

The Studio at Knutsford Academy

Bexton Road, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0EA

Inspection dates

22–23 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive principal, very well supported by the governors and the headteacher, has created a clear vision of what this studio school should provide to best serve its pupils. His passion is infectious and he has inspired other staff to drive rapid improvement. The quality of leadership at all levels is excellent.
- The school's ethos is tangible. Many pupils start in the studio having not experienced recent success in education. Staff strive to find ways to help their pupils thrive. Success is celebrated and pupils' self-esteem is systematically developed. With increased confidence, good academic achievement and strengthened personal development, pupils are well prepared for good-quality further training and employment.
- Many pupils start key stage 4 from low starting points. They make good progress, particularly in English. In the sixth form, students make very good progress in A levels and most, but not all, vocational subjects.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers are clear about what they have to teach. The quality of their work is monitored closely. Each department has responsibility for deciding how best their subjects should be taught and there is highly effective partnership working between teachers.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly over the past year and pupils welcome this. Pupils have very positive attitudes in lessons and around the school. Attendance is improving, although a few disadvantaged pupils do not attend as well as others.
- Since opening, the studio school has made considerable changes to the range of courses it offers pupils. Key stage 4 pupils experience a broad, basic curriculum. However, there is a limited number of vocational courses available to them. Students in the sixth form are able to choose from an extensive range of A levels. A few of the students who have clear career intentions are not able to support their vocational courses with relevant additional qualifications.
- Pupils throughout the school undertake extended work experience. For the majority, these placements are both meaningful and valuable. In key stage 4, provision to develop employability skills is excellent. In the sixth form, a small minority of students do not benefit from good work experience or develop employability skills that are a good match to their intended careers.
- At key stage 4, most-able pupils are supported effectively and attain well. In the sixth form this is also the case throughout A-level courses and some vocational courses.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the curriculum further so that those pupils who have clear ideas about their future careers can choose a more coherent set of subjects which will support their specific aspirations.
- Increase attendance further, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Within the sixth form:
 - increase the proportion of Year 12 and Year 13 students who take part in meaningful work experience and develop good employability skills which relate more specifically to their intended careers
 - ensure that all vocational courses are taught as well as the best, particularly in relation to the most able.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- School leaders made a bold and principled move to start a studio school within the Knutsford Multi Academy Trust (MAT). They recognised the benefits that this type of school could offer a small number of pupils in the Knutsford and south Manchester areas. They have also demonstrated some considerable leadership capacity in recognising, in the very early years of the studio, it was not working as well as it should. The executive principal of the MAT, the studio's two headteachers and its local governing board made considerable changes to the structure, culture and ethos of the studio. This led to rapid and considerable improvement. Behaviour and pupils' attitudes have improved considerably. The quality of teaching has improved and this, combined with very strong pupil support, has driven up standards.
- The quality of leadership at every level is very strong. Every staff member is crystal clear about their responsibilities and what they are expected to achieve. Support systems for staff are highly effective. With high-quality support, training and guidance, the quality of teaching has strengthened further. Senior leaders and leaders of faculties make accurate assessments on the quality of the work for which they are responsible. With this detailed knowledge of how well systems and people are performing, refinements are made with confidence, continuing to drive yet further improvement. Procedures to appraise the quality of work of all leaders and teachers are rigorous.
- Pupils are very clear about the standards of behaviour expected of them. Pupils said that behaviour has much improved and also say that this is a very good thing.
- The curriculum is improving. Pupils study most of their core curriculum and GCSEs with pupils from Knutsford College, which is also part of the MAT. This enables them to work with other pupils and access teaching and learning facilities that are well resourced. Next year's curriculum will result in studio school pupils studying all of these core subjects together with college pupils. Currently, pupils can choose between two vocational pathways. These courses are popular. However, the currently available choice of vocational courses means that the needs of some pupils are not fully met.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional. Studio pupils combine with college pupils to take part in an extensive range of high-quality artistic, sporting, cultural and charitable events. Their leadership skills are developed through the sports leaders programme and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Leaders ensure that pupils' employability skills are developed systematically through their vocational and other courses. These include financial and computer skills. They receive very good, impartial careers advice. Pupils benefit considerably from opportunities and visits that build their confidence, social skills and self-esteem. This rich experience, excellent support and good achievement prepare pupils very well for their next steps in education, training or employment.
- Leaders and teachers understand in detail the barriers that sometimes make it difficult for disadvantaged pupils to flourish. Leaders target additional funding effectively to help break down these barriers very well, so disadvantaged pupils achieve broadly as well as others.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made good progress. This

