

Phoenix Academy

Duce Drive, Dawley, Telford, TF4 3JS

Inspection dates

3–4 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- A culture of low expectations has become acceptable across the academy.
- Students' achievement is too low and has declined since the academy opened. Leaders, including governors, have failed to halt this decline in students' achievement.
- Students arrive at the academy with below average skills in reading and writing. The academy has not placed enough importance on developing these basic skills. Consequently, students' weak reading and writing skills limit their attainment and progress across the curriculum.
- Students leave the academy without having made the progress they should in English and mathematics.
- Gaps in the achievement of disadvantaged students, compared to other students in the academy and nationally, are widening. The use of pupil premium funding has not been effective in closing these gaps. Governors have not held leaders to account for the continuing decline in the achievement of this group.
- The curriculum is inadequate because it does not meet the needs of all students. Some students study courses that are not suitable for their ability.
- Weak teaching over time has limited students' ability to learn well. Teachers do not plan activities that are carefully matched to the different abilities of students. As a result, teaching lacks challenge, is uninspiring and fails to motivate students to get fully involved in lessons. In too many lessons, this results in students becoming disengaged and disruptive.
- Leaders and governors do not have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching. Too much emphasis is placed on judging teachers' performance in the classroom and not enough on judging the progress students are making by checking the work in their books and their results in assessments.
- Attendance is well below average and continuing to decline. Too many students do not attend the academy regularly. Checking by leaders is inadequate and does not ensure that intervention and support for these students is in place quickly.
- Systems in place to check on behaviour and exclusions are ineffective. Leaders are unable to identify quickly students and groups of students who need support. As a result students are not getting the help they need to re-engage with the academy positively.

The school has the following strengths

- The acting headteacher is ambitious for the academy and has introduced a range of initiatives to bring about improvement. Some of these are beginning to have an impact on raising expectations of what students can achieve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning and behaviour in 37 lessons; some observations were with senior leaders. They also observed tutor groups, break and lunchtime, and around the academy at the start and the end of the day. One inspector observed Year 8 taking part in a theatre in education project.
- Inspectors met formally with three groups of students, and spoke to students around the academy and in lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with the acting headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor.
- The inspection team considered the views of 11 parents who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire. The views of 53 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire were also analysed.
- A variety of information was analysed about students' progress, attendance and behaviour. The inspection team also viewed a range of other documents, including the academy's self-evaluation and improvement plan, and minutes from governing body meetings. The inspection team looked at records relating to the safeguarding of students.

Inspection team

Helen Reeves, Lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Gwendoline Onyon	Additional Inspector
Andrew Vind	Additional Inspector
Patrick Walsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- Phoenix Academy is smaller than the average sized school.
- Phoenix Academy converted to become an academy on 1 June 2013. When its predecessor school, The Phoenix School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require improvement. Phoenix Academy subsequently became a member of the Telford Cooperative Multi-Academy Trust, which consists of four local academy converters.
- The majority of students attending the academy are White British, with a much lower than average proportion of students attending from minority ethnic groups.
- A well-above-average proportion of students are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after).
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is well above the national average.
- A small number of students attend courses away from the academy at SEEDS, Nova training and AFC Telford Learning.
- An acting headteacher has been in post since October 2014.
- The academy does not meet the governments' current floor standards. These are the minimum standards expected for pupils' learning and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in English and mathematics, so that the progress and attainment of all groups of students, improves rapidly by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about students' progress from assessments and the regular marking of students' work to plan lessons at the right level of difficulty for different groups of students
 - making sure that teachers' planning is clear about the learning expected in each lesson, so that teachers can check students are making progress in their learning and adapt or provide support during the lesson
 - consistently and effectively challenging low level disruption so that the focus remains on learning in all lessons
 - ensuring that teachers receive good training and support to develop effective questioning skills, so that questions probe and develop a greater depth and understanding in students' responses
 - making sure that teachers' marking leads to improvement in students' work
 - insisting that teachers' seize every opportunity when planning lessons to develop students' skills and confidence in reading and writing, and numeracy insisting on high standards of written work and presentation in books.
- Close the attainment and progress gaps between disadvantaged students and other students nationally by:
 - analysing information about the achievement of students across all years to ensure that well planned interventions are put in place
 - ensuring that governors receive clear analysis of students' attainment and progress across all years so that they can be more effective in challenging and supporting the academy, to ensure that pupil premium funding is making a difference.

