

Space Studio Banbury

Ruskin Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9HY

Inspection dates

26–27 April 2017

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
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

- Space Studio Banbury provides a rare opportunity for its pupils to thrive in a school matched to their particular interests.
- Leaders have created a unique environment where 'difference is normal'.
- Pupils excel in mathematics and science subjects, aided by well-qualified subject experts and enthusiasts.
- The few disadvantaged pupils do as well as other pupils in the narrow range of subjects offered, and many do even better than their peers.
- Girls, even though there are many more boys, attain high standards at Space Studio Banbury, with some going on to skilled apprenticeships or prestigious degree courses.
- Space Studio Banbury prepares pupils well for employment, through a focused programme of skills development.
- Leaders have forged successful partnerships with relevant industries. Pupils work collaboratively on actual commercial or industrial projects.
- Pupils cooperate with each other and staff very well. Their behaviour is good. They respect each other's right to learn and, therefore, take care not to disrupt lessons.
- Vulnerable pupils are catered for well. Pupils like the nurturing environment which enables them to express themselves freely.
- The Aspirations Academies Trust (AAT) ensures that the school has all the resources it needs and holds local leaders to account robustly for the quality of the provision and outcomes.
- The trust also ensures that the school's work remains truly aspirational. Trust leaders remind staff regularly of the importance of AAT's eight conditions of learning.
- Some of the most able pupils do not attain the very high levels of which they are capable.
- A few pupils' and students' weak attendance is improving due to leaders' effective action.
- A minority of parents remain concerned that leaders do not communicate effectively and do not respond in a timely enough manner to reasonable requests for information.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils, especially the most able, who achieve the highest standards of which they are capable, by:
 - developing further the teaching skills of successfully recruited subject experts
 - creating even more challenging learning activities which spark young people's imagination.
- Reduce further the number of pupils who are persistently absent, and raise further the proportion of pupils who attend regularly, by:
 - extending enforcement of the good range of strategies that have already proved effective
 - ensuring that there is an even higher frequency of 'unmissable' learning opportunities.
- Increase parents' confidence in the leadership and management of the school, by:
 - communicating effectively the reasons for necessary changes to provision, personnel or plans
 - responding in a timely manner to parents' reasonable or well-founded concerns.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership of Space Studio Banbury is now highly effective. Leaders are focused intently on delivering the aspirational educational experience that the school's founders intended.
- Leaders have put in place recently systems and structures that are rapidly resetting the school on the right path. This has meant inevitable and often frequent changes. Not all of these changes were liked by parents and pupils. The reasons for changes were not always communicated clearly enough.
- Since February 2017, leadership has stabilised. Until then, parents had well-founded concerns that their initial choice of Space Studio Banbury was a mistake. However, pupils achieve well and secure appropriate places in further or higher education, apprenticeships or good-quality work placements.
- The executive principal, who took over in September 2016, is single-mindedly focused on raising standards. She is ably assisted by two vice-principals, one of whom acts as the day-to-day head of school. Though she was new to her role in February 2017, the head of school has already formed positive relationships with the pupils and is building effective working relationships with parents.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for the school and want the very best for each of the pupils. They are relentless in their pursuit of higher standards, raising expectations about, for example, uniform, attendance, and presentation of pupils' work. Many gains have already been made in these aspects of school life, though there is much still to be done to ensure that pupils record learning carefully.
- Leaders set clear standards for the quality of teaching. Teachers are held to account robustly for the quality of their work. Leaders monitor learning carefully and act decisively when pupils start to fall behind or need more help to keep up. This is essential because parents and pupils have made a positive choice to undertake study differently from key stage 4 onwards.
- Senior leaders in the trust make sure that expertise in other similar schools is shared with staff. This is helping to spread effective practice and to make more of the lessons 'unmissable'. Training is purposeful and leads to good professional development for teachers. Most teachers observe the trust-wide requirements related to their practice. Leaders use a range of indicators to judge their performance and feed these into decisions about pay progression.
- The school's curriculum reflects the original intention. This was to focus on a niche set of subjects that enable pupils to take up careers in mathematics or the sciences, including space exploration and travel. The school is meeting a regional need for skilled and specialist workers in high-technology industries. It is also meeting a national need for well-qualified students in engineering and the sciences. Most importantly, it is meeting pupils' needs to study such subjects among like-minded peers.
- Leaders have created an environment where it is 'cool' to be interested in higher-order thinking, phenomena outside 'normal' experience, and where knowledge is celebrated for its own sake. Pupils ask adults really challenging questions. Adults respond with

equally detailed and informed answers which deepen pupils' understanding.