is another aspect of provision that is very well led and managed. Pupils' needs are accurately assessed and teachers are well informed about support for these pupils. Additional funding the school receives to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is spent effectively.

Governance of the school

- Governors share the executive principal's vision of the studio school providing an outstanding education and are dedicated to ensuring that pupils and students receive this.
- An excellent blend of high-achieving experts from a wide range of services and businesses make up the local governing board. They have considerable capacity to offer support to the executive principal and headteacher to challenge both rigorously.
- In addition to ensuring that the quality of teaching improves, governors have ensured that the studio is financially viable and that both pupils and students are safe. The governors also inspire senior leaders to have the highest of aspirations and give them the confidence to try to achieve these goals.
- Governors are great champions of the studio school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have ensured that there are comprehensive, effective and rigorous safeguarding processes in place. Designated safeguarding staff, teachers and governors have received regular training, including on the 'Prevent' duty. There is a designated named teacher for children who are looked after. Staff know how to spot signs that might suggest that a pupil is not safe. They also know when and how to report their concerns. Staff maintain good relationships with a number of agencies concerned with safeguarding.
- Leaders and teachers develop close relationships with parents, particularly with parents of pupils who are considered to be vulnerable. Parents and studio staff work well together. This close partnership adds further strength to safeguarding and promotes high-quality pupil well-being.
- Managers carry out the appropriate recruitment checks and keep accurate records. Staff insist pupils follow safe working practices, including in practical workshops and laboratories. Leaders ensure that learning environments are well maintained. Students demonstrate a good understanding of the requirement to work safely both in the school and in workshops. The site is secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils are productive in lessons because teachers expect them to work hard on interesting topics and tasks. The culture in lessons is highly positive and supportive. This enables pupils to ask questions and express their options confidently.
- Teachers have a detailed knowledge of each of their pupils and how well they are

currently learning. This helps teachers to plan lessons well, ensuring that pupils take part in learning activities that match their capabilities and prior learning.

- Teachers have a very good understanding of the requirements of their courses. They collaborate well with colleagues, creating clear and detailed programmes of study. Teachers ensure that pupils systematically build knowledge, understanding and skills.
- In vocational lessons, pupils work enthusiastically. Teachers, over time, have established a safe and positive learning culture. This enables pupils to work independently. Pupils are rightly proud of the quality of their practical work.
- Leaders' expectations on how teachers assess pupils' work and give advice are firmly established. Each department adapts the whole-school policy to suit their particular subject. Pupils respond positively to advice. Homework is set frequently and pupils, in the main, complete it on time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff believe that building pupils' confidence and self-esteem are essential aspects of supporting them to achieve well. Teachers and studio school leaders know their pupils very well and spot when to encourage them to take on greater challenges and when to provide them with kindly support. The studio school works closely with staff from a wide range of health and welfare services. They give advice to school staff or work directly with pupils. These partnerships enable leaders and teachers to provide pupils with the very best support, ensuring that they are physically and mentally healthy and safe.
- The promotion of pupils' personal development is a critical aspect of ensuring that they learn well and flourish. Pupils are able to join pupils attending Knutsford College to take part in extensive, high-quality events and visits. Teachers also build pupils' social and emotional skills, which gives them confidence to interact with adults in their work environments.
- Pupils routinely take responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others because they have been taught effectively how to do so. In practical sessions, pupils understand the reasons for wearing suitable clothing and protective equipment. They know how to protect themselves in practical science lessons. They understand why maintaining a clean and tidy work environment is essential in keeping everyone safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils say that they are much happier in school because behaviour has improved greatly. They say that there is no bullying and studio records support this. Pupils have very mature views on prejudice, demonstrating respect and tolerance of all. The culture around the studio is friendly and harmonious.

