

The Studio School Liverpool

41 Greenland Street, Liverpool, Merseyside, L1 0BS

Inspection dates 13–14 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
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 and staff have successfully created a vibrant, caring learning community where aspiration abounds and the individual can flourish.
- There is a shared vision to prepare students well for employment. As a result, this is an orderly and business-like setting where students and staff work together cooperatively and purposefully.
- The behaviour of students is outstanding. They are self-disciplined, courteous, broad-minded and sociable. As a consequence, they are determined to make the best of all the opportunities available to them.
- Teaching is characterised by high expectations of work and behaviour. As a result, lessons proceed seamlessly and students make substantial gains in their knowledge and expertise.
- Students make good progress across a range of subjects. They achieve particularly well in the studio's specialism of digital technology.
- The studio's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. The pastoral care of students is exceptional and has had an immeasurably positive impact on many students' lives.
- The studio has been successful in turning round the lives of young people who were previously at risk of disengagement from education.
- Staff have been unrelenting in challenging absence. As a result, the attendance rate has improved dramatically since the studio opened and is now broadly in line with the national average.
- The sixth form is good. Students develop skills and attitudes that prepare them well for the next stages in their lives. Students in the sixth form exert a positive influence, acting as strong role models for younger students.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not always sufficiently tailored to suit the abilities of all students. As a result, sometimes the work that the more able students are set is too easy.
- Middle leaders have not always been effective in ensuring all staff follow school policies, for example, in marking. As a result, some students' work goes uncorrected leading to them making repeated mistakes.
- Retention on some courses in the sixth form is not good enough. As a result, some students do not achieve as well as they might.
- The studio's development plan lacks clear milestones and success criteria. As a result, it is difficult for school leaders to check the progress they are making in tackling areas they have identified as requiring further improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students’ learning in lessons, visited classrooms and examined a selection of students’ work across a range of subjects and year groups. Three lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed a ‘project-based learning’ session and sat in on a one-to-one coaching session.
- Inspectors interviewed a large number of students, both formally in meetings and informally at break, lunchtime and in lessons.
- Inspectors studied a wide range of information, provided by the school, including: records of students’ progress, behaviour and attendance; the school’s self-evaluation of its work; plans for further development and records relating to the monitoring of the quality of teaching. Inspectors also examined information on the school’s website.
- During the inspection detailed consideration was given to policies and practices relating to safeguarding and also how the school prepares its students for life in modern Britain.
- Inspectors scrutinised minutes of meetings of the governing body and information relating to the school’s financial transactions. Inspectors also considered a number of reports from monitoring visits conducted by the Department for Education.
- Meetings were held with the Principal and other school leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, representatives of the Northern Schools Trust, staff and several local employers who work in partnership with the school.
- Inspectors considered the 29 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors analysed 22 submissions to Parent View, Ofsted’s on-line questionnaire, met with three parents and also considered a letter submitted by email from another parent.

Inspection team

Joan Bonenfant, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Andrea Machell

