

Darwen Aldridge Enterprise Studio

19 Police Street, Darwen, BB3 1AF

Inspection dates 25–26 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	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.

- Senior leaders, staff, governors and the sponsor share vision, passion, determination and the skills to make a difference to young people’s lives. Good leadership is securing rapid improvement.
- Students feel safe and secure. They behave well and take pride in their work and their studio.
- Students make good progress in response to good teaching that engages their interest and stimulates their thinking. Their achievement in the studio’s specialist subjects is strong.
- Students who have previously been at risk of exclusion or have had a disrupted education are effectively supported; consequently, their attendance has improved and they show good engagement in their work.
- The curriculum is well-planned to meet students’ needs. Students enjoy wide-ranging experiences, including through their work placements; these prepare them well for meaningful future employment.
- The studio promotes tolerance, resilience and respect rigorously and equips students well to be responsible young citizens.
- Pastoral care is excellent. The studio works tenaciously with students and their families to remove barriers to their learning and build their self-esteem.
- The sixth form is good. It gives students the skills and self-belief to progress into higher education or training.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some students do not read widely enough.
- Students do not always apply basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar sufficiently in their writing.
- Teachers do not consistently encourage students to use Standard English or to extend their range of vocabulary.
- Attendance, although improving, is significantly lower than for secondary schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with no notice.
- The inspector observed the learning of students during a range of lessons. Three observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. A selection of students' work was scrutinised.
- The inspector discussed the studio's work with the principal, senior leaders, teachers, four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the sponsor, groups of students, the head of the local pupil referral unit, an external partner who reviews the studio's work and a family support worker.
- The inspector reviewed the studio's website and considered documents including: the studio's self-evaluation summary; improvement plans; data relating to students' achievement, attendance and behaviour; safeguarding procedures and records; risk assessments; monitoring reports following external reviews and records of the work of the governing body.
- The inspector considered the 15 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspector reviewed 11 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), met with five parents and considered a letter submitted by another parent. She also considered correspondence sent to Ofsted regarding the work of the studio.

