

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Phoenix Primary School

Leinster Road, Laindon, Basildon, Essex SS15 5NQ

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 April 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The head of school is Marie Kirkham. This school is part of the Lee Chapel Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Sue Jackson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Craig O'Callaghan. The trust board delegate some functions to a local governing body which is chaired by Jon Hann.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are friendly and kind. Their positive attitude toward school ensures they typically achieve well. Pupils put this down to adults in school being caring and knowledgeable. This also ensures pupils feel safe and valued. Generally, pupils' lessons set them up for success. It shows in them remembering much of what they learn. For example, Year 1 pupils explain what started The Great Fire of London, while Year 3 pupils describe what was found in the best-preserved Neolithic settlement: Skara Brae.

Pupils enjoy the ever-increasing experiences the school arranges. Some of these complement the curriculum, such as a trip to a castle or competing in a poetry slam. Other events allow pupils to socialise and make memories, such as a disco or dress-up day. Pupils know the wheels are in motion to expand on the offer. Plans include revamping the play spaces and introducing the 'Phoenix Farm'.

In the past few years, too many disadvantaged pupils have been absent from school. This affects their achievement, confidence and happiness. They do not feel good about themselves, seeing that other pupils know and can do things they cannot. Attending school more regularly will mean they benefit from all the school has to offer.

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

Issues in leadership that came about after the last inspection stalled school development. For example, up until recently, there has been a high staff turnover. This affected the ease with which leaders could use their own expertise to secure consistently strong teaching across the school. Recent change in leadership has helped to resolve those issues. Pupils, parents and staff report positively on the changes leaders continue to make. For staff, these include greater collaboration with the trust. It is allowing staff to access well-considered training and networking opportunities. These inspire and motivate them to develop and improve their practice.

The school prioritise reading with rigorous programmes in place. Timely assessments ensure that pupils acquire the necessary knowledge to progress swiftly. This includes targeted tuition for pupils requiring additional support. Staff typically excel in teaching phonics. They facilitate pupils' reading and writing abilities because staff receive relevant training and coaching. Furthermore, initiatives such as 'listen up' books and inviting reading areas promote a love of reading among pupils. Pupils are also encouraged to read regularly through certificate schemes.

Though the school is fine-tuning its curriculum, what is in place clearly sets out the concepts, words and skills pupils should learn. This gives staff the clarity to know what to teach and what to check pupils know. On occasion, pupils go without the explanation or demonstration they need to set them up for success. When this happens, pupils make mistakes or do not complete the task as effectively as they should. Leaders are united in how best to resolve this. For example, the coaching they introduced is starting to help staff strengthen their teaching.

How the school identifies and supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a strength. Many parents recognise this. They are particularly grateful for how the school advocates for them and their child with external partners. It means pupils with SEND are typically receiving the support they need to thrive academically and personally. For example, there is effective use of 'workstations'. These give pupils a quiet space in which to complete their work with a staff member. Then, the pupil can return to class to successfully continue activities alongside their peers.

Leaders and staff now work positively together. The behaviour training and support leaders provide ensure staff have the confidence to oversee classrooms that are conducive to learning. The positive behaviour is rooted in respectful relationships. Pupils listen to staff because they recognise the efforts staff make to support them with their learning and behaviour. It shows, for example, in pupils striving to secure three gold merit badges to win a coveted spot on a trip to a theme park.

Many pupils attend school regularly. They relish working as a class to win the attendance bear or trophy. The school has fair systems in place to monitor attendance and act on concerns. However, more needs to be done to catch pupils and their families before poor attendance habits begin and become harder to resolve.

The trust and school aim to bring about a personal development programme filled with awe and wonder. There are exciting and workable plans to build on the current sufficient offer. These include revamping school facilities, adding to school trips and clubs, expanding on pupils' roles and responsibilities and greater opportunities for pupils to participate in competitions. Leaders believe strongly that it is this that will make attending school every day irresistible to pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Recent turbulence in leadership hampered leaders' work to translate staff training into consistent improvements in the teaching of the curriculum. Now that leadership and staffing are secure, leaders should strengthen how they guide staff to fine-tune their teaching in response to the high-quality training they receive.
- Too many disadvantaged pupils are persistently absent. As a result, pupils have gaps in their knowledge which hinder their achievement. The trust and school should review and revise their systems for identifying and addressing attendance concerns to rectify this issue.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in July 2019.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	143128
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10323772
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	702
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Craig O'Callaghan
CEO of the trust	Sue Jackson
Headteacher	Marie Kirkham
Website	www.phoenix-pri.essex.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	10 and 11 July 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The head of school had been in post for less than a week at the point of inspection.
- There is before- and after-school childcare for pupils attending the school. It is run by school staff and managed by school leaders.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the chief executive officer, the chair of the trust, the chair of the local governing body, the head of school, the deputy headteacher, five assistant headteachers and the special educational needs coordinator.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- 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.
- Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys. These included 54 responses to the staff survey and 122 responses, with 67 free-text responses, to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

John Crane

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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