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Studio School opened in September 2013. It is sponsored by the Northern Schools Trust and provides specialist education in gaming and digital media education. The curriculum also covers a range of traditional subjects including English, mathematics and science.
- The Studio School is co-located with another school in the Trust, UTC Life Sciences. Some teaching is delivered to students of The Studio School by teachers from the UTC and vice versa.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school and caters for students in the 14 – 19 age range.
- The Studio School recruits students from the Liverpool area and other boroughs further afield, such as St Helens.
- Almost half the students attending this school are eligible for support through the pupil premium. This proportion is higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than the national 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 lower than average.
- Students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form undertake placements with local businesses, related to the school's specialism.
- It is not possible to state whether the school meets the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations of students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4 because no students have as yet completed their Key Stage 4 courses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
 - ensuring all teachers mark work effectively in accordance with the school's policy, so that all students know how to improve their work and avoid repeating mistakes
 - making sure all teachers adapt their lessons so that more able students are challenged appropriately and achieve their potential.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the school's self-evaluation of its work by examining critically the impact of actions taken to secure improvement
 - improving the effectiveness of the school development plan by inserting milestones and measurable success criteria, so that school leaders can check the progress they have made in tackling areas for improvement
 - increase the effectiveness of middle leaders in ensuring all teachers in their area of responsibility follow school policies, for example in marking.
- Ensure all students achieve as well as they might in the sixth form by improving retention on some courses.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders, including the governors and sponsors of the studio, have successfully created a vibrant school where students thrive and make substantial gains in their learning. Students and parents spoken to during the inspection, were absolutely clear that, in their opinion, this quite unique provision is having a substantial impact on students' lives.
- There is a shared vision to ensure students are well prepared for employment by being 'industry ready'. This translates well into practice: this is an orderly, business-like community where students and staff work together diligently and with aspiration.
- The innovative curriculum makes a strong contribution to students' good achievement. As well as a broad range of subjects reflecting the specialism of the studio, students can choose from a selection of more traditional options, such as history or Spanish. In this way, the curriculum does not limit students' potential and helps to broaden their horizons.
- Students benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as theatre visits and trips to art galleries. The studio's specialism facilitates exciting and unusual experiences, for example, through links with a local business, FACT (the Foundation for Art and Creative Technologies). Students were also able to watch a production of one of Shakespeare's plays by the Royal Shakespeare Company, in real time, in the school's cinema.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well. Students are encouraged to reflect on ethical issues in a 'philosophy for children' course and they debate current affairs, such as the recent General Election, in form time. In social spaces, compelling displays of students' truly exceptional paintings lift the spirits and enable students to develop their appreciation of art and beauty.
- The studio is secular but recognises and celebrates Christian festivals. Students also visit places of worship for other religions and have used their skills to design a computer App to explore and understand different faiths. School leaders and students take an unswerving approach to challenging all forms of intolerance or discrimination. As a result, students are broad-minded and well prepared to participate fully as citizens of modern Britain.
- Students attending the studio have specifically elected to study courses that will equip them for work in creative and digital industries; nevertheless, students recognise that they develop skills that are transferable should they wish to pursue different careers. Students receive comprehensive careers information, advice and guidance, encouraging them to explore a range of possibilities, including apprenticeships and higher education. In this way, the school prepares students well for the next stage in their lives.
- The leadership and management of teaching are good. There is a rigorous programme of monitoring the quality of teaching through lesson observations, scrutinies of students' work, progress reviews and speaking to students about their learning. As a result, senior leaders quickly identify weaknesses and then provide support that is tailored to teachers' individual needs. Weekly 'learning lunches' where a programme of training is delivered, provide staff with the opportunity to showcase good practice and share expertise.
- The studio works in effective partnership with other schools in the multi-academy trust which has helped them, for example, in verifying the accuracy of their assessments. Links with local digital and creative industries and higher education institutions, such as Edge Hill and Liverpool John Moores Universities, are invaluable in ensuring that the curriculum reflects the up-to-date needs of industries that are constantly changing. Such links also provide students with rich opportunities, such as work experience, to develop their employability and social skills in the outside world.
- Subject leaders are 'on message', sharing senior leaders' high expectations and values. They play an active role in monitoring the overall quality of teaching but are not always effective in ensuring all teachers follow school policies, for example in marking.
- Senior leaders have designed effective systems to track students' progress, which is regularly monitored. They use this information to hold teachers to account for their performance. Teachers are held back from salary increases if they do not meet their targets.
- The studio's self-evaluation is accurate, but does not explore sufficiently well the impact of actions taken to drive improvement. The school development plan identifies the correct priorities, but lacks clear milestones and measurable success criteria. As a result, the school development plan does not serve as a useful tool for governors or representatives of the trust to determine the progress the studio is making in tackling areas identified as requiring further improvement.
- The studio engages well with parents who, as a consequence, are overwhelmingly supportive. Parents

receive termly reports on their child's progress and are invited to 'parent forum' meetings to discuss the future direction of the school or raise concerns.

