

Epic Learning

Golborne Youth and Community Centre, 2a Wornington Road, Swinbrook Estate, London, W10 5QJ

Inspection dates

4–6 June 2014

Overall effectiveness

	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Require improvement	3
Leadership and management	Require improvement	3

Summary of key findings

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The management structure has not provided for a full-time qualified and experienced headteacher at the school.
- This lack of suitable leadership has reduced the effectiveness of teaching and learning, although it has had less impact on achievement.
- Teachers lack opportunities for training and opportunities to work alongside colleagues from other schools, and this hinders their further development.
- Staff are not sufficiently supported and challenged by effective systems of appraisal to check on their work or challenge them to improve.
- Not enough use is made of the information on students' progress, including how well different groups of students are doing, so that any underachievement is identified and tackled.
- Absence rates of students are too high and significant numbers do not attend school on a regular basis.

The school has the following strengths

- Students who attend regularly are successfully re-engaged in learning and can gain a range of external accreditation. They are well prepared for moving on from school.
- From very low starting points students make rapid progress in their learning.
- Teachers and students form positive relationships that support students socially and emotionally, as well as helping them to learn successfully.
- Students with challenging behaviour are developing much more positive attitudes and relationships.
- Effective links with parents, carers and other professionals provides good support to students and their families.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards)(England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Independent School Standards(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- Five lessons were observed during the inspection.
- Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the proprietor, the Chair of the Governing Body and the operations director of the Epic Community Interest Company (CIC), which is responsible for Epic Learning. A meeting was also held with a representative of the Tri-borough Alternative Provision Team. Telephone discussions were held with the headteacher, who was absent from school following a recent operation.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire to trigger an analysis, so the views of parents were gathered from their responses to contacts with the school.
- The views of the students were gathered from discussions and from talking to them individually throughout the inspection.
- Staff completed their inspection questionnaire and discussed issues with the inspector throughout the inspection so that their views could be taken into full account.
- Written and other work produced by students was looked at during lessons and a representative sample of work was looked at in more detail in order to help judge the progress that students have made over time.
- A range of written evidence was scrutinised, including data that shows the progress being made by students, teachers' planning and assessment, the centre's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Epic Learning provides day places for up to 60 male and female students aged from 13 to 18 as part of the alternative provision for education within the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. There are currently 31 enrolled students (including seven who are post-16), two of whom have a statement of special educational needs relating to their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- Because student numbers are low there are only three teachers, each responsible for and taking control of either English, mathematics or science.
- The school is run by an employee-led social enterprise company known as Epic CIC, which developed from the previous Borough of Kensington and Chelsea School Engagement Programme, staffed by professionals from the youth service of the local authority. It is based in a council-owned multi-use centre that is also a youth and community centre out of school hours.
- The school's aim is to improve behaviour, raise achievement, promote greater inclusion and reduce the risk of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. Students are dual-registered, remaining on the register of their mainstream school while attending the centre on a full-time basis until they are ready to return to mainstream learning, college or employment.
- Around a quarter of the current students are from White British backgrounds. Of the remainder, 20% are of mixed race, with the remainder coming from a range of ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the multi-ethnic character of the local authority area.
- Opportunities for vocational learning are provided off site at local colleges and centres.
- Curriculum and learning support is given by the Tri-borough Alternative Provision team, which covers the London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster. Support for staff training and appraisal/performance management is provided by Avium Education under a contractual agreement.
- This is the first inspection of the school following its registration and admission of its first students, both of which occurred in September 2013.
- During the headteacher's temporary absence the school is being led by the acting headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for training teachers, including working alongside colleagues from other settings, so that they can:
 - develop a clear view of what work at different National Curriculum levels looks like
 - improve their knowledge and skills, including in providing better feedback in their marking
 - work with other teachers of their specialist subjects.
- Improve attendance by developing more effective strategies, with clear rewards and sanctions, to encourage all students to come to school every day.
- Strengthen systems of leadership and management so that:
 - there is a full-time headteacher with the expertise and experience of working with students who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
 - greater use is made of the information on students' progress, so the progress of identified groups is identified and any underachievement quickly tackled
 - effective appraisal is provided to support staff and develop their skills.

