefit from being taught by subject specialists who establish a very positive atmosphere for learning. Classrooms are made attractive and informative, with colourful displays relating to the subject. These often include work produced by students. Relationships between staff and students are positive and mutually respectful.
- Lessons are purposeful, with an appropriate focus on enabling students to gain new skills in reading, writing and mathematics at a good rate, and to encourage positive attitudes to learning. Teachers plan their lessons well to provide the right level of challenge for different students and often include an extra task to stretch the most able.
- In an English lesson for students in Years 7 and 8, pupils made good progress in analysing and exploring layers of meaning in a text. Less able students worked with a teaching assistant who helped them to tease out their ideas. The rest of the class produced a good amount of written work and the most able had an extra challenge to use dictionaries to find the meaning of series of difficult words. All students made good progress because the work was well matched to the next steps in their learning.
- Teachers make good use of their teaching assistants, many of whom are skilled in providing support for students' learning and behaviour. In addition, assistant staff run a range of valuable support programmes to help students who need extra help with reading, spelling and mathematics.
- Teachers, and often teaching assistants also, ask effective questions to check students' understanding and deepen their thinking. Staff provide them with much encouragement and ongoing information about how well they are doing during lessons, and involve them in assessing their own work. In addition, there is some good marking of students' books but this is not consistent in providing them with clear guidance about what they could do to improve or time to respond to teachers' advice.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The attainment of students is low when they join the academy - and often exceptionally so in literacy - as a result of a history of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, poor attendance and learning difficulties.
- Many students join the academy at various points during Key Stages 3 and 4, often having been out of

school for significant amounts of time. Published data about students' progress based on their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is not, therefore, an accurate reflection of how well they achieve.

- Although students reach below average standards by the end of Year 11, this represents good progress from their low starting points. Students achieve well and most make good progress towards their individual targets. Achievement is good in English and mathematics, and students often do well in other subjects. In art, they make exceptionally good progress and produce high quality work.
- The academy does not enter students early for GCSE but it does enter them from Year 7 onwards for Entry Level qualifications to help them to build up a number of awards. Students typically leave with a range of academic and vocational qualifications, and develop a good awareness of the world of work. Combined with their improved attitudes to learning, this enables the large majority to go on to further education, training or employment.
- The most able students make good progress, gaining up to four GCSE A* to G grades and several vocational qualifications. In lessons, they communicate their ideas clearly and produce some imaginative and thoughtful work. Describing an alligator, a Year 7 student wrote, 'Twisting through the splashing water, while catching fish, he dives elegantly into the dark deep river. his scales like armour, his sharp teeth like daggers.'
- Students at Eagle Hall House make good progress in literacy and outstanding gains in mathematics as a result of individual support matched closely to the next steps in their learning. In addition, they develop a range of practical and vocational skills.
- The academy is working to narrow the gap between the attainment of students eligible for pupil premium funding and other students, as the latter group tend to achieve more qualifications at the end of Year 11. The progress of students who are eligible for pupil premium funding was similar to their classmates in mathematics in 2014 and slightly lower in English. Currently, these students are mostly making good progress in response to individual support in reading, spelling and mathematics.
- Similarly, support programmes for students with additional needs and those for whom the academy receives Year 7 catch-up funding enable them to make good progress.
- Lesson observation and examination of students' books show that they make good progress and produce a good amount of work.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139316
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	449450

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	William Bush
Principal	Stan Kilroy and Diane Bush (Acting Principals)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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