- In lessons, pupils work hard and support one another. Pupils say that low-level disruption interrupts very few of their lessons. When this does occur, teachers deal with it well.
- Pupils from the studio school mix very well with pupils from the college. There is no discrimination, only harmony.
- At the start of this academic year leaders of the studio school introduced new ways of working to improve pupils' attendance. This has had an improvement overall and a considerable improvement in the attendance of Year 10 pupils. Some pupils' attendance is limited considerably by poor health, and this has a substantial effect on published attendance information. Some disadvantaged pupils have been slower to respond to the drive to improve attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Published information about how well students achieve in secondary schools is based on their progress between the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 11. Since students join this school in Year 10 or subsequently, using published information only to evaluate the quality of education is misleading as students will have had two years only at this school.
- This studio school, as is the case in most studio schools, offers a curriculum which is specifically tailored to the very specific needs of its pupils. Consequently, most Knutsford Studio Academy pupils will not sit a sufficient number of GCSE examinations to make a full contribution to the school's overall progress measure. This too will result in published information, most particularly the school's overall progress score, being misleading.
- Many pupils experienced disruption to their education prior to joining the studio. A large proportion did not progress well through their key stage 3 schooling.
- From their starting points, Year 11 pupils in 2016 made good progress. This was particularly so in English, where pupils, on average, made half a grade better progress than other pupils nationally. In mathematics, pupils' progress was similar to pupils nationally. Girls progressed very well. Boys made similar progress to boys nationally. Disadvantaged pupils made broadly similar progress to others in the school and others nationally.
- Pupils currently in Year 10 and in Year 11 are also making good progress. Boys are making better progress in English than they did last year. Once again, the difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school is negligible. Disadvantaged pupils' needs are clearly understood and they receive very good support and encouragement. Most-able pupils are pushed to attain high grades in all of their subjects and their progress is good.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made similarly good progress. Teachers direct learning mentors well on how to support these pupils. The starting points of some current pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very low. However, with additional support, they too make good progress.
- Pupils undertaking vocational courses enjoy their work and can see relevance to them.

They work enthusiastically and make strong progress. This success and their positive work experiences motivate pupils to work hard in all their subjects, and help them in their aim of getting onto a relevant and good-quality course or securing good employment when they leave the school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Students enjoy being part of this sixth form. They appreciate the extensive range of opportunities available to them. Students receive high-quality careers advice and guidance throughout the sixth form. Progress is good and many students attain high grades. Students' welfare is fostered as well in the sixth form as it is in key stage 4. Students' personal development is promoted very well and they are positive about the opportunities that lie ahead for them. On leaving the studio school, students are very well prepared for their next stages in education or employment.
- Leaders and managers of the sixth form are dedicated to providing high-quality education for all students from a range of abilities and aspirations. They monitor closely the quality of teaching and how well students are progressing. If they identify that a student is not performing as well as they should, teachers and leaders are quick to investigate why and to provide effective support. Leaders take decisive action if the quality of a course is not good enough. This was the case with sports studies. Working with a new partner, providing high-quality opportunities to develop employability skills and additional qualifications, this course is now one of the best in the school.
- Students are expected to study at least two vocational subjects. Students can also choose from an extensive range of A-level subjects. Leaders recognise that they need to make further improvements to the curriculum, particularly for those students who have clear career paths in mind. Currently, for a few of these students, there is a lack of rationale to the curriculum they follow.
- In this school, work experience forms a big part of students' education. For many, they work in industries or services that are highly relevant to their career aspirations. This helps them gain valuable experience, gives them opportunities to apply their learning and enhances their curriculum vitae. However, a few students are not currently benefiting from these high-quality experiences because their placements are not specifically relevant to their intended careers or the work they do is at a low level.
- Teaching is very effective. Teachers have an in-depth knowledge of the requirements of the courses they are teaching. In most cases, teachers also know the capability of students and how well they are currently performing. Consequently, teachers plan very effective lessons which offer a good balance of support to the students and challenge which develops their skills in learning independently. In all A-level courses the most able students flourish because teachers fully understand how capable these students are, and provide work that ensures that they perform at a high level. This is also seen in some vocational courses and is particularly evident in creative media, sports studies and public services.
- Many courses systematically enhance students' employability skills by ensuring that they work on 'real' assignments set by employers. A few teachers do not do enough to seek out these excellent opportunities and so assignments are limited to meeting course requirements. When this happens, students miss out on developing a range of

