

# Large special school gains strong financial position with the help of “brilliant support”



## School Profile

### Name

Phoenix Primary & Secondary School

### School Category

Maintained

### School type

Special

### Pupil roll

166

### Age range of pupils

3 to 19

### LA

Tower Hamlets, London

“Governors have said in committee that our school is receiving ‘brilliant financial support’ from SBS.”

Stewart Harris  
Headteacher

## Phoenix Primary & Secondary School is a well-established special school, which offers a unique service to the children of Tower Hamlets.

The school has a multi-ethnic community which reflects the diversity of the borough. Phoenix School has pupils with severe language and communication difficulties whose needs lie within the autistic spectrum.

### The school’s objectives

Phoenix School needed an effective, responsive and reliable finance function that would support the Headteacher in producing and maintaining accurate short and medium term budget plans to match the school’s needs. The school specifically wanted to deliver accurate and timely payment and receipt transactions, and to be able to contribute to the review and improvement of school procedures.

In addition to working well alongside other staff within the school, the SBS team was asked to deliver financial monitoring, briefing and support to governors, and to meet the Local Authority’s reporting requirements and deadlines.

## How SBS services helped

SBS provided the entire finance function for the headteacher, including financial consultancy and bursarial support to the school.

Phoenix has a comparatively large budget, with a high volume of transactions and a large staff structure. SBS staff worked closely with the headteacher to ensure effective 3 year budget planning and budget and salary monitoring, which included briefing governors at each finance committee meeting.

SBS staff advised the headteacher and governors on financial policy and procedures, audit and surplus budget action plans, benchmarking reviews, and School Financial Value Standards. SBS also provided an independent audit of the voluntary school funds.

SBS consultants have developed excellent working relationships with other school staff, and in effect are now considered to be part of the school team.

Due to the special needs of the pupils, a large number of support staff are employed in one-to-one, group support, and speech and language therapy positions. SBS Online, the unique school budget management tool from SBS, is proving invaluable in predicting and monitoring staffing costs in particular, and providing accurate budget monitoring reports to governors.



### The impact

Stewart Harris, Headteacher, commented: "With SBS support, I am confident in my budget plans, as are my governors. Governors are receiving effective briefing, monitoring reports and budget plans that help them understand the school's financial position. These include year-end projections, management of any surplus balances, and to be able to challenge expenditure proposals. In particular, the knowledge and understanding that governors have of financial procedures, and other requirements, has been enhanced by the chair of the finance committee working closely with the SBS consultant when producing our School Financial Value Standard self-assessment."

Phoenix School's last audit report commented that the school follows good practice for the accounting of income and expenditure, has been effective in controlling and maintaining the school's disbursement account, and generally has effective controls over payroll management.

The senior leadership team has recently made a huge investment in the school's facilities by adding a new building for an Expressive Arts Studio, Design and Technology classroom, Sixth Form common room and dining hall, restaurant and a roof garden.

The added confidence that SBS support has brought to the financial planning has meant that the school can plan and deliver major improvement programmes with a clear understanding of affordability, including new technology, special classrooms and other resources that best meet the needs of the pupils.

### Next steps

With continued support from SBS, Headteacher Stewart Harris is hoping to further improve the school financial processes and procedures, in particular future audit outcomes.

SBS will continue to work closely with the school's governors and in particular the chair of the finance committee to ensure that the governors take greater ownership of the school's financial effectiveness and reporting on the School Financial Value Standard.

To find out more about Finance services, contact the SBS team on 0345 222 1551 or email [sales@schoolbusinessservices.co.uk](mailto:sales@schoolbusinessservices.co.uk)

[www.schoolbusinessservices.co.uk](http://www.schoolbusinessservices.co.uk)