Inspection of Petherton Park School

Brook Farm, Newton Road, North Petherton, Somerset TA6 6NA

Inspection dates:	1 to 3 July 2025

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?

Petherton Park School is a place where pupils thrive. At the heart of the school's success are the warm and trusting relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils often arrive from multiple unsuccessful placements elsewhere. They receive the care and support they need to help them overcome the challenges they face. Pupils rediscover the importance and joy of learning. The core values of 'nurture, flourish and grow,' shine through the school's every action. The school has high expectations of pupils, and as a result, pupils progress well through the curriculum and achieve well.

Pupils know who to share any worries or concerns with. This helps them to feel safe. Pupils' attendance improves rapidly during their time at Petherton Park. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They demonstrate high levels of respect and kindness towards one another. They are polite and well-mannered. Pupils accept each other's differences and show tolerance and empathy to one another during challenging times.

Pupils are proud of the responsibilities the school offers, such as school rangers and digital officers. These responsibilities develop pupils' social and leadership skills well. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive. Comments include praise for the school as going 'above and beyond' and a place where pupils are 'happy and eager to learn'.

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

The school has successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last standard inspection. The curriculum has been developed to meet most pupils' individual needs well based on their education, health and care (EHC) plans. The school ensures that there is a focus on the core subjects of mathematics, English and science. Pupils achieve success in a range of qualifications, including in English and mathematics. Academic studies intertwine seamlessly with pupils' therapeutic provision. Pupils have access to a wide range of therapies including equine, horticulture and farming. This impacts positively on pupils' behaviour, which is exceptional in lessons and during social times. However, leaders recognise that in some subjects, the curriculum does not consistently meet some pupils' needs precisely. For example, pupils' learning is not moved on quickly enough. Therefore, pupils do not build their knowledge as well as they could.

The school has significantly raised the culture of reading amongst pupils. It provides opportunities to develop pupils' reading across the curriculum. For example, pupils talk with enthusiasm about their favourite authors or a particular genre. The new library is a firm favourite where pupils like to spend time browsing through the wide range of high-quality books and reading quietly. Pupils who arrive with significant gaps in their reading knowledge and skills receive the support and practice they need to help them catch up quickly.

The school does not put a ceiling on pupils' aspirations. Staff are passionate about ensuring that pupils receive personalised careers advice to help them take the next steps into education or training. Work placements are purposeful and enable pupils to make well-considered decisions with regards to their future education, training or employment.

Pupils experience a wide range of activities beyond the school, such as carp fishing, aerial hoops and silks, and climbing. In addition, visits to the theatre spark pupils' interests and support learning well. Such experiences build pupils' desire to learn, their independence, resilience and leadership skills. As a result, pupils leave the school well prepared for their next steps.

Those responsible for governance have a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The school welcomes the support and challenge that governors provide. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They welcome the camaraderie that permeates across the 'team members'. Staff talk about the 'unconditional regard' for every pupil and adult that permeates the school. This builds a sense of community.

The proprietor ensures that the school meets the independent school standards in full. 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)

- In some subjects, checks on what pupils can and cannot do to identify when they are ready to move on in their learning is not consistent. Therefore, these pupils do not build their knowledge as well as they could. The school should ensure that it implements its current plans to strengthen these subjects effectively.

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

Unique reference number	135673
DfE registration number	933/6216
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10391747
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Phoenix Schools (South) Limited
Chair	Jonathan Pain
Headteacher	Zoey Shelley
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,714.44 to £100,441
Telephone number	0330 1358200
Website	phoenixschools.org.uk/petherton
Email address	djackson@plcl.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 November 2023

Information about this school

- Petherton Park School is an independent co-educational therapeutic school in Somerset which provides a supportive learning environment for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, autism spectrum condition and/or specific learning difficulties.
- Since the last inspection, a new executive headteacher and deputy headteacher have started in post.
- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan. Pupils are placed at the school by their representative local authorities.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative provisions.
- At the time of the inspection there were no pupils in key stage 2.

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 evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders and wider staff.
- The lead inspector met with the operations director for education and regional educational lead for Phoenix Schools (South) Limited.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of proprietors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors listened to some pupils from across the school read.

- Inspectors sampled the wider curriculum including pupils' work in science, geography, history and culture and community.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered key documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and governance minutes.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school sites. An inspector met with school leaders to discuss and review how they respond to behaviour incidents and pupils' attendance.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils. They considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The lead inspector held phone calls with parents and considered additional correspondence sent in via email.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
James Gentile	His Majesty's Inspector

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