- Safeguarding procedures meet requirements, with examples of exemplary practice.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors and sponsors bring highly developed skills, honed in a wide range of relevant industries, to support the school well. Governors have a very clear vision for the further development of the studio and communicate this effectively to other members of the school community.
- The Chair of the Governing Body represents the studio in meetings with the multi-academy trust and he is an effective advocate for the school.
- Governors receive regular updates from the Principal on students' progress and they use this to inform their view of the overall quality of teaching. They ask pertinent, incisive questions that hold senior leaders to account; for example, they challenged the school to provide evidence to back up teachers' assessment of students' progress. In this way, they demonstrated good judgement and ensured senior leaders took all steps possible to determine the accuracy of this information.
- Governors have ensured that the pupil premium funding is spent wisely, such as on additional staffing. As a result, disadvantaged students are making good progress and there is very little gap in attainment between these students and their peers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. A distinctive feature of students' behaviour is their self-discipline; they are mature beyond their years and conduct themselves impeccably. As a result, lessons proceed with minimal disruption: teachers are able to teach and students to learn.
- Students spoken to during the inspection, without exception, said they feel very safe in this school. They were insistent that this is because there is 'zero tolerance' of bullying be it racist, homophobic or emanating from discrimination of any description. There is a widely shared expectation that people's differences are respected.
- When students congregate in social spaces, such as the canteen, the studio has the feel of a university. Students discuss their work and their life beyond school sensibly, sociably and without silliness.
- The studio expects students to dress and behave in a professional manner. Students respond well to this and the overwhelming majority of students wear the uniform correctly and arrive at school in the morning well prepared for their lessons. As a result, little lesson time is lost in providing students with basic equipment.
- Attitudes to learning are exemplary. Students display a thirst for knowledge and a respect for their teachers, whom they describe as 'colleagues'. Students appear to view teachers as partners in their learning. The school day at the studio is longer than average. Nevertheless, according to students spoken to during the inspection, the days 'just fly by'.
- Students take good care of their surroundings. As a result, the environment for learning is pristine with no litter or graffiti in evidence anywhere in the school.
- Students' attendance has improved considerably since the studio opened. Despite the fact that many students had poor attendance records in their previous school, their attendance rate is now broadly in line with the national average. This is because senior leaders have been successful in creating a school where students want to attend and staff have been unrelenting in challenging absence.
- Parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, were practically unanimous in saying their child feels safe in this school and most parents and staff were of the opinion that behaviour is well managed.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. The studio's pastoral care of students is exceptional and has had an immeasurably positive effect on many students' lives.
- A substantial proportion of students attending the studio have experienced difficulties, such as persistent bullying, in their previous schools, that led them to become disengaged and often reluctant to attend school. Students spoken to during the inspection were keen to explain to inspectors how joining the studio has transformed their lives, helping them to develop far more positive views of themselves and their futures. In conversation with inspectors, one student talked frankly about his experience: 'In my old school I used to have to hide behind a wall, ... like a shadow – this is a fantastic school, I can be myself

and no-one judges you.’ Parents also supported this view, for example, as one parent explained: ‘Since starting the studio, my son is like a different child. He loves school, feels very valued and is full of confidence and motivation.’

- The studio meets safeguarding requirements fully. Senior leaders ensure that all staff and visitors to the school, such as industry partners, are appropriately vetted. The trust supports the studio effectively in safeguarding, for example by ensuring all risk assessments are carried out thoroughly and professionally.
- Staff receive regular training on how to keep students safe. The one-to-one coaching system is particularly effective in alerting staff to any problems students may be experiencing in their lives. Students say they trust staff to help them if they encounter difficulties, be it with academic work or life outside school.
- The studio’s records on the management of behaviour are meticulous. As a result, senior leaders readily spot any patterns developing and step in swiftly to sort problems out before they get any worse. Records show that incidences of racism are non-existent and students confirmed this when they spoke with inspectors. Even the slightest bullying issue is dealt with speedily and satisfactorily.
- Students are taught how to assess risks that they may meet in the outside world and also how to behave in ways that will help them to keep safe. Issues such as gang warfare and child sexual exploitation are dealt with in a measured way through discussion, assemblies and theatre performances.
- Students are well informed about e-safety; they take a proactive approach and report swiftly to staff if they have any concerns, for example regarding inappropriate use of the internet. The school works closely with parents in order to ensure they too understand the risks that their children may face.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most teachers have developed an effective style of teaching that engages the large majority of students well. As a result, most students make good progress, including in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is characterised by high expectations of students’ attitudes to learning. There is a strong culture of diligence and aspiration. As a result, students endeavour to work hard and achieve well in the subjects they are studying; lessons proceed seamlessly, without interruption.
- Teaching in some subjects, such as art, is outstanding. The impact of teaching of such high quality is evident in the alluring and skilful work displayed around the school and also in the work scrutinised by inspectors during the inspection. Teaching in English and mathematics has been of more variable quality in the past, but is now improving.
- As a result of the studio’s highly effective teaching of subjects related to creative and digital media, students are very adept in the use of information and communication technology and its applications. Industry partners comment favourably on students’ abilities in this respect.
- Assessment is frequent. For the most part, students receive valuable feedback, both verbal and written, that helps them to improve their work. The studio has developed a robust marking policy and inspectors saw examples of excellent practice, particularly in science. However, evidence gathered on inspection revealed that not all teachers are following this policy. As a result, some students’ work goes unmarked, leading to them making repeated errors or not presenting their work as neatly as they might.
- The vast majority of students know their individual targets. Teachers encourage them to aim high and exceed their minimum target grade. Progress against these targets is regularly monitored and reviewed. Where there are concerns, support is rapidly offered. As a result, the majority of students are set to achieve in line with expectations.
- Innovative strategies such as ‘project-based learning’ have been adopted with the aim of helping students develop the ability to solve problems and work well in teams. Such approaches have been effective in improving students’ employability and social skills.
- Teachers do not always plan work to suit the needs and abilities of their students. As a result, sometimes there is insufficient challenge because the work set is too easy, particularly for more able students.
- The coaching system is highly tailored to the needs of the individual student. It is delivered by teaching and support staff and is very effective in developing students’ personal qualities, such as resilience and aspiration. Students respond well to being coached and they say it has encouraged them to think for themselves about issues in their lives.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- The majority of students currently in the studio made weak progress and fell behind other students in their previous schools. The studio assesses students rigorously when they start Key Stage 4. This

generally reveals that there are some substantial gaps in students' learning, particularly in English and mathematics, largely owing to previously poor attendance or disaffection.