skills, including real-time project planning, project financial management and speaking with people in a business context.

- Last year, students who took A-level courses progressed very well, and some significantly so. A very large proportion of students who sat BTEC qualifications passed with merit or distinction. However, achievement in business studies and sports studies was not so strong. Current students continue to perform well at A level, and show improvement in vocational subjects.
- Generally, a very large proportion of students complete their studies through to the end of Year 13. Last year, a smaller proportion completed their studies in sport, public service and in finance.
- The school is particularly successful in enabling sixth-form students to gain a good GCSE pass in English if they did not achieve one in Year 11. The proportion of students improving their GCSE mathematics grade to at least a C is not as large as seen in English but much larger than seen nationally.
- In the majority of lessons and in their assignments, students' development of their written and verbal communication skills is good. When appropriate, subjects take the opportunity to improve students' mathematical skills and understanding. Students usually present their work well and with a good degree of accuracy. The vast majority take an active part in lessons and group work. They display good attitudes to learning, and participate with enthusiasm in a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. Students' attendance is improving, and recently it has improved significantly.

School details

Unique reference number	140813
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10024088

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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	102
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	50
Appropriate authority	The local governing body
Chair	Robert Armstrong
Headteacher	James Whittaker
Telephone number	01565 633294
Website	www.knutsfordacademy.org.uk
Email address	studio@knutsfordacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with DfE guidance on what academies should publish.
- The Studio at Knutsford Academy opened in September 2014 and is part of Knutsford Multi-Academy Trust, which provides secondary education to over 1,200 pupils aged between 11 and 19. Almost all students join the school at the start of key stage 4, after completing their key stage 3 education at Knutsford Academy. A small number join from other neighbouring schools.
- For the reasons explained in the report, the school did not meet government's current

floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

- The Studio at Knutsford Academy works with a range of local, national and international businesses to provide vocational opportunities for its students. The Studio also has a partnership with a local football club. This partnership offers a football academy where students can study for a BTEC sport qualification combined with a football coaching programme.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are both higher than average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the executive principal of the MAT, the headteacher and other leaders and managers. The lead inspector met with two members of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and students. They talked to pupils and students during their social times.
- The lead inspector met with a group of teachers and also spoke to individual teachers.
- The lead inspector spoke to a representative of the Studio Schools Trust.
- School documents were scrutinised, including: safeguarding checks; information about pupils' achievement; and records of checks on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors also visited classrooms with leaders to speak with pupils, look at their books and observe their learning.
- The executive principal and other senior leaders were party to many of the inspection activities.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, for the inspectors to consider. They took account of a parental survey recently completed by the school. Inspectors considered the views of four parents who texted their comments.

Inspection team

Neil Mackenzie, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrea Machell

Her Majesty's Inspector

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