

Walsall Studio School

14a Lower Hall Lane, The Goldmine Centre, Walsall, WS1 1RL

Inspection dates 21–22 April 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
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- A culture of very high expectations permeates this studio school, driven by leaders' uncompromising belief that all students can reach their potential. As a result, students are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Students make good progress. Teachers use questioning well to deepen understanding and match activities in lessons to the needs of individuals.
- The highly effective use of personal coaches ensures that all students' academic and emotional needs are clearly understood. The individual support students receive contributes significantly to their progress.
- Regular tracking of information about how well students are doing is used very effectively by leaders to intervene quickly where students need additional support.
- Students make excellent progress in English and literacy as a result of a whole-school commitment to improving reading and writing skills.
- The leadership and development of teaching is highly effective. Robust systems are in place to continually review and refine practice, through a skilfully planned programme of training encouraging teachers to innovate and share good practice.
- The sixth form is good. Students undertake an extensive range of rich and rewarding work-based projects. Such opportunities ensure that students are fully engaged with their learning and make good progress.
- Governors use their expertise in business and commerce, social enterprise and the creative industries to great effect. This expertise provides students with very valuable opportunities developing their knowledge and understanding of the world of work beyond school.
- Keeping children safe is at the heart of this school and drives highly effective processes and systems. Students feel very safe in school.
- Behaviour in school is good. The school is characterised by good productive relationships. Students describe their school as 'a community we belong to, not just a school we attend'.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Despite the positive impact of the interventions to improve students' attendance and reduce persistent absence, attendance is not in line with other schools nationally.
- In mathematics, the proportion of students making more than expected progress is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in 12 lessons across a range of subjects, including some joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. In addition to this, inspectors also observed sixth form students leading peer mentoring sessions, small-group intervention sessions in English and mathematics, tutor time and Year 10 'Challenge Wednesday' activities.
- One inspector accompanied two groups of Key Stage 4 students to Queen Mary's Grammar School to observe their learning in biology and chemistry.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, members of the leadership team, other senior and subject leaders, and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body.
- In addition to talking to students in lessons and informally around the building, inspectors spoke to two groups of students and three students with their personal coaches.
- Inspectors analysed a range of information about students' current attainment and progress, attendance, performance management documents, the school's self-review documents and school development plans, safeguarding records and the governing body minutes.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents by reviewing surveys conducted by the school in addition to 18 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Helen Reeves, Lead inspector