- The studio works assiduously to help students get themselves back on track. However, in some instances there is considerable ground to make up. As a result, progress in English and mathematics has been variable across Key Stage 4. During the inspection, senior leaders provided convincing evidence of an improving picture and most students are on target to make good progress in these subjects.
- There is no published, validated data on the studio's performance as this is a relatively new school and no students have as yet completed their courses. The studio's monitoring of students' progress indicates that students are in line to achieve well in their forthcoming examinations. Senior leaders have made every attempt to ensure that these records are accurate. This information was interrogated thoroughly on inspection and the studio's predictions appear realistic but they remain at this point unconfirmed.
- Students make particularly good progress in the studio's specialist subjects and also in science. They develop flair and expertise in the use of digital technologies and creative media. For example, students are responsible for keeping a careful record of the work they have done and build up a detailed portfolio of their individual achievements. As a result, their strong progress in these subjects is clearly demonstrable.
- According to the studio's records, there is very little gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers in the school. Furthermore, disadvantaged students are predicted to do better than other students nationally in their GCSEs. The additional staffing and support, for example the purchase of revision materials, provided through the pupil premium, has helped students to achieve well.
- More able students do not always achieve as well as they might because on occasion the work they are set is insufficiently challenging. Senior leaders recognise this as a priority for action. Plans to tackle this are afoot but have not had time to take effect.
- The studio's marking policy incorporates strategies to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum and these are employed effectively in some subjects, for example, in history and science. However, the marking policy is not always consistently followed and some work examined during the inspection showed that students sometimes make repeated errors, for example, in spelling and punctuation, because these mistakes have not been corrected.
- Students who have special educational needs make good progress in line with other students in the school. They receive additional support well suited to their individual requirements.
- The studio does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The studio has developed highly specialised provision that suits well the needs, abilities and interests of the students it serves. Courses are engaging, leading to high levels of motivation on the part of most students. In addition, the support they receive contributes highly effectively to their personal development, preparing them well to be forward-looking, aspirational and responsible citizens.
- The sixth form provides study programmes that include specialist vocational provision and a range of more traditional A and AS levels. Students have the opportunity to build on their previous achievement and for the most part they receive effective advice and guidance regarding which courses they should pursue. As a result, retention rates for most subjects are good. However, this is not the case for a small minority of students following BTEC courses.
- There are clear progression routes from the sixth form to higher education, apprenticeships and employment, particularly in the creative and digital media industries. Effective partnerships with local industries, for example in providing work placements, have contributed to students developing skills that have prepared them well for the next stage in their lives. The vast majority of students leaving the sixth form this year have plans to go on to higher education, further training or employment.
- Teaching is effective and the large majority of learners make good progress. Teaching develops students' skills well, particularly in the specialist subjects. For example, in one creative media lesson, observed during the inspection, students were encouraged to review their work critically and make changes where appropriate. In this lesson, students demonstrated a high degree of technical competence.
- Students engage well with their teachers and appreciate the support they are given. Individual study time is used productively; little time is wasted and students take responsibility for their learning in a mature fashion.
- The behaviour of students in the sixth form is exemplary. The studio expects students in the sixth form to follow a 'business dress' code and they do so without exception. Students in the sixth form act as

exceptional role models and support younger students well, for example by acting as mentors.

- Students receive appropriate information on how to assess risk in the outside world and to keep themselves safe.
- Students enter the sixth form with prior attainment that is generally lower than average. They make good progress from their individual starting points and according to evidence gathered during the inspection they are on target to achieve well in their forthcoming examinations. There is little externally validated information on students' achievement, other than for re-sits in English and mathematics GCSE, as no students have as yet completed their courses.
- Students who join the sixth form have frequently had poor attendance records in their previous schools. Staff in the studio have worked highly effectively with students to improve their attendance which is now higher than the average for sixth forms.
- Students who join the studio without at least a GCSE grade C grade in English and/ or mathematics have the opportunity to re-sit their examinations and improve their grade. The success rates for such students were above average in 2014.
- According to information gathered on inspection, there are no gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers. Equally, students with special educational needs or disabilities make good progress and are predicted to achieve well in their forthcoming examinations.

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	139589
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	450021

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	244
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Taylor
Headteacher	Shaun McInerney
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01512301330
Fax number	01512635665
Email address	s.mcinerney@thestudio-liverpool.co.uk

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