Inspection team

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Darwen Aldridge Enterprise Studio opened in September 2013. It is sponsored by the Aldridge Foundation and provides specialist education in creative, digital and media education, business and law. The curriculum is expanding to include health-, social- and child-care.
- After a year using temporary accommodation, the studio moved into permanent premises in September 2014. Refurbishment of this building was completed in January 2015.
- The school is much smaller than an average-sized secondary school.
- Around two-thirds of students attending the studio are supported through the pupil premium. This figure is significantly higher than average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is higher than average.
- Students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form undertake professional placements with local businesses or organisations.
- Three students are educated at St Thomas' Centre, the local pupil referral unit.
- It is not possible to judge whether the school meets the government's floor standards (the minimum expectations of students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 4) because no group of students has yet completed their Key Stage 4 course.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and thereby improve students' skills in reading, writing and speaking by:
 - encouraging students to read more widely from a variety of texts
 - ensuring that students check and correct their written work to identify and rectify mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - developing students' use of standard English and broadening their vocabulary
 - taking regular opportunities to review share and celebrate students' success as readers, writers and speakers.
- Improve attendance through further work with students, their families and support services.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The principal leads by example, sets a swift pace for improvement and takes her staff with her in the relentless pursuit of excellence. She is very well supported by her senior leaders, whose complementary skills ensure that students' needs and skills are swiftly identified and that staff work as a team to secure successful learning.
- The vision and values of the sponsor are apparent in all aspects of the studio's work. They are shared by staff and students and embedded in the curriculum which has a strong focus on building resilience, fostering creativity and equipping young people with skills to enable them to participate as 21st century citizens.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Senior leaders regularly observe teaching, review students' work and provide developmental advice to teachers. Leaders have established an open and collaborative environment; this means that teachers have a good awareness of their colleagues' work in different subjects. As one senior leader stated, 'we want it to feel like a professional place where people work together and find solutions.' Teachers meet regularly, share their practice and learn from each other.
- Leaders have worked with teachers to establish clear, non-negotiable features of teaching that they expect in all lessons. These features provide an effective framework that means students know how they should behave and work. The framework does not sufficiently emphasise the teaching of basic literacy skills. The studio's records indicate improvement in teaching over time and scrutiny of students' work confirms this to be the case.
- Leaders have effective links with other academies in the multi-academy trust. These are being used to good effect, including through teachers' assessments of students' work being checked for accuracy by teachers from other academies.
- The studio has robust systems for data management that enable all students' achievement to be rigorously and regularly reviewed. Leaders draw sensible conclusions from the wide-ranging data they collect and use these to inform further developments. The studio's self-evaluation is accurate and leads to appropriate actions being taken. Leaders review their progress in securing improvement on a regular basis and leave no stone unturned.
- Most teachers in the studio have a leadership role of some sort and senior leaders have multiple roles. They are flexible, adaptable and optimistic: the studio has undergone considerable change since its opening and more change is inevitable given prospective growth and the introduction of a new curriculum pathway. Subject teachers take effective steps, with the support of senior leaders, to ensure that they are aware of changes to the National Curriculum and examination requirements.
- The special educational needs coordinator ensures that teachers have appropriate information and guidance regarding students' individual needs. Close working among the staff, and the effective work of personal coaches, means that students' needs are addressed successfully.
- The studio's leaders, teachers and support staff work very well with students' parents and carers. Parents who made their views known during the inspection unanimously strongly agreed that they would recommend the studio to other parents. Several of them talked about the 'amazing difference' that the studio had made in getting their children back on track, attending and learning. The studio's collaborative work with external agencies ensures that students and families receive the specific support they need.
- Leaders have ensured effective working with business partners so that the commitment to 'real life learning' is well-developed through appropriate work placements. Students apply for their placements and attend interviews to assess their suitability. They learn from the feedback that they receive from employers. The studio provides good quality advice, information and guidance about careers and further education to students at both key stages. Virtually all students have a clear and realistic idea of what they want to do in the future and the steps they need to take to realise their ambitions.
- Leaders undertake all necessary safeguarding checks to ensure that students are safe and supported when they are away from the studio site, including when on work placements or at the pupil referral unit.
- Leaders recognise that more needs to be done to encourage and celebrate students' enjoyment of reading. They are developing an e-library, including books that students have selected, and they have provided a range of books and periodicals for students to borrow; however, reading for pleasure is not promoted strongly enough to have a significant impact on students' literacy skills.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors bring a range of professional and personal skills to their roles which enable them to make a significant contribution to the studio, including by providing or facilitating work placements. They have clear understanding of the context, aims and values of the studio and a secure knowledge of the quality

of teaching, gained from regular reports provided by the principal and through regular visits during the studio day.

- The sponsor’s representative on the governing body ensures that the specific support provided by the sponsor, including for leadership training, is well-directed.
- Governors have ensured that clear appraisal arrangements are in place so that staff are appropriately rewarded depending on their contribution to securing students’ progress.
- Governors are well-informed about the impact of the funding the studio receives, including the pupil premium. This has been directed in the main to additional staffing that has been successful in ensuring that there is no gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and their peers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Students appreciate all that the studio provides for them. As one of them put it: ‘Everyone knows each other as a person and that helps you find your talents.’ Students enjoy their learning and cite many examples of how the studio staff have helped them to develop positive attitudes by being ‘interested and persistent: they never give up on us.’ Teachers and support staff manage students’ behaviour well and this means that minimal learning time is lost.
- The studio expects students to behave and dress as they would in a workplace. The vast majority of students live up to this expectation, wear smart business attire and move sensibly around the studio. They play their part in helping the dedicated site manager, cleaning and kitchen staff to maintain the pristine condition of the building.
- Teachers help students to develop empathy and resilience. Most students develop good collaborative working skills and understand that the ability they develop in the studio to work flexibly with different people is a foundation for future employment. Equality of opportunity is a core principle of the studio: students are taught about equalities legislation. Students are actively encouraged to have positive regard for each other, including through making notes of ‘random acts of kindness’ by members of the studio community and displaying these in the building.
- No student has been permanently excluded from the studio. The few short fixed-term exclusions which have happened have been successful in improving individual students’ behaviour, with the result that it is extremely rare for a student to be excluded on more than one occasion. Students say that they behave better at the studio than they did in their previous schools and records show this to be the case.
- A significant number of students join the studio with a history of persistent absence or non-attendance at their previous schools. Their attendance has improved considerably in the majority of cases. Attendance at the studio remains well below the national level for secondary schools but is rising.
- The vast majority of parents agree that students’ behaviour is well-managed and that their children feel safe at the studio. Staff who completed the questionnaire concurred with this view.