Seconded Inspector

Derrick Baughan

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Walsall Studio School is a smaller than average-sized school with a sixth form specialising in business, social enterprise and a broad range of creative and digital disciplines. Students apply to join the school at either the beginning of Year 10 or Year 12.
- Walsall Studio School opened in September 2013 following a successful joint bid to the Studio School Trust from The Vine Education Trust, Queen Mary's Grammar School and Performance through People. These key partners are all represented on the governing body.
- There are 167 students currently on roll, and 18 staff employed in the school.
- Many of the students who join the school have in the past experienced disruption to their education and some have not attended school regularly.
- Three quarters of the school population are of White British heritage.
- One in five students in the school is supported by the pupil premium funding (additional government funding that provides support for disadvantaged students known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority). This is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is above the national average. This represents just under a quarter of the students in the school.
- A small number of students attend courses away from school at Second Chances School, part of The Vine Education Trust.
- Students have not yet finished their courses in Key Stage 4 or the sixth form, therefore it is not possible to analyse their performance against the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance across the school, including in the sixth form, by:
 - embedding the strategies already in place to improve whole-school attendance
 - developing further strategies from good practice observed in other schools with a similar profile of students.
- Accelerate further the progress of all students across the school, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring greater consistency in the marking and feedback given to students to improve and develop the quality of students' reflections on their learning
 - providing strategies for students to use in order that when students get stuck with their work they demonstrate more resilience and perseverance
 - insist that all staff take every opportunity when planning lessons, enrichment opportunities or one-to-one coaching sessions, to develop students' confidence with numbers and understanding of mathematical terminology.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The principal's inspirational leadership drives a team of very dedicated staff to be 'pioneers' of the studio school vision. All staff are very clear that they are contributing to students not only achieving academic success but developing students to become confident adults in the world of work and the community in which they live. This view is widely shared and students clearly understand these values at the heart of their school.
- The school's self-evaluation of its strengths and areas for development, informed by a range of information, is honest and accurate. The school's development plan is thorough, and provides a robust plan of action to address specific areas. Leaders have clearly defined areas of responsibility and are held to account for securing these improvements.
- All students complete thorough assessments of their skills on arrival to the school and challenging targets are set for their academic performance. Systems in place to monitor this progress are very robust. A large proportion of students start in Year 10 having made less progress than expected for their age. Leaders are very quick to provide additional support so that students catch up. An extensive range of small-group intervention, peer mentoring from local sixth form students and personal coaching all contribute significantly to the good progress students make.
- The school has developed its own criteria by which to assess the quality of teaching. 'The 4 Pillars' of teaching and learning: observing teaching; information about students' achievement; marking and feedback; student voice. Each pillar provides in-depth analysis of the teacher's performance and a clear direction for further training and support.
- Teachers meet together twice a week for dedicated training to explore and develop their practice as well as sharing good practice with each other. Teachers learn very effectively from each other and they have high regard for the training they receive.
- The principal and assistant principal have developed a strong tier of middle leaders made up of the subject leader of English, mathematics and the coordinator of special educational needs. This skilful team design and lead training sessions for teachers and personal coaches.
- The highly effective curriculum is broad and balanced, and offers a range of subjects in addition to the school's specialism in business and the creative industries. In the sixth form, all courses are defined by the school specialism and are run as vocational courses alongside employers. The most-able students in Key Stage 4 are taught science at Queens Mary's Grammar school and other students are offered lessons in Mandarin and sport.
- There is a very comprehensive plan for the delivery of the wider curriculum. This plan skilfully maps the development of personal, social and health education through the effective use, for example, of tutor time, assemblies, focus weeks, challenge days, diversity week and extra-curricular activities. Students are provided with high-quality experiences which allow them to explore issues including their role in their community and community cohesion, the challenges in our society of discrimination, financial management, and what it means to be British. The performing arts and digital media are used very effectively to help explore these issues and tackle head on the issues facing young people.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet requirements. Designated staff are tenacious in following up any safeguarding concerns, and ensure that students and their families are accessing the support that they need.
- All students are provided with a dedicated coach who supports them to settle quickly in the school when they first arrive and foster good relationships between students. Through regular one-to-one sessions, students develop their skills in communication, emotional intelligence, thinking, enterprise and the wider skills for life. This intensive support throughout Key Stage 4 ensures that all students have equal access to opportunities across the school.
- Students have a very comprehensive knowledge of the different aspects of the world of work because of the many occasions provided to work alongside a range of professionals in their project-based work and enrichment opportunities. All students have access to high-quality, impartial careers advice and guidance provided by one of the school's key partners.
- A small number of students attend courses away from school. Their progress, attendance and behaviour are closely checked each week to ensure that students continue to be successful on their placements.
- Leaders use the pupil premium effectively to make a difference to the achievement of disadvantaged students. This funding is used to increase the number of personal coaches and to provide additional targeted support. Students speak highly of the additional support they receive to help them with examination preparation.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a shared ambition and passion for the studio school model. They clearly understand the school's performance information and provide effective challenge at meetings to hold school leaders to account for students' achievements.
- The three main stakeholders contribute generously to unique and valuable parts of the school's offer to students. They use their expertise well to encourage a significant number of other professionals to be involved with the school.
- The teaching and learning committee have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching in school and use 'The 4 Pillars' matrix to decide about pay awards for teachers.
- The principal has robust and challenging performance management targets, and these are reviewed regularly.
- Governors are thorough in their analysis of the pupil premium funding and are able to see the impact as their achievement is improving rapidly.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students are polite, friendly and enjoy highly productive relationships with their classmates and staff at the school. The studio school is located in a well-resourced building in the town centre and is shared with a number of professional organisations. Students respect the environment and resources within it, and their conduct around the building contributes positively to a vibrant and busy place of work.
- Leaders have established clear expectations for behaviour and a robust system to manage behaviour. Systems are in place to deal with unacceptable behaviour, and leaders and staff are uncompromising in challenging disruption when it occurs. Leaders track information about students' behaviour very thoroughly and are quick to intervene. These strategies are having an impact as the number of days lost because students have been excluded from school has fallen.
- Leaders are relentless in their ambition to improve attendance and interventions have had a dramatic impact on reducing the number of students who are persistently absent from school. The importance of good attendance is communicated well to students through the work of tutors and personal coaches. Inspectors acknowledge that some students, with appropriate support, have better attendance now than at their previous school. However, despite improvements on last years' attendance, leaders are aware that students still need to attend school more regularly to ensure they make as much progress as possible.
- Behaviour is very good in the sixth form. Sixth form students are excellent role models for the younger students.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained in issues about safeguarding children. Staff are alert and proactive in raising concerns and taking the appropriate actions to protect children. Checks on adults in the building are very thorough, and risk assessment before any work placements outside of school are thoroughly carried out.
- The principal meets with the appropriate staff every week to update information and ensure that the maximum support is in place for students in need of support. The record keeping of these cases is of a very high standard and documents accurately actions taken by different agencies. The school is tenacious and timely in its actions to pursue and maintain the right support for students and families in need.
- Students across the school, including the sixth form, know how to keep themselves safe online, and the importance of safe and healthy relationships. There are many opportunities within the curriculum and wider work of the school that explore these issues thoroughly. Students are very well prepared to understand how to keep themselves safe on their work placements.
- Students are aware of the different types of bullying. Bullying in school is rare; however, when conflict does arise, it is dealt with very effectively by personal coaches and other staff as appropriate.
- Clear procedures are in place to ensure that students who study courses away from school are safe, behave well and attend regularly.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers plan well to meet the different needs of the students. A range of activities that motivate

students to learn new things and help them consolidate earlier learning results in students making good progress. As one Year 11 student told inspectors, 'I had cobwebs in my brain before I came here!'