- Leaders also ensure that pupils are prepared well for the world into which they are moving. Pupils are clear that they have regular opportunities to develop appropriate values for life in modern Britain. They talk about the inclusive nature of the school and how individuality is embraced. They openly discuss differences in sexuality and the lack of any prejudice-based discrimination. The school makes a positive contribution to pupils' moral and social development.
- A significant proportion of the curriculum is given over to the development of employability skills. Pupils benefit from a range of collaborative projects with both regional businesses and companies working on major civil or scientific engineering projects. This builds pupils' confidence so that over time they can communicate effectively with sometimes large audiences. The school makes a unique contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Leaders' commitment to pupils' intellectual development means that pupils receive many opportunities to explore creativity and phenomena beyond the realm of observable human experience. This is a remarkable, though different, way of supporting pupils' spiritual development. The presence of an observatory, trips to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the USA, and the Rutherford laboratories in Harwell, all contribute to pupils' understanding of and engagement with the wider universe.
- Good use is made of the small amounts of pupil premium funding and funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders ensure that such funding enables these pupils to have equal access to the curriculum and wider educational experiences. This results in equally strong attainment for the few disadvantaged pupils as for their peers. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities similarly do as well as their peers and better than pupils with similar starting points in other schools. This is because the specialist curriculum is better suited to their needs.

Governance of the school

- The arrangements for the governance of Space Studio Banbury are unusual. They comply fully, however, with all aspects of the governance of the Aspirations Academies Trust. The principals of AAT schools and the chairs of each school's local board comprise a district board. The Banbury district board oversees carefully the leadership and management of Space Studio Banbury.
- The local board holds leaders to account for the delivery of the original mission. The chair of the local board was one of the original founders and is deeply committed to the maintenance of the vision. All those responsible for governance exploit their personal and professional networks to provide learning or work experience opportunities for the pupils.
- The local board reviews performance information regularly. Trust executives challenge the local board to account for gains or dips in performance. All those with responsibility for governance have a detailed understanding of how well the school is doing. When necessary, they act decisively to change policies, plans or personnel.
- The trust ensures that the school has the resources it needs. Trust executives

recognise that the low numbers on roll puts the viability of the school at risk. Admirably, however, they are determined to maintain this different type of provision and have a clear financial plan to secure the stability of the school moving forward.

- Those responsible for governance rigorously undertake their duties relating to safeguarding and their statutory duties relating to the publication of relevant information on the website.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that all aspects of the school's work to keep pupils safe are thorough and timely.
- The checks that the school makes on adults wishing to work in or volunteer at the school are extremely rigorous and records are kept meticulously. Leaders review this work constantly.
- Leaders maintain equally strong records of any training in health and safety or safeguarding undertaken by staff. They carry out risk assessments for any activities likely to expose pupils to any danger. Leaders are watchful in assuring the cleanliness and maintenance of the site.
- Staff are diligent in providing pupils with good-quality instruction, training and advice on safeguarding matters. Pupils know how to stay safe personally, in relationships, online and, where relevant, in cars. Pupils are taught effectively how to identify abusive or grooming behaviour and how this can lead to radicalisation or extremism. Pupils say they feel safe at the school. Most parents agree.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have access to good-quality information about the prior attainment of their pupils. They plan learning opportunities that take account of these starting points. Pupils have particular interests in mathematics and science. This is shared by the small group of core staff who work daily in Space Studio Banbury.
- Teachers are experts in their fields. They understand well the depth and breadth of their subject disciplines. They communicate their enthusiasm for the subject matter well. Some learning is supported by highly qualified and inspirational volunteers or visiting speakers. This adds value to the pupils' experience.
- Not all teachers, however, regularly challenge very bright pupils to work at the highest levels or ignore the constraints of examination specifications. Consequently, the most able pupils often find the work too easy. Their progress is not as good as it could be even though they attain respectable qualifications. Teachers do not always support pupils to 'reach for the stars'.
- Much of the teaching is organised around collaborative projects. Pupils learn how to lead learning in these settings, basing their research and development on rich questions. In one session, Year 10 pupils were working out how to land safely a space probe on Mars. They were successfully applying their knowledge of safety features in cars to their prototype landing module.
- Teachers and pupils make highly effective use of information and communications

technology. In a Year 13 lesson pupils were debating 'facts' presented in a highly informative clip of recent space probe explorations of the planet Saturn. In an elective session, a group of pupils were skilfully using virtual reality technology to design furniture layouts and a mock-up of the inside of Dr Who's Tardis.