- Improve the attendance of all groups of students to at least the national average by:
 - implementing robust systems to track and monitor students' attendance, so that interventions can be put in place quickly to reduce the proportion of students not attending the academy each day.

- Strengthen leadership and management across the academy so that all actions drive improvement in students' achievement by:
 - evaluating rigorously the quality of teaching throughout the academy, using information about students' progress as well as observations and scrutinies of students work
 - providing relevant support and training for middle leaders
 - urgently reviewing the curriculum to ensure that students have access to a range of appropriate courses, and review the allocation of time given to lessons to improve the pace at which students learn
 - analysing more thoroughly information gathered by the academy regarding exclusions and behaviour and use this to target action in a more focused way
 - implementing robust strategies across the whole academy to improve literacy and numeracy, so that every opportunity is seized to support students in the development of these basic skills.

External reviews of governance and of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are inadequate

- A culture of low expectations has become acceptable across the academy. Leaders and governors have failed to act decisively to address the decline in students' achievement since the academy opened.
- Leaders, including subject leaders, do not have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching. Their judgements are over generous and, as a result, teachers are not provided with training which helps them improve. Too much emphasis is placed on teachers' performance in the classroom. Leaders do not spend enough time looking at students' learning in their books, analysing assessment information, or talking to students about their work. They are, therefore, poorly informed about the extent to which teaching is helping students to make progress. Leaders at all levels are not tackling weak teaching with sufficient urgency to improve students' experience in lessons and the progress they make in learning.
- Pupil premium funding is not spent effectively to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged students. As a result, their achievement lags behind that of other students in the academy and nationally. The acting headteacher has introduced a range of initiatives to tackle the under performance of disadvantaged students. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these strategies.
- The curriculum, and how it is organised in the timetable, is inadequate. Some students are studying subjects at Key Stage 4 that are inappropriate for their ability and leaders have allowed some students to make choices that will not secure places at college when they leave the academy. The acting headteacher is currently in the process of reviewing the curriculum, and has, where possible, made changes to some students' courses.
- The structure of the day is made up of three lessons of 100 minutes each. Senior leaders have struggled to provide enough support for teachers in delivering engaging and motivating activities over lessons of this length. They have found it difficult to offer a sufficiently broad range of courses, and to group students appropriately. This contributes significantly to the weak achievement of students and does not provide equal access for all students to different subjects. As a result, the academy does not promote equality of opportunity as well as it should.
- Leaders' predictions of examination results in summer 2014 were inaccurate. New systems have been recently introduced to improve the accuracy of assessments and to provide teachers with appropriate information for planning lessons. It is too soon to assess the impact of this system.
- The effectiveness of middle leaders is inadequate. The assistant principal is supporting the leaders of mathematics and science and this is having a positive impact. The acting headteacher has recently introduced new systems to improve the quality and consistency of leaders' analysis of the quality of teaching, and the evaluation of student assessment information. These systems are in the early stages of development.
- Improving basic literacy and numeracy skills of students is a priority for the academy. The leadership of literacy and numeracy across the academy is inadequate. It is an expectation that all students read regularly in the academy; this is not checked by leaders to guarantee all students have access to this activity.
- Time allocated to 'Learning4life' for twenty minutes every morning is not well used. Not all staff consistently follow a detailed plan to deliver aspects of personal development, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development alongside opportunities to develop reading and numeracy skills. The quality of this experience for many students is poor and the plan does not provide students with enough opportunities to explore and prepare for life in modern Britain.
- The academy's statutory arrangements to keep students safe meet requirements.
- Performance management is ineffective. Rewarding teachers' performance has not taken into account the achievement information about students. The acting headteacher has taken steps to address this, a new

system of performance management linked to students' achievement is currently being implemented.

