

Big Creative Independent School

BCE Campus, Silver Birch House, Uplands Business Park A, Blackhorse Road, Walthamstow E17 5SD

Inspection dates	8–10 March 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders are ambitious for the school and its pupils. They expect the most of all pupils including their conduct. As a result, behaviour is consistently good.
- Leaders are determined to make the school the best it can be and they drive improvement effectively.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers use assessment effectively to set challenging but achievable targets.
- Relationships between pupils and with staff are strong. Pupils value the respect they receive from staff and feel safe.
- Pupils make good progress, including in English and mathematics, because teaching builds their understanding and skills step by step.
- The school promotes pupils' care and welfare effectively. Staff know their pupils very well and work closely with parents and social workers to provide a high level of support.
- The school's positive climate is focused on learning and pupils' welfare. As a result, pupils' attitudes are very good. They enjoy learning and have a great deal of respect for their teachers.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully. Pupils become mature well-rounded young people ready for the next stage of their careers.
- British values are promoted well, especially tolerance, respect and equality.
- Leaders and the proprietor are vigilant in ensuring that all the independent school standards are met.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always challenge pupils' thinking sufficiently or get them to contribute to discussions. As a result, a very small number of the most-able pupils do not make all the progress they could.
- Policy documents are not always organised well and, as a result, are not readily available to teachers. Occasionally, policies are not fully up to date.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils, especially the most able, make consistently good progress by:
 - developing teachers' skills further so that they ask more questions to challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding
 - ensuring that pupils are given more opportunities to contribute to discussions.
- Improve leadership and management further by ensuring that key policies, for example the school's safeguarding policy and associated guidance, are organised in a way that makes them readily available to all teachers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and the proprietor share a clear vision for the Big Creative Independent School and are ambitious for its future and the future of pupils. This commitment to high standards is shared by all staff, who are highly dedicated to the school and its pupils, and is reflected in the way equality of opportunity is promoted very successfully.
- The school benefits significantly from being part of the wider Big Creative Education (BCE) organisation with which it shares both the building and services. This ensures that pupils have access to a wide range of facilities and equipment as well as extensive support services. Consequently, the school is very inclusive, supporting all pupils whatever their needs.
- Leaders have worked successfully to improve teaching by focusing attention on learning in classrooms. A member of staff who is responsible for leading on teaching, learning and assessment was appointed at the start of the year and has begun to introduce regular observation of learning and follow-up advice for teachers. Leaders have rightly judged that not all teaching is of a consistently high quality. However, the actions taken so far are already having a positive impact.
- The well thought out and robust systems for checking the quality of teaching include helpful feedback to teachers, specific training and opportunities to visit other schools. As a result, teaching quality and pupils' progress are improving.
- Leaders, including the proprietor, have an accurate understanding of the quality of education the school provides and what it needs to do to improve. Self-evaluation has rightly identified improving learning, attendance and punctuality as priorities and the school has a well-defined plan to tackle these issues.
- The proprietor and leaders make sure that all the relevant checks on equipment are carried out regularly. This includes checks on the fire alarm system and fire extinguishers. The school's leaders ensure that fire drills are carried out at regular intervals and keep records of drills to check the time it takes to vacate the building. The premises are clean, tidy and litter free. Access to the building is well supervised. All staff insist on good conduct and the school is very clear that it expects pupils to be ready for learning. As a result, pupils behave well and are respectful of others.
- The curriculum is well matched to the particular needs and aspirations of the pupils. All have been directed to the school because of its vocational music and media specialisms. Pupils' personal development and academic progress are developed very successfully. As one pupil said, 'I have matured a lot since I came here.' An ex-pupil noted that the school is very supportive and gives pupils the self-confidence to achieve their potential.
- The curriculum is extended well by a range of after-school activities and visits. This develops pupils' learning effectively and provides opportunities for them to experience new and challenging situations.
- English, mathematics and computing skills are promoted well. All pupils study specific functional English and mathematics courses while information and communication technology (ICT) is an essential part of the vocational courses. Literacy and numeracy are also interwoven into other lessons so that English and mathematics skills are used to support vocational assignments. This means that pupils see English, mathematics and ICT as important aspects of their learning, and they develop their skills well.
- British values are promoted effectively. There are planned sessions in which pupils discuss the fundamental British values and develop a secure understanding of, and a respect and tolerance for, the rule of law and how this impacts on their lives. One pupil noted, 'Everyone gets treated equally.' During the inspection, pupils talked thoughtfully about democracy and what it meant for them.
- Pupils are very well looked after by all adults. All staff are appropriately trained in child protection and safeguarding, and the school ensures that this is topped up regularly. For example, during this inspection, staff attended safeguarding training that included specialist training on extremism and radicalisation.
- Good careers advice has a positive impact on pupils' progression to the next stage of their lives. This is reflected in the destinations of pupils last year with all pupils moving on to further study, employment or an apprenticeship.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The headteacher and proprietor have worked successfully to ensure that all the independent school standards are met.

