

# Rye Studio School

The Grove, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7NQ

## Inspection dates

30 November–1 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for students	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Too few students achieve the academic standards of which they are capable.
- The progress of students overall is not as good as it should be.
- The rich, creative curriculum is not supported by enough additional elements to prepare students securely for their future career or education.
- The quality of teaching in some of the performance, design and creative disciplines is not found in other parts of the curriculum.
- The studio school is too heavily dependent on spare or part-time teaching capacity in Rye College.
- Too few students on 16 to 19 study programmes needing to improve their GCSE grades in mathematics do so.
- Weak student recruitment means that the studio school's budget is constantly under pressure.
- Teachers and students lack basic equipment such as books. Expensive resources are underused.
- The information and communication technology system is a barrier to effective management, teaching and learning.
- The attendance of a few vulnerable students limits their ability to complete their study programmes successfully.
- Until recently, governance was weak and did not hold leaders to account sufficiently.
- Governors and senior trustees in the Rye Academy Trust did not intervene soon enough when standards were visibly and unacceptably low.

### The school has the following strengths

- Many students settle well into learning at the Rye Studio School after turbulent periods in their educational career.
- Outcomes in art and design are strong at key stages 4 and 5 and in the foundation year programme.
- Students feel safe and able to express themselves freely. The studio school's inclusive atmosphere supports students' richly diverse identities.

## Full report

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

- Raise outcomes on academic programmes at all levels within the studio school, especially in mathematics, by:
  - focusing sharply on what each individual student needs to fill gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding caused at an earlier stage of their education
  - ensuring that personal coaching continues to support each student’s well-being while promoting attainment actively.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
  - sharing more widely the teaching expertise that exists in many of the performing, creative and visual arts
  - ensuring that teachers exploit the benefits of very small teaching groups by planning sessions that enable each student to excel.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - continuing to enhance local governance so that the sponsor and trustees can focus on strategic leadership of the overall trust
  - continuing to restructure local leadership so that individual leaders’ roles and responsibilities are clear to everyone
  - reorganising the curriculum so that it is affordable and sustainable.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Leaders did not take seriously enough the requirement to track students' performance clearly indicated at the last inspection. As a result, leaders were not aware that standards were not good enough. They ignored warning signs. Consequently, outcomes for learners have been, overall, much weaker than they should have been.
- Leaders focused heavily on the creative aspects of the curriculum. This was well intentioned and in keeping with the studio school's founding mission. However, all maintained schools are required to prepare students broadly for their future and life in modern Britain. Leaders did not assure the quality of work in other aspects of the school's provision. Consequently, too few students in 2015 and 2016 attained a broad range of qualifications.
- Leaders also failed to create sufficiently compelling reasons locally to attract students to the studio school in adequate numbers. It is less than half full. Inevitably, this has had a significant impact on the budget. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the current leadership team to justify the retention of some courses as many, especially A-level programmes, are no longer viable.
- The founding leaders of the studio school remain rightly proud of the vision. Regrettably, this impressive ambition was not tempered by a realistic understanding of all the managerial skills necessary to lead successful provision.
- Leaders did not, for example, routinely insist that teachers checked the quality of their work against that of other teachers locally. Leaders did not challenge weak performance soon enough. Leaders did not open up the studio school routinely to external verification, creating, in effect a 'walled garden'. Only recently has the new leadership team begun to insist that teachers attend, for example, training from the awarding bodies for each examination specification.
- Leaders were overly generous in their evaluation of the studio school's performance. The recently appointed interim principal, prompted by the new chief executive officer of the Rye Academy Trust, has undertaken a thorough and accurate assessment of the studio school's current performance. He judges rightly that aspects of its work require improvement.
- The interim principal is taking action now to halt the studio school's worrying decline. Fully supported by the recently reformed multi-academy trust, he is tackling underperformance, working to improve teaching and constantly encouraging the students to be the best they can be.
- Leaders are hampered in their work by a weak information and communication technology (ICT) system. This is the outcome of poor procurement and ineffective contractual and service level agreements. The website is a public illustration of the weakness of this aspect of the school's management of information.