Inspection judgements

Achievement of pupils

Good

- The attainment of students is low because they have had histories of disrupted education and failure at schools before they joined Epic Learning. However, once they start to attend they are able to make rapid progress from their very low starting points and the achievement of all different groups of pupils is good.
- Staff have adapted their planning and teaching to take account of the big gaps in students' prior learning and understanding. They make learning interesting and engaging. Because students enjoy their learning they are supported in making progress and raising their achievement. Students are able to experience success in their studies because of good teaching and a suitable programme of study.
- All students have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties of varying kinds. Because numbers are small, staff know every student individually and seek to ensure that their learning and other needs are met. This underpins their new-found engagement and interest in learning.
- Students make rapid progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Vocational learning opportunities are also effective, which is provided by local colleges and centres. Some students have already gained Level 1 qualifications in areas such as health and social care.
- The focus in school is on delivering National Curriculum subjects that lead to GCSE or functional skills qualifications, together with art and physical education.
- All students are being supported to make positive choices about their futures when they leave. Many will move on to college courses, remaining within the education system and reflecting the success of Epic Learning with these students.
- Individual progress is checked from an initial baseline assessment of their skills on entry. The information is used to set individual targets for the end of the school year. Progress is checked on a half-termly basis, with a formal progress report for parents and carers sent at the end of each term. This process means that work can be set at the right level for every student, including the most able.
- Less use is made of progress information for analysing the progress of identified groups of students, such as those from different ethnic backgrounds. Although leaders wish to ensure that individual needs are met so all have an equal opportunity to succeed, the lack of such an analysis reduces the impact of this commitment.
- The small numbers of post-16 students benefit from opportunities to take a range of GCSE and other courses. All are intending to remain in education by seeking college placements and this reflects very positive outcomes after years of previous failure in schools.
- A range of personal achievements are encouraged, for example, through opportunities with the Prince's Trust, the Arts Award and through trips that include residential opportunities.
- There is good provision for careers guidance that includes opportunities for work experience.

Quality of teaching

Good

- The quality of teaching is good because it supports students in engaging in learning, experiencing success and enjoyment as a result. Staff show care, respect and support to students, helping them develop more positive attitudes and better outcomes.
- Teachers have high expectations and use the information gathered on individuals' progress to try to ensure that students achieve the best of which they are capable. This is reflected in their rapid progress seen in reading, writing, communication and mathematics.
- Staff understand the nature of students' wider problems and needs and seek to support them, providing positive role models. This creates a positive climate for learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively to ensure that all students are encouraged in an environment that supports good learning.

- Teachers show good skills in questioning. This not only helps them know how well students understand the work but also stimulates good discussions and participation. This was seen in a lively and interesting lesson in which students discussed obesity and the extent to which it might be hereditary. They listened carefully to, and respected, the views of others. This reflects the school's positive promotion of students' spiritual, moral and social and cultural development.
- Students also demonstrate positive attitudes towards opportunities for vocational learning, which are provided externally. Care is taken to check on the quality of this provision to ensure that it meets students' needs and supports them in gaining qualifications.
- Marking is done regularly. At its best it not only praises good work but also gives advice on how to make it even better. However, this is not always the case and at times there is too little reference in teachers' comments to individual targets and how students can progress towards meeting them.
- As teachers work in a very small setting, they do not see lots of examples of students' work across the whole range of ability, which makes it more difficult to give a piece of work the correct National Curriculum level. It also limits opportunities to attend further training or to meet with other teachers specialising in the same subject areas.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Require improvement