- The support and challenge from the Telford Cooperative Multi-Academy Trust is ineffective. The Trust has not taken action to halt the decline in achievement and governors are now in discussion about the future of Phoenix Academy with an alternative sponsor.
- Students in Year 11 have regular access to external good quality careers advice and information about local college choices, and apprenticeships. However, as students do not achieve well in the academy, they are not fully prepared for the next stage of their education or training.
- Relationships between students and staff, and students and their classmates are good.
- The acting headteacher has recently reduced the number of students attending courses away from the academy, and in some cases made changes to students' courses in order to meet their needs more appropriately. Leaders check the attendance, progress and behaviour of these students regularly and the academy is working with some of these students to improve their poor attendance.
- The acting headteacher is ambitious for the academy and has introduced a range of initiatives since taking up post in October. A detailed development plan is in place; however, these plans do not provide realistic measures by which to assess impact at key points. Newly introduced targets for students have raised the expectations of what they can achieve, but teaching is not yet consistently strong enough across the academy to deliver these targets.
- The staff questionnaires are very positive about the leadership of the acting headteacher and about the very recent changes in dealing more consistently with students' behaviour.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that the academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is inadequate. Governors have not been effective in challenging the performance of the academy. They have not been provided with accurate and reliable information about the achievement of different groups of students. Since the academy opened, governors have not sufficiently held leaders at all levels to account for the decline in achievement. They do not have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching in the academy, and do not use achievement information in their discussions about performance management. Governors do not know how the pupil premium is spent, and are not involved in these discussions. They have not acted with sufficient urgency on their concerns regarding students' behaviour in the new building, curriculum decisions and staffing. Governors are aware of underperformance in some areas of the academy, yet this has not been tackled. Governors are well informed about their safeguarding responsibilities and ensure that suitable safeguarding procedures are in place.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is inadequate.
- Too many lessons are interrupted by poor behaviour. Students who spoke to inspectors expressed their concern about the number of lessons disrupted by poor behaviour; this was confirmed by inspectors' observations in some lessons.
- Systems in place to monitor incidents where a student is sent out of a lesson or excluded from the academy are not effective. Leaders do not analyse the incidents to see if there are any patterns or trends that need further action, or whether there are particular group of students involved more than others.
- Some students lack pride in their academy uniform and need reminding about how to present themselves.