- There is one middle leader in the studio school. As well as leading a subject effectively, the middle leader is also responsible for the academic and pastoral care of students in key stage 4. The key stage 5 leader was not present at the time of the inspection. Leaders from Rye College are supporting the interim principal and the middle leader to ensure that the studio school's performance improves quickly.
- Leaders have held true to the original founding mission of the studio school. The creative and expressive arts form the core of the curriculum. Parents like this and many opt positively for the studio school so that their children can benefit from this focused, unusual educational opportunity.
- Leaders have not, however, ensured that the rest of the curriculum provides students with equal access to other courses necessary to provide a broad and balanced educational experience. For example, most attain necessary qualifications in English, but not enough attain good passes in GCSE mathematics.
- Only recently, leaders have begun to manage the performance of teachers effectively. Some are now receiving focused support to improve their teaching. As yet, not enough effort is being made to encourage effective practitioners in the creative disciplines to share their expertise and skills with their colleagues. Many could act more effectively as positive professional models.
- Students receive an enriched curriculum which helps prepare them as individuals to take their part in modern, diverse British society. They develop an appropriate sense of themselves. They gain a strong moral purpose and admirable ethical code. Students integrate well socially, include everyone and have many opportunities to explore their spirituality through creativity. Students also benefit from several extra-curricular activities, such as organising and producing theatrical performances with and for students in other schools.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance requires further improvement. The restructuring of the trust and the local education board is timely and necessary. Governors were, for too long, prepared to take as read leaders' evaluation of the performance and relative successes of the studio school.
- Until recently governance was ineffective. The studio school has, so far, not given good value for money. Visibly poor performance was not challenged. Governors were not able to hold leaders to account because information about the studio school's results was not readily available.
- The governors had failed in their duty to ensure that all teachers had read part 1 of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. They had also failed to ensure that the website contained all the information required by the Department for Education.
- Governors have not insisted that leaders report how the pupil premium is being used effectively to help disadvantaged students overcome any barriers to learning.
- Changes to the trust in September 2016, improvements to governance immediately and the restructuring of the studio school's leadership have rescued the situation. Vital improvements are under way now. It is too soon to evaluate the full, or lasting, impact of these changes.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Despite shortcomings in governors meeting their statutory duties relating to safeguarding, students are safe in the studio school. Indeed, they are thriving.
- Leaders have created a caring and comfortable environment where even the most vulnerable students feel safe and able to express themselves fearlessly.
- Leaders ensure that students have access to balanced and sensible messages about mental health, presenting themselves appropriately in online contexts, and how to stay safe in relationships. Clear messages about sexual health are available in social areas.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable. There are real strengths in art and design, graphics, dance and drama. However, there are some areas of concern such as business studies and ICT.
- Teaching does not routinely lead to good or better outcomes for all students in mathematics. In 2016, 20 students re-sat their mathematics GCSE but only a quarter increased their grade.
- Teachers are constrained to prepare sessions which last for anything up to 100 minutes at a time. This is helpful for the creative disciplines where it is necessary for students to spend extended periods of time in focused work. It tests the concentration of students in other subjects. Teachers of academic subjects report that they find it hard to keep levels of motivation high in such sessions. Students inevitably disengage.
- Some subjects are delivered through the medium of a workshop which, in some instances, can be for a whole day, comprising three 100-minute sessions. Again, this is helpful in music, for example, where the expected outcome is a performance at the end of a day. Conversely, A-level psychology is only taught in this way, meaning that an absent student potentially misses all of the input for a week.
- Over half the sessions observed on the second day of the inspection were led by staff from Rye College. This is because they have space in their timetables. It is not because they have, necessarily, the same level of expertise as the core staff in the studio school.
- Teachers benefit from very small class sizes. In some A-level subjects, there is only one candidate. Teachers do not make the most of this privileged teaching context. Where teaching is weakest, all students receive the same work. Some may have completed it before, others find it too easy, and many do not receive the additional support required to enable them to access the key learning objectives.
- Some teaching lacks the degree of specialist subject knowledge found in the provision for the core creative disciplines. A few teachers make errors in correct spoken English and some lack precision in the content of what they are teaching.

- Teachers encourage sensible use of mobile phones to support students' learning. Students use their own devices to capture images, record sound, find ideas to support their work and share their outputs with others.
- Most-able students are supported to achieve well in the creative disciplines. Teaching is not strong enough or suitably stretching to enable these students to do as well as they should in the academic subjects.
- Disadvantaged students benefit from the personal coaching that is also available for all students. Many report that they are helped to settle into school life or receive valuable extra tuition when they are struggling. This is also true of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Psychological, social, emotional or personal barriers to learning are managed well by teaching and support staff.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The studio school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good.
- Many students arrive in the studio school with poor experiences of their previous time in education. Some were close to refusing to attend. Others had been excluded more than once from their existing schools. Many spoke about fearful times spent in maintained schools. Students presented an in-house, written drama about life in secondary schools which was powerful because of its worrying content.
- Rye Studio School intends to make sure that students have a better time in education than that which they reflect in their performances. Another powerful presentation of students' own composition charts strikingly the dangers of online 'suicide chat rooms'.
- Rye Studio School confronts head-on issues of prejudice, bullying, substance misuse, self-harm and identity. Students are clear that any derogatory language or racist, homophobic or transgender bullying would be dealt with robustly, by them. Teachers create and support this inclusive and nurturing environment.
- Even the most vulnerable students develop confidence and maturity during their time at Rye Studio School. Students with clear records of unacceptable behaviour in other schools attend well, respect the values and ethos of the studio school and cooperate well with teachers and coaches. Individuals in this group speak highly of what the school has done for them.
- Parents speak warmly of the work of the studio school. They are delighted that such provision is available for their children. Most are more concerned about their child's well-being than their academic progress. This means that they find the studio school's approach helpful and supportive of their children's adolescent needs.
- The work of personal and academic coaches is strong in ensuring that students complete their programmes of study. Coaches spend less time in their sessions challenging students to do even better in their programmes of study.

