

# The Da Vinci Studio School of Science and Engineering

Monkswood Way, Stevenage, SG1 1LA

**Inspection dates** 28–29 January 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b> <b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Students make good progress from their different starting points and achieve well.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve as well as their peers.
- Students supported through pupil premium funding make similar progress to their classmates.
- Most teachers are aware of the capabilities of individual students and plan lessons well so that they all make good progress.
- Students behave well when moving around the school and in lessons. Relationships between teachers and students are strong.
- Students feel safe and are proud of their school.
- The Principal has a clear vision for the school and talks with pride about the achievements of individual students.
- Leaders monitor students' achievement and the quality of teaching regularly. Consequently, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is a school which continues to improve.
- The sixth form is good. Leaders have tackled previous weaknesses effectively, so that students now make good progress.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small proportion of teaching still requires improvement.
- Teachers' marking and comments are not yet regularly acted upon by students.
- Students do not read widely enough outside of the classroom.
- The recently-formed local governing body has not yet established regular systems for monitoring the work of the school so that it can provide an appropriate level of challenge and support.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 18 lessons, in some cases accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors visited a smaller number of lessons briefly to focus on the progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Meetings took place with the Executive Principal and other senior leaders, heads of subject, different groups of students, two members of the governing body and the Chair of the North Hertfordshire Studio School Trust.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation provided by the school including the school improvement plan and self-evaluation document, records on the quality of teaching, documentation on students' achievement and school policies. They also scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- As parents and carers of students at studio schools cannot currently respond to the online questionnaire (Parent View), inspectors considered their views by reviewing surveys conducted by the school as well as taking into account 17 emails sent to the school during the inspection. The lead inspector also selected a number of parents at random to conduct telephone discussions about the school.
- Inspectors considered 27 responses to a staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

John Daniell, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gillian Walley

Additional Inspector

June Cannie

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Da Vinci Studio School is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It opened in September 2012 and operates on two sites which are about half a mile apart. The school day is typically longer than that of other secondary schools.
- The school is part of the North Hertfordshire Studio Schools Trust. The Executive Principal also leads the Da Vinci Studio School of Creative Enterprise in Letchworth.
- Many students who join the school have had a disrupted education in the past. Some have not attended school regularly and others have been educated at home.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, those with a parent in the armed services and children known to be eligible for free school meals, is above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- Post-16 provision is part of a consortium arrangement with The Da Vinci Studio School of Creative Enterprise, North Hertfordshire College and The Thomas Alleyne Academy.
- No students attend off-site provision.
- As the school only admitted its first students in September 2012, the school has not yet been evaluated against the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to the standard of the best by:
  - eradicating the small proportion of teaching that still requires improvement
  - providing regular opportunities for students to respond to their teachers' oral and written feedback
  - providing more opportunities for students to read outside of the classroom.
- Ensure that the recently-formed local governing body sharpens its strategies for gaining a deeper understanding of the work of the school, so that its members present an appropriate degree of support and challenge to the school's leaders.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Many students join the school in Key Stage 4 having attended schools that require improvement or having not attended school regularly. Once the school has established each student's starting point, staff are successful in ensuring they make up on lost ground.
- Parents and carers who have made their views known to the school and to inspectors believe their children are making good progress at the school. The school's systems for tracking students' progress support this view. Inspectors also share this view after speaking to students, looking at their work in books and observing their learning.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well in the school. This is because the experienced special educational needs co-ordinator has a good understanding of each student's needs and communicates these needs well to staff.
- Students supported through pupil premium funding achieve as well as their peers. Their attainment and rate of progress in English and mathematics equal that of other students in the school because the extra funding allocated to these students is used well to support their achievement. Successful initiatives have included one-to-one tuition, the purchase of helpful computer software and student counselling.
- All groups of students in the school make progress at a similar rate because school leaders are effective in promoting equality of opportunity, fostering good relations and tackling discrimination.
- The school is effective in developing students' skills in literacy and mathematics. Opportunities are presented to develop these skills through teaching, although students do not read as widely outside of the classroom as they should.
- The school enters students early for English and for mathematics GCSE, as they gain a double qualification in mathematics. Leaders feel this eases the burden on students at the end of Year 11. There is no evidence to suggest this approach is disadvantageous to students' outcomes.
- After an unsteady start and a review of entry requirements, students are now making good progress in the sixth form. Students have high aspirations for themselves and the sixth form consortium arrangements allow them to select courses and qualifications which are well-suited to their previous attainment and styles of learning.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Parents and carers believe that the quality of teaching in the school is good. Inspectors saw mostly good teaching, and some that was outstanding. Very little teaching was seen that required improvement and inspectors saw no teaching that was inadequate.
- The vast majority of teachers plan their lessons well and students respond positively to the teaching they receive. One student told inspectors 'Teachers go that extra step. Because they care, we care'. Students' previous work shows teaching has been consistently challenging since the school opened.