- Most students are polite to each other and move around the building sensibly. They are well supervised during break and lunchtime. Students from different ethnic groups and faiths socialise well with each other. When students are unpleasant to each other, students told inspectors that staff deal quickly and effectively with any incidents.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is inadequate because attendance is well below the national average and is not improving. Systems in place to monitor attendance are ineffective. Leaders do not use this information sufficiently to quickly identify concerns about particular students and groups of students. Disadvantaged students, disabled students and those who have special educational needs attend the academy less than their classmates. Leaders are not doing enough to intervene and provide support for these students to get them back into the academy regularly.
- Students told inspectors that they feel safe in the academy. They could explain different types of bullying and knew how to keep themselves safe on the internet. Incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and students know who to go to if they need help.
- Awareness of other faiths and cultures is not a strong feature of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences.
- The attendance and behaviour of students following courses away from the academy is checked weekly and staff from the academy make regular visits to see students. The academy and the providers work well together to resolve issues of poor attendance or behaviour as quickly as possible.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Inadequate teaching over time has resulted in too many students not making the progress they should, particularly in English and mathematics. There is not enough good teaching across the academy to accelerate students' progress and enable them to make gains in their learning.
- Teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are too low. Teachers do not use the information they have about students' progress to plan activities which engage and challenge all students. In too many lessons, students are occupied by completing a series of tasks that do not inspire or motivate them to think about their learning. In some lessons observed students quickly became bored and disruptive.
- Teachers stretch out learning activities that could be completed in a much shorter time to fill the 100 minute lesson. This has significantly contributed to a culture of low expectations in lessons.
- Some teachers are not clear enough about what they want students to learn when planning lessons and do not check how well students are learning during the lesson. As a result, teachers are unable to provide extra support, or change their lesson to make sure that all students understand the work they are doing.
- Marking of students' work and the quality of feedback is inconsistent across the academy and does not help students understand how to improve their work. Incorrect use of spellings and punctuation is not always corrected, and some students repeat mistakes. Some teachers' comments are scruffy and hard to read. Some use words and phrases that are too difficult for weaker readers to fully understand. However, inspectors did see some very effective feedback to students in English and geography. When spoken to in these lessons, students were clear how they could develop their skills and improve their progress.
- Some teachers do not probe students' understanding or enable students to regularly reflect on their work and think deeply about what they are learning. Where learning is more effective, teachers ask challenging questions and give students time to consider their responses. This was observed in both English and geography where students were encouraged to develop well-thought-through responses, which then prompted the class to develop further discussion and challenge.
- Developing students' literacy and numeracy skills is a priority for the academy. Strategies to improve students' confidence with numbers are not well developed in lessons outside of mathematics. In addition

teachers do not plan for or use enough opportunities to develop students' confidence to produce extended pieces of writing, encourage students to read a range of texts, or insist on the use of subject specific vocabulary when speaking. However, inspectors observed literacy skills being cleverly developed in a design technology and in a physical education lesson. As a result, students were structuring extended pieces of writing independently and, when answering questions from the teacher, demonstrating their learning using technical vocabulary very confidently and accurately.

- The impact of teaching assistants in classrooms is varied. At times, teaching assistants have specific instructions from the teachers and play a valuable role in supporting the progress of students in the lesson. In other lessons students are over reliant on adult support and not encouraged to develop their independence.
- Many students do not take pride in their work; books are untidy and work poorly presented. Lack of good presentation in Key Stage 4 books will make using notes for revision more difficult.

The achievement of pupils is inadequate

- Since the academy opened, achievement has declined. Students join the academy with skills in English and mathematics that are well below the national average. They do not make the progress they should in English and mathematics when compared to other students nationally of the same ability.
- In 2014 just over a third of all students and 20% of disadvantaged students achieved five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. These results were much worse than the academy's predictions and well below the national average.
- In 2014, although the proportion of students in English who made the progress they should from their starting points increased by 16%, this proportion was still below the national average. In mathematics, the proportion of students who made the progress they should declined by 23% and was well below the national average.
- The gaps in the standards reached at GCSE in English and mathematics between disadvantaged students and other students in the academy have widened since the academy opened to just under a grade and a half in English, and two grades in Mathematics. The gaps have widened further when compared to other students nationally to two grades in English and almost three grades in mathematics.
- In 2014, too few of the most able students (i.e. those who achieved at least Level 5 at Key Stage 2) across the academy made the progress they should, and not all of them achieved 5 GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Of these students, over half did not make the progress they should in mathematics and about a third did not make the progress they should in English.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make inadequate progress. New initiatives are in place to improve the support and increase the achievement of these students, it is too early to assess the impact of these interventions.
- Year 7 catch-up funding (additional funding provided by the government to support Year 7 students who join the academy with below average skills) has supported the recent purchase of a reading scheme. This provides regular practice and support for students; there are some gains in reading levels, however, this is not consistent for all students involved in the programme.
- The achievement of students' who attend courses away from the academy is broadly average. For some students these courses have motivated them to learn more effectively than when they were attending the academy full time.
- The academy does not enter students early for GCSE examinations in English or mathematics.

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	139766
Local authority	Telford and Wrekin
Inspection number	453469

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	625
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Spears
Headteacher	Stephen Carter (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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