- The studio school ensures that students receive helpful advice and guidance about career pathways. Students value the opportunities they receive in good-quality work placements to understand the world of work and how they can prepare to join it.
- The studio school provides a positive space for students that might have existed previously in social care or 'youth and community' contexts. As such, it keeps many students at risk of falling out of education, in school and able to develop.
- Students demonstrate that the studio school has, over time, enabled them to grow in self-esteem and self-confidence. Students show this through their creative outputs and the clarity with which they speak about their individual 'works'.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students cooperate well with teachers, coaches, members of the public and visitors. They describe themselves as 'one big family'. They look out for each other, share each other's concerns and manage each other's behaviour carefully.
- The inspector saw no poor behaviour. No lessons were interrupted during the inspection, even though some of the students have lengthy track records of defiance and exclusion. This is a commendable commentary on the effectiveness of one aspect of the founding intention for the studio school: 'doing education differently'.
- The inspector also saw some students having their time wasted in lessons. They drifted off task but did not disrupt the others. This was because the staffing shortages mean that some classes have to be taught in mixed-age groups. In one case, students on three different levels of qualification were in the same room. For some, this led to unnecessary and unhelpful repetition of lessons previously learned.
- Students attend well. Their attendance in the current year compares favourably with that of all secondary-age students nationally. Attendance was not good enough in previous years. Leaders have tackled this over time, consistently raising levels of attendance to where they are now. Leaders have also reduced persistent absence. They are working effectively with a range of agencies to reduce even further the problem absence of a few vulnerable students.
- All students come to the studio school regularly because they enjoy the more relaxed setting and the fact that they are treated as adults. Parents make strenuous efforts to get students to school. This is particularly so when parents have made a positive choice to get students into the studio school from homes up to 40 miles away.
- Most students arrive at lessons punctually. A few drift in once the lesson is under way.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- Not all students attain the number or level of qualifications that they should. This is true for all groups of students, including those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The performance of these groups of students is comparable to that of their classmates, but the whole cohort's performance is below average in most areas.

- Historically, attainment has been weak. In 2015, standards were unacceptably low. In 2016, there was marked improvement, but standards for key stage 4 students were still below national averages in many areas.
- The unique curriculum does not allow students to gather a range of qualifications that enables direct comparisons with students in other schools nationally. However, in subjects where such comparisons are possible, for example English and mathematics, students do not do as well overall as they should. They do not make enough progress from key stage 2 to key stage 4.
- The inspector took into account that many students join the studio school after at least one change in their schooling. Clearly, this disrupts learning. However, the unique contribution to education that this studio school offers is not yet making enough difference to students' learning so that they leave with a good collection of results.
- The studio school's work is not yet having sustained impact on outcomes for disadvantaged students. Their progress and attainment do not compare favourably with those of other students nationally, despite the reduced class sizes that additional funding to support them makes possible. Gaps are not especially wide, mainly because overall performance is weak.
- The new leadership team is able to demonstrate, for current students, that better progress is being made now. This is based on a rigorous assessment of each student's starting point when they enter the studio school. Leaders are developing a more accurate monitoring system so that they can track the amount of progress made by each student from term to term. This was the area for improvement at the last inspection. It was not put in place until much too late.
- Students do well on vocational programmes, with many gaining starred distinctions on some of the BTEC diploma programmes. Others attain high standards in the creative disciplines. For example, the value added to students' learning in art and design is significantly above the national average at AS- and A level. In 2016, two thirds of the cohort attained distinctions in the foundation diploma.
- Around the studio school and in a range of video clips, there is abundant evidence of students' creative outputs. Much of this work is impressive and is a good basis for students' future careers in the creative industries.
- It is too soon to report whether or not the impact of their time in the studio school results in students securing acting roles, working in radio, television and film production, performing music or dance professionally, or selling works of art.
- There are no students who leave the studio school who are not in employment, education or training at the end of key stage 4. The numbers of students who leave Years 13 or 14 with no concrete plans for employment, education or training are broadly in line with the national average.
- In 2016, about a third of leavers from Year 13 went on to study at a university. Some of these were from families with no previous experience of higher education. Similarly, the vast majority of students completing the foundation diploma went on to study art in higher education.