- During the observation of two different teaching styles in mathematics, one more traditional and the other more innovative, students made equally good progress in both lessons because the teaching took account of what they had learned previously and motivated them to achieve.
- A very small proportion of teaching is not yet consistently good because teachers' planning over time does not ensure that students make progress as quickly as they should. These few teachers receive good-quality guidance and support to develop their practice.
- Where teaching is weaker, marking does not always provide enough guidance to students on how they can improve, and too little time is given to students to respond to their teachers' comments.
- The teaching of literacy and mathematical skills is effective and inspectors saw teachers making reference to key words and phrases during their observation of teaching. An assembly for Year 10 students ended with a spelling challenge which was rewarded with Da Vinci rewards points.
- Additional adults in the classroom have a positive impact on students' learning and take an active part in helping students to understand the work for themselves.
- The school's assembly schedule and 'Learning for Life' programme is an effective way of promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students in the sixth form enjoy good quality teaching. Relationships with teachers are strong and they are coached and mentored regularly by suitably trained members of staff.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- The behaviour of students is good. They conduct themselves well when moving around the school and in lessons. They are courteous towards each other, to their teachers and to visitors. Students socialise with each other well during break times and those using the North Hertfordshire College canteen interact well with older College students.
- Students' attitudes in lessons are positive and they are keen to answer teachers' questions. They willingly support each other if one of their peers appears to be struggling with the work.
- A Year 10 assembly on the theme of offering help to others engaged all students in considering the different ways in which they can support one another and the situations where they may need to offer help to others.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions is low. Leaders monitor students' behaviour weekly to ensure attitudes do not decline. Teachers manage students' behaviour consistently well in the classroom.
- Attendance is broadly average and improving. Many of the students had attendance issues in their previous schools. Those who are persistently absent or late to school are expected to make up for time lost, including in the summer holiday period.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are taught effectively about staying safe and are aware of the risks involved in the use of social networking sites.
- Students told inspectors there is very little, if any, bullying in the school. The school's records of

such incidents support this. Homophobic bullying is not tolerated under any circumstances. When questioned about this form of bullying one student commented 'I'd like to think we are above that'.

- Inspectors considered a number of case studies of students who are at risk of underachieving. The school demonstrated a good awareness of each child's individual circumstances and provided effective examples of how they had supported these students in what was, for many, their last chance at gaining a meaningful education.
- The student-led school council, chaired by members of the sixth form, provides students with an opportunity to make their views known to the school's leaders and governors. Many students travel a considerable distance to come to school and students were observed putting together an argument to persuade governors to purchase bicycles for these students to avoid their reliance on public transport.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The Executive Principal, ably supported by the senior leadership team, has a clear vision for the school. Parent and carers, students and members of staff speak positively about the impact of the school's leaders and the difference this school has made to individual students' life chances.
- There is a positive, work-like atmosphere in this school. Expectations are high and teachers work hard to ensure students achieve well. One parent told inspectors 'each morning my son doesn't say he's going to school, he says he's going to work'.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Inspectors agreed with their current evaluation of the school.
- Subject leaders, many of whom have joined the school recently, are clear about what is expected of them, and make good use of regular meetings with senior leaders to discuss the progress of students.
- Students have access to a good range of qualifications for the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects on offer. In addition, the project-based approach to some aspects of their learning develops their investigative and research skills well.
- The range of regular work experience for students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is broad. Work experience providers are complimentary about the Da Vinci students, and students themselves speak with pride about what they are gaining from this aspect of their education.
- Teaching is well managed and monitored. Teachers complete an audit of their skills against the national teachers' standards at the start of the year and training is suitably matched to individuals to fill in any identified gaps. Where teaching was jointly observed with a senior leader, inspectors agreed with their judgements.
- Teachers' performance is managed well. They can move up the pay scale only if their teaching is effective.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Information on students' expected progress and attainment is used effectively to ensure they achieve well. Students receive good quality coaching to prepare them for the next stage of their learning and all students have

individualised study programmes to ensure they make meaningful gains in their learning.

- The Trust has supported the school well and holds the Executive Principal to account for all aspects of the school's provision. North Hertfordshire College makes its STEM centre available to Da Vinci students and has provided teachers from the College to teach in the school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The recently-formed local governing body is committed to fulfilling its role well. It has just set up procedures for gaining a deeper understanding of all aspects of the school by linking individual members to subject areas. This is at an early stage of development. Governors have a good understanding of how pupil premium funding is being spent and the impact this is having on eligible students. They would welcome more training on understanding information on students' achievement, particularly in relation to different groups of students. They receive regular reports from the Executive Principal on the quality of teaching, information on students' progress and to what extent teachers are meeting their targets. Governors know how teachers' performance is checked and only agree pay rises where they are warranted. They hope that their proposed programme of visits will enable them to test out whether what they are being told is entirely accurate. Governors make sure that safeguarding arrangements are in place, and that statutory requirements are met.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138225
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	425165

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy studio school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	276
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	161
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Adrian Hawkins
<b>Principal</b>	Donna Lodge
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 443040
<b>Fax number</b>	N/A
<b>Email address</b>	admin@davinci-school.co.uk

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