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. Attendance is too low and persistent absentees show little sign of changing their behaviour over time.
- That said, when students are at school they say they feel safe, both at the centre and while they are at their off-site provision. This is reflected in the decreasing number of records in the serious incident log. As a last resort staff are trained in the safe use of restraint but there is a clear focus on de-escalation when incidents occur. All safeguarding requirements are met.
- Students are aware of the risks inherent in the misuse of computers and particularly the potential harm arising from the misuse of social networking sites. Such issues are well covered in personal, social and health education.
- Bullying is another topic that is covered effectively. On the whole, students get on very well together and with the staff, so bullying in school is not an issue. They are taught to appreciate that bullying can take various forms, including bullying based on prejudice and cyber-bullying. Students are supported in developing a clear view of right and wrong, and bullying is an important element in this learning process.
- The behaviour of students is good. Many display extremely challenging behaviour when they first arrive as a consequence of their wider social and emotional difficulties. A clear, consistently applied policy supports students to take a greater control over their behaviour. Over time there are clear and sustained improvements in behaviour and social attitudes.
- The positive rapport that is developed within the school community also supports students in developing their confidence, self-esteem and independence. This is also supported through the opportunities to benefit from vocational opportunities to learn a variety of skills.
- The multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of the local community is reflected among staff and students. Positive attitudes underpin the way in which students are prepared for life in a multicultural, democratic community. Students develop a basic understanding of public institutions and the importance of the rule of law.

Leadership and management

Require improvement

- While leadership and management require improvement, the school's leaders, including the proprietors at Epic CIC and the governing body, have identified key steps that need to be taken to bring about the needed improvement.
- Developments are already underway in a school that is currently only in its third term of existence. The recent establishment of a governing body has created a structure through which

the school's leaders can be effectively challenged and held to account. A wide degree of relevant expertise is represented on this group, which is starting to have an impact.

- The proprietors and governors have correctly identified that initial plans that saw the school leader having wider responsibilities within Epic CIC, rather than being the full-time headteacher at Epic Learning, have not been satisfactory. The current plan for the future identifies the need to appoint a full-time school leader with management experience and expertise who has worked with students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- This lack of a full-time school leader is at the heart of wider issues and means, for example, that there is no in-house expertise in developing and implementing an effective system for the appraisal and training of staff. This is currently delegated to an external company under a contractual arrangement. Staff responsible for English, mathematics and science are developing their role.
- There is also a lack of direction in the collation and use of information gathered about students' progress to give direction to raise the performance of the school. While the progress of individual students is checked, there is no good analysis of the performance of identified groups of students so any underachievement can be quickly tackled.
- A review of provision undertaken with the Tri-borough Alternative Provision Service (which represents the three local authorities in the vicinity) also identified these areas for improvement. Effective working links with Epic Learning's leadership are enabling areas of weakness to be addressed.
- Because Epic CIC and the recently formed governing body of the centre are closely involved in the centre, they have a clear view of the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They have appointed an external consultancy to develop systems for staff training and appraisal. As this is a recent development its impact and effectiveness are not yet evident. Governors' use of information to check performance. Procedures for tackling underperformance and for rewarding good teaching are developing. The use of consultants is supporting this process.
- Some very positive processes to support students and their families have been created. Links with other agencies are strong and close work is undertaken with a range of professionals, including those such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and local authority social services departments.
- Every student is allocated a key worker and efforts are made to engage with families in order to support the students' ability to re-engage with learning. Close links with the students' own mainstream school are also maintained.
- The balance of the curriculum provides for a wide and relevant education while also supporting the development of specific skills, such as literacy. Success is reflected in the way in which the students who attend regularly are participating in learning and in some cases already having success in gaining accreditation. Others are about to take GCSE and other external examinations and this is after earlier failures throughout their school careers.
- The wider curriculum supports the development of confidence and independence. For example, students have been able to participate in a residential experience that helped them develop a range of skills, including resilience.
- In the sixth form, students are supported and encouraged and the current Year 12 group are all talking confidently of moving on to college when they finish at Epic Learning.
- Welfare, health and safety requirements, including safeguarding requirements.
- Financial resources are managed effectively, which supports the efficient deployment of staff and resources. This includes facilitating the appointment of a full-time headteacher.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website:
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School details

Unique reference number	140225
Inspection number	443034
DfE registration number	207/6007

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Alternative provision
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	13–18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Brendan O'Keefe
Chair	Mary Mackle
Headteacher	Vicki Harrison-Carr
Date of previous school inspection	First inspection
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,000
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