## 16 to 19 study programmes

## Requires improvement

- The quality of the learning experience for students on 16 to 19 study programmes varies depending on the pathways they are following.
- Students receive good-quality teaching leading to positive outcomes in most of the creative disciplines. However, students' overall progress is limited by weaker teaching in many academic subjects.
- A majority of students leave Rye Studio School having attained eventually a grade C in GCSE English. However, only a minority leave the studio school having attained this important level of qualification in mathematics. This is despite several attempts across Years 12 and 13. Insufficient time and tuition are given currently to overcome this weakness.
- Until recently, leaders focused too heavily on ensuring that the creative disciplines were at the forefront of planning and teaching activity. They did not manage other aspects of the 16 to 19 study programmes with appropriate rigour.
- Leaders established a series of effective links with businesses in the creative and hospitality industries. This has led to positive work experience placements for many students. This complements the useful opportunities they received in Year 10. A few leave the studio school to take up jobs or apprenticeships with work experience employers.
- The employment situation locally means that some students prefer to leave the studio school before the end of their programme of study to secure paid work. This is understandable but has a significant impact on completion rates and success in academic subjects.
- Leaders ensure that all students receive regular and impartial careers advice and guidance. This complements further the coaching and personal mentoring that is a hallmark of the studio school.
- Many of the older students act as positive role models or peer coaches to younger students. Students across year groups integrate well, especially in social settings. This is fully in keeping with the original intentions of the 14 to 19 approach to later secondary phase education. There are strong examples of younger students collaborating with the older students in cross-phase productions and performances.
- Students learning how to stage and direct theatrical performances contribute their skills to productions in the Milligan Theatre at Rye College, next door. They collaborate well with teachers and pupils from the college. This contributes to an enriched extra-curricular experience for pupils in Rye College.

## School details

Unique reference number	139689
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10020049

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Other secondary
School category	Academy studio school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	137
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	95
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Ian Potter
Interim principal	Ian Gillespie
Telephone number	01797 228434
Website	<a href="http://www.ryestudioschool.co.uk">www.ryestudioschool.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@ryecollege.co.uk">office@ryecollege.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	24–25 June 2016

## Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website about its curriculum, the results attained by students, its strategy for the use of pupil premium funding, how it intends to safeguard pupils, and the organisation, operation and structure of the local governing body.

- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the curriculum, the results attained by students, use of pupil premium funding, how it intends to safeguard pupils, the organisation, operation and structure of the governing body and the business and pecuniary interests of individual governors.
- This is a much smaller school than average. There are more students on 16 to 19 study programmes than in key stage 4.
- The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- There are more girls than boys in the studio school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is greater than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is half the national average.
- The proportion of pupils receiving support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is over three times the national average. The vast majority of the needs accounted for stem from social, emotional or health considerations.
- Two of the current pupils in key stage 4 have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number have such statements in key stage 5.
- The studio school benefits from a stable population. A number of students join the school mid-year, often as a result of a managed move from another school or as an outcome of a decision from the East Sussex fair access panel.
- Rye Studio School is part of the Rye Academy Trust.
- No students are currently educated in alternative provision. Rye Studio School provides an alternative type of provision for students in other East Sussex schools. About a third of students each year transfer in from Rye College next door. There are several other feeder schools to Rye Studio School.
- The studio school does not meet the government's current floor standards.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. During the course of the inspection, the inspector deemed it to be an inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was extended by one full day.
- The inspector jointly observed learning in six lessons on the second day of the inspection. He observed teaching in all parts of the studio school and in all settings during two extensive learning walks. He also observed frequently more informal teaching in the central space while moving between activities.
- The inspector spoke with students informally on several occasions. He met formally with two groups of students.
- The inspector met with a group of five parents and carers. The inspector also had a conversation with one of the original parent governors.
- The inspector met regularly with the interim principal, the chief executive officer of the Rye Academy Trust and other, recently appointed senior leaders, many of whom have dual leadership roles in Rye College next door.
- The inspector met with two recently appointed trustees of the Rye Academy Trust. This was in addition to a telephone conversation with one of them who acts as the chair of the education board.
- The inspection was carried out in response to a complaint made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. The complaint was deemed to be a qualifying complaint and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the wider issues that were raised. The inspector sought to establish whether:
  - outcomes for learners in the studio school are good enough
  - leaders are acting quickly and rigorously enough to improve results.

## Inspection team

Dr Simon Hughes, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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