- Teachers use their good subject expertise to great effect to ask challenging questions that probe and deepen students' understanding.
- Sixth form teachers are skilful at planning rich and rewarding tasks that are based on real experiences linked to working alongside professionals in the workplace. These motivating experiences are demanding and build resilience. Sixth form students are independent and able to manage their own learning. This resilience is less well developed in Key Stage 4, particularly in mathematics, as students ask for help too easily and do not persevere with finding a solution.
- In English, students confidently read out loud and are very supportive of each other. Students generate high-quality discussion to explore their work in small groups and as a whole class. These discussions help students to understand the themes of the novel and support them in putting their ideas down on paper.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are very well supported in lessons. Learning coaches are skilful in asking questions that help students to find the answers for themselves. Coaches use their detailed understanding of the students to know when to intervene and when to provide more challenge.
- Marking and feedback is a developing strength across the school. For example, in English and Level 3 music, it is of a very high standard. Students are very clear about what they need to do to improve their work because of the precise way in which teachers mark their work and make suggestions for further improvement. This marking and feedback policy is new and is not used to a consistently high standard in all subjects.
- Students are expected to self-assess their work regularly. This practice is inconsistent across school and at times can be undeveloped and simplistic. However, it is very effective in English where teachers provide ideas and words to help students reflect on their work, and in performing arts, teachers have developed 'chat charts' to structure students' thoughts and reflections. As a result, in these subjects, students are regularly developing their self-assessment skills.
- Leaders have been successful in leading a whole-school focus on improving reading and writing skills, and have recently introduced a similar focus around building confidence with numbers. However, developing confidence with numbers is not embedded in the daily practice of all teachers. When speaking with students, some have very little confidence in their mathematical ability.

The achievement of students

is good

- A large proportion of the students who join the school in Year 10 have already not made the expected progress in English and mathematics for their age and ability. Leaders quickly establish their starting point and all assessments are externally moderated by Queen Mary's Grammar School.
- School records indicate that the proportion of current Year 11 students predicted to make expected and more than expected progress in English is above the national average. In mathematics, the proportion of students making expected progress is broadly in line with other students nationally. However, the proportion of students making more than expected progress is below the national average.
- Work in students' books and moderated tracking information for most-able students (such as those who achieved at least Level 5 at Key Stage 2) indicate that they are currently making good progress.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs in Key Stage 4 are making good progress across a range of subjects, for example in English, science, information technology and business studies. Their progress is slower in mathematics and geography. However, these students are well supported through intervention groups and personal coaching to maximise their achievement in these areas.
- Leaders measure the impact of the different intervention groups carefully across Key Stage 4. Students are rapidly identified if they join the school behind or if they fall behind further in their studies. School records show that students in Year 10 are making up lost ground quickly with this intensive support in place and in Year 10 disadvantaged students are generally doing as well as their classmates. The extra funding allocated to assertive mentoring and additional support is used well to support their achievement.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Records indicate that the small proportion of students currently studying courses away from school are all expected to achieve five GCSE examinations including English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4. Their achievement is carefully monitored by a senior leader. In all cases, students are making better progress in their courses than when they attended the main school.

The sixth form provision**is good**

- The sixth form offers a broad range of vocational pathways reflecting the business, enterprise and broadcast media specialism of the studio school. These pathways also include work-related live projects, personal coaching and tutorials, and work experience.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. According to school records, over half of the students in the sixth form are working at least a grade higher than their predictions.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good because teachers develop rich and creative project-based programmes of study. In lessons, students are highly motivated, resilient and creative. External reviews of work in the sixth form are extremely positive about the impact on students' achievements of these rewarding learning experiences.
- Sixth form students enjoy their learning and are motivated to well in their studies, as a result their behaviour around the school is good.
- Some students have chosen to be part of a Level 3 national pilot in mathematics. Leaders have designed modules of work in collaboration with a television company. This innovative engaging project is successfully developing the mathematical skills of the students in the pilot, some of whom would not have gone on to study mathematics at this level.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Students' achievement and attendance is closely checked. Leaders' relentless focus on the importance of good attendance has had a positive impact. The focus across Key Stage 4 on improving attendances is equally visible in the sixth form.
- The majority of Year 13 students have already secured their place in further education, university, on an apprenticeship scheme, or employment for September 2015.
- The small numbers of students who joined the sixth form without achieving at least a grade C in GCSE English and or mathematics are provided with weekly tutorials to prepare for these examinations. Most of these students are now working at a grade C standard.

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	139789
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	450233

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy studio school
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	167
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Davis
Principal	Dan Parkes
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01922 621951
Fax number	01922 621984
Email address	enquiries@walsallstudioschool.co.uk

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