- There are monthly meetings to assess progress towards meeting the school’s targets and to examine information about pupils’ academic progress and personal development, including any issues related to safeguarding. This ensures that leaders are supported and challenged in equal measure, as well as enabling managers to keep a close eye on how well the school is performing.
- There is a good range of policies and guidance which are generally reviewed each year. However, some of these are not as up to date as they should be, and are not organised in a way that makes them easy to access. For example, the safeguarding policy and guidance on the forms of abuse are contained in separate documents making it unnecessarily complicated for staff.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and the proprietor have established good systems and are vigilant in identifying any signs that pupils are not coping well. The school has close links with local social services to ensure that any concerns are followed up properly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is good and, as a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. From different starting points, and often with poor experiences of education, pupils develop the personal and academic skills needed to tackle the future with confidence.
- Teachers have a passion for their subject, which they use successfully to build pupils’ learning. Often, they are experts in their field and use their first-hand experience of working in the industry to provide pupils with an in-depth understanding of the world of work. This gives them considerable authority with pupils, who value and respect their teachers a great deal.
- The school has a strong focus on developing pupils’ English and mathematics skills. As well as dedicated lessons in English and mathematics, opportunities to develop pupils’ literacy and numeracy skills are carefully planned for in other lessons. For example, in a session looking at healthy lifestyles, pupils had to calculate the number of cigarettes smoked, and the cost, over a given time. As a result, provision for literacy and numeracy is good and pupils make good progress.
- Teachers use their knowledge of pupils’ capabilities and interests effectively to set work that is suitably demanding. When pupils start at Big Creative, usually in Year 11, but sometimes in Year 10, teachers use information from their mainstream school and diagnostic tests to set specific targets. Each pupil’s progress is reviewed regularly and mapped carefully to ensure that any gaps in their learning are tackled before it becomes too late. Consequently, pupils make good progress.
- The school has robust systems to check and analyse the quality of teaching and uses the results to support improvements effectively. The school’s records show that these systems have had a positive impact and that the quality of teaching and learning has improved in recent months. The good-quality teaching is also confirmed by external evaluation through the local authority.
- Despite good teaching overall, the pace of learning is sometimes compromised because teachers do not get pupils to contribute to discussions enough. For example, sometimes teachers cut off pupils’ contributions by telling them the answer or not following up the points they make. In other cases, questions are undemanding and do not challenge pupils’ thinking sufficiently, especially the most able.
- Marking is thorough and gives pupils a clear understanding of what they have done well and areas for improvement. There is a clear policy for assessing work which is followed consistently. Pupils noted that they find the opportunity to improve their work before a final assessment very helpful.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Teachers have time for pupils, respecting their capabilities and understanding their circumstances. In return, pupils respect their teachers and use the support they get to tackle increasingly difficult work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school’s work to promote pupils’ personal development and welfare is good. Staff are highly committed to developing pupils’ personal and social skills. They provide a very high level of care and welfare based on maximising pupils’ learning. As a result, pupils’ emotional well-being is promoted very effectively and pupils become increasingly self-confident as they move through the school.