Safety

- The studio’s work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- The studio meets safeguarding requirements in full. All staff are thoroughly vetted on appointment and they receive appropriate training. They are adept at recognising and acting upon small changes in students’ behaviour that may indicate that they are experiencing problems. This approach reduces the risk of vulnerable students to exploitation. Students greatly appreciate the work of personal coaches who help them to keep safe and well.
- Staff and students openly discuss potential risks including gang culture, extremism and sexual exploitation; this raising of awareness equips students to make good choices about personal safety. The studio’s approach to online safety is robust: students know how to recognise and report abuse.
- Students say that they feel safe and that bullying is very rare. Records show that there have been very rare instances of homophobic and racist language use. Where these have occurred, they have been reported and recorded. Students involved have then reflected on the impact of this language, as the perpetrator or the recipient. This approach has helped students to develop respect and tolerance.
- Students behave well when they are off-site on their work placements. The studio works closely with the pupil referral unit to check the behaviour and attendance of students who are registered at the studio but attend there for part of their education.

- Governors and leaders ensure that all appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. During the refurbishment of the studio, effective steps were taken to ensure the safety of staff and students. The studio site is safe and well-maintained, for example the fire evacuation procedure is regularly reviewed and is made clear to visitors.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teachers work hard to find the best ways to engage, challenge and support students. Their approaches are often highly creative, for example an English lesson captivated students' interest particularly well because the teacher showed a film that he had made and 'starred in' as the stimulus for revising persuasive techniques. Teachers are encouraged to play to their strengths; in doing this they make learning relevant and fun and secure good achievement over time for most students.
- Teaching throughout the studio is characterised by good quality questioning that encourages students to develop their thinking. Teachers structure lessons so that there is an interesting blend of activities along with time for students to evaluate their work.
- Strong relationships between staff and students are apparent in the studio. Teachers and support staff make students feel positive about themselves and their work. Staff morale is high: staff who responded to the questionnaire unanimously agreed that they are proud to work at the studio and that their professional development needs are well met.
- Teachers provide students with effective feedback on how to improve their work, both verbally and through their written marking. Students generally act on this feedback. Teachers often point out to students how their skills are developing and encourage them to make comparisons between previous and current work so that they can see the improvements for themselves.
- Teachers encourage students to learn from each other, such as in mathematics lesson where students helped their friends to consider Pythagoras' theorem. Because teachers' knowledge of individual students' work is detailed, they are able to make links between students effectively so that the right students help each other with concepts.
- There are examples of high quality display throughout the studio. Students' artwork is proudly exhibited and celebrated. In English, poems students have written in response to the studio's work remembering victims of the Holocaust emphasise their spiritual awareness and sensitivity. Teachers take every opportunity to celebrate students' achievement.
- Teachers successfully encourage students to learn and use appropriate technical vocabulary in different subjects. In English, students develop their vocabulary, for instance by reading a range of poetry and analysing the techniques that authors use to express ideas. The teaching of reading comprehension, particularly in English, is helping students who have weak literacy skills; however, the promotion of wider reading is not encouraged sufficiently throughout the studio.
- Teachers give students plenty of opportunities to discuss ideas but do not always correct mistakes in students' speech; consequently, some students do not use Standard English as well as they should. Similarly, not all teachers expect students to make thorough checks on their spelling, punctuation and grammar in different subjects and so some errors persist unnecessarily.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Many students who join the studio have made weak progress during Key Stage 3 and fallen behind their peers in the schools they have previously attended. The studio establishes an accurate baseline of their attainment when they start Key Stage 4. This shows that there are gaps in students' learning in English and mathematics, often due to previous poor attendance or disaffection. The studio's work to plug these gaps and accelerate progress is effective. Most students are making good progress towards meeting their targets.
- There is no published data on the studio's performance as no students have yet completed their Key Stage 4 courses. The studio's records of students' achievement indicate that attainment in 2015 will be lower than the national figure but that the vast majority have made good progress from their starting points on joining the studio.
- There is no gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers. The additional staffing provided through pupil premium helps students to overcome their individual difficulties and get back on

track to achieve well.

- Students who are relatively higher attaining within the studio are making good progress and are on track to attain good grades in public examinations.
- Students achieve well in the studio's specialist subjects. Their portfolios of work in creative and digital media show a mature understanding of techniques and effects.
- Students make good progress in mathematics and are developing increased confidence to explain their mathematical thinking and solve problems in different contexts.
- Students are competent users of digital technology. They undertake research readily using the internet and can find, read and evaluate information linked to their studies; however, some students do not read for pleasure and this limits their access to rich and varied vocabulary beyond their work in the studio. Students can explain their work and express opinions confidently but their vocabulary is underdeveloped, particularly in Key Stage 4, and some do not use Standard English appropriately. Not all students check their work carefully enough to find and change errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Students who have special educational needs or disabilities make good progress, in line with that of their peers, in response to good teaching along with effective additional support from their personal coaches and teaching assistants.
- The school does not enter any students early for GCSE.

Sixth form provision

is good

- Leadership of the sixth form is good. The curriculum meets the needs and ambitions of students on the studio roll. A new course is being introduced to widen provision and help to meet local employment patterns.
- All the students who were entered for AS level photography in 2014 passed the course. Their achievement from their various starting points was good. There are no other published data showing students' attainment in the sixth form as no sixth-formers have yet completed their two-year courses.
- Inspection evidence indicates that sixth formers are making good progress from their starting points in their specialist courses.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers aim to enable students to be reflective and resilient independent learners. Observation of students' work during lessons confirms that this is being realised. In photography, students are adept at pursuing individual lines of inquiry, researching and evaluating the work of different artists and testing out the techniques artists have used for themselves. Their work is mature and insightful. Students take great trouble refining their portfolios and willingly act on teachers' critical feedback. In economics, students developed confidence in expressing their views about complex national policy and its impact on citizens' lives because of the effective questioning style of the teacher who encouraged them to 'probe deeper and make connections.'
- Students' written work is generally well-presented and demonstrates their understanding; however, students do not always identify and rectify errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- The sixth form prepares students well for the next stage in their education or employment. Students undertake work placements that develop their skills and are relevant to their aspirations. Almost all students have secured university places or work for when they leave the studio. Some students have received unconditional university offers because of the talents they have displayed. Several commented that, prior to attending the studio, they had never considered the possibility of university.
- Students' behaviour is good. Students are positive role models in the studio. They willingly support younger students and staff; for instance, some students host an extra-curricular computer gaming club that students attend from different schools.
- The studio provides strong pastoral support for sixth formers and ensures that they are kept safe. Effective multi-agency support is in place to help students to deal with problems; this enables them to focus on their learning and achieve as well as they can.

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	139924
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	462684

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	99
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Terry Boynes
Headteacher	Ruth Bradbury
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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