- Pupils are very complimentary about the school and the way they are treated by their teachers and support workers. They are confident that their teachers and other adults in the school are concerned for their welfare and future. Pupils know that they can talk to staff if they have a problem and that they will be supported effectively. School records show that staff are tenacious in following up and supporting individual pupils, in partnership with external agencies, including social services.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including from extremism and radicalisation. Internet safety is essential to the work of the school because of the extensive use of information technology. The school has effective internet security systems and all pupils sign an agreement about its responsible use. Pupils discuss issues related to knife crime, gang-related violence and sexual exploitation with maturity and understanding. They have a clear understanding of treating others with respect, including those from different cultural or religious backgrounds, and are adamant that bullying does not happen. School records show that there have been no incidents of bullying in the last two years.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. As a result, pupils are encouraged to develop their social and moral skills effectively. Many pupils join the school because they have had difficulty with their behaviour in the past. However, staff work successfully with pupils to improve their behaviour. As a result, pupils' conduct during lessons and around the school is typically good. Disruptive behaviour is simply not a feature of the school.
- Pupils' attitudes are very positive. They enjoy learning and are very keen to do well, taking the opportunities the school provides to develop their personal and academic skills. They especially value the advice and support they receive from staff, including careers advice. All pupils and ex-pupils spoken to agree that the school has given them the opportunity to realise their potential, develop their self-confidence and engage successfully in learning. As one pupil noted, 'Learning is made enjoyable.'
- Nearly all pupils have improved their attendance since joining the school, often from very low levels. Comparisons with national figures are not possible because the number of pupils is very small. However, the school places attendance at the top of its priorities and works diligently with each pupil to improve their attendance. There are good systems to follow up absence and punctuality and although the attendance of a few pupils remains low, for most it has improved significantly.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Most pupils start at the school having experienced a disrupted education, often caused by poor attendance or negative attitudes to learning. Some pupils start midway through the school year. As a result, their starting points are low and they have much to catch up on. However, all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make good progress overall from their different starting points because they are motivated and engaged in their learning. Occasionally, the most-able pupils do not make as much progress as they could because teachers do not challenge pupils' thinking to deepen their understanding.
- Currently there are no disabled pupils or those who have a statement of special educational needs. Nonetheless, teachers plan learning on an individual basis for each pupil and use previous assessments, and new tests, to ensure that they set work that is demanding but achievable. As a result, pupils make good progress with English and mathematics, and, in their vocational courses, make good progress over time. Last year, for example, all pupils achieved at least a Level 1 in English and mathematics, and the majority a Level 2. This is similar to getting a GCSE pass with the majority getting a good pass.
- Last year all pupils continued in education, training or an apprenticeship at the end of their time at the school. This reflects the impact the school has on pupils' learning and progress. Many pupils move onto the Big Creative 16–19 Academy to extend further their vocational qualifications, and often study GCSE English and mathematics.
- A particular strength is the way pupils develop their self-assurance and belief in themselves while at the school. This represents significant progress for pupils and means they become well-rounded young people ready to take their place in society. This is reflected in the views of parents and pupils, and in the way pupils talk about the difference the school has made to their attitudes to learning. Not all attain at the highest levels but the great majority overcome their difficulties to achieve significant progress.

School details

Unique reference number	141411
Inspection number	10006032
DfE registration number	999/1608

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Other
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	15–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	7
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Alexis Michaelides
Chair	N/A
Headteacher	Ian Morton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,600
Telephone number	020 8498 3300
Website	http://bce-ap.com
Email address	ian.morton@bigcreative.education
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Big Creative Independent School is an alternative to school for Year 11 pupils interested in creative music and media. Its aim is 'to transform the lives of young people through inspirational teaching and by providing exceptional access to career opportunities in the creative industries'.
- There are currently seven pupils on roll aged between 15 and 16. All are referred from local authority secondary schools in the London Borough of Waltham Forest.
- The school has a contract to take 20 pupils in Year 11 each year. This is managed through the Hawkswood Group, the local authority's group of schools that provide alternative provision.
- The school caters for pupils who have a record of poor behaviour and attitudes, or a history of poor attendance.
- The school is part of the BCE group which includes BCE training and the BCE Academy (a 16–19 academy). It shares the building, some teachers, policies and pupils' services with the wider BCE group.
- The school's proprietor is the managing director. The school is overseen by a management board chaired by the managing director.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The Big Creative Independent School was registered by the Department for Education in September 2014 and this is its first standard inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Learning was observed in a number of sessions all of which were visited jointly with the leader of teaching, learning and assessment. A tour of the building was undertaken with the headteacher and site manager.
- Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised.
- The inspector spoke to the headteacher, the proprietor, leaders and teachers. A separate discussion was held with the headteacher of the Hawkswood Group, which manages the school's contract with the local authority.
- The inspector spoke to a range of pupils including some ex-pupils studying in the BCE 16–19 Academy.
- Documentation and policies were checked for compliance with the independent school standards.
- Behaviour and progress records were examined.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Brian Oppenheim, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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