- Teachers check learning frequently in lessons. They provide instant feedback on work. Often, this is in the context of small-group work so that dialogue is straightforward. Teachers provide frequent opportunities for examination candidates to practise sitting papers. They work together to check the accuracy of answers. All work is aligned to examination specifications and assessment criteria.
- Teachers receive good-quality support from the very small group of teaching assistants who work with pupils in lessons.
- Recently, some of the time used for aspects of the Space Studio's different curriculum has been diverted to revision sessions or direct interventions. This is because leaders judged pupils to need additional support to make up for shortcomings previously in teaching in some subjects. Teaching in key stage 4 English, for example, has been reorganised so that all pupils are on track to attain the important GCSE national benchmark.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. This is a strength of its work. A few parents reported how Space Studio has 'been the making' of their child. Pupils develop confidence as a result of focused work in an aspect of human experience which they find fascinating.
- Pupils interact and integrate well. They work effectively in groups, developing the skills they will need for later in life. Pupils learn how to handle stressful situations with maturity.
- Pupils also learn how to study independently. This helps those who aspire to have long academic careers in applied sciences such as medicine or clinical psychology. Pupils form good learning habits, though they do not take as much care as they should in maintaining tidy records of their learning in workbooks.
- Teachers create ample opportunities for pupils to explore leadership roles and thus develop self-confidence. External partners also support pupils' developing self-confidence. The mature and nurturing atmosphere encourages pupils to express themselves freely and independently.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves well. They are polite and courteous to each other, staff and visitors.
- Pupils learn the importance of collaborative working and teamwork and this encourages a purposeful and enterprising atmosphere. This is particularly evident in the large

learning spaces when pupils engage actively in core project work.

- Historically, pupils' attendance was weak. The persistent absence of a minority of pupils was too high. The executive principal, upon appointment, set about changing this. There has been a dramatic shift in patterns of attendance since September 2016. This drive for improvement has been given fresh impetus with the appointment of the new head of school. Currently, attendance is in line with good attendance in other schools. The number of pupils with poor, persistent absence has fallen.
- Disadvantaged pupils now attend more regularly than their peers. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are now absent much less frequently than pupils with similar starting points in other schools.
- Leaders seldom resort to exclusion. This is because pupils respect the very clear expectations for their behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' attainment is good. For example, in 2016, the vast majority of Year 11 pupils attained results in GCSE examinations above the national averages. There were particular strengths in mathematics and physics.
- Pupils' progress is broadly in line with national averages. Published information shows that the Year 11 pupils in 2016 made typical progress, even though they changed schools in Year 10.
- There are many more boys than girls but this does not impact negatively on girls' performance. Many do very well, attaining high standards at Space Studio Banbury. Some go on to high-level apprenticeships or study in top universities.
- The very few pupils who joined the school with low prior attainment, on average, made more progress in 2016 than pupils with similar starting points nationally. This was the case for those who entered the school with middle prior attainment.
- The most able pupils usually attain respectable results. Their progress is not as good as it could be. As such, these pupils do not achieve the highest results of which they are capable. Notably, their progress in English was below national standards in 2016. Leaders have put in place a range of measures to avoid this happening for the current Year 11 pupils. This includes the provision of better quality teaching from subject experts in the sister school, Banbury Academy.
- Disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with their peers. This means that sometimes their achievements are higher than those of other pupils nationally.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also achieve standards that compare well with their peers. Some of these pupils function at a very high level and could be expected to attain even higher standards.
- Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds do at least as well as White British pupils and often better. Those who speak English as an additional language make better progress than their peers, excelling in mathematics.
- There are clear differences in performance between pupils studying mathematics and science subjects and the same pupils studying humanities or languages, especially at

the top end of the ability range. This reflects the school's original foundation and its primary function as a specialist school for the sciences and mathematics.

- All pupils are able to read fluently and use mathematical skills efficiently across the curriculum. They challenge each other, and their teachers, with questions arising from their natural curiosity and interest.
- Pupils are increasingly well-prepared for careers in engineering and pure and applied sciences as well as for undertaking higher-level study. Many have an unusually detailed knowledge of the qualifications framework through which they must proceed if they wish to practice as, for example, surgeons or psychiatrists.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Currently, the 16 to 19 study programmes at Space Studio Banbury are undertaken by just a few students in each subject. The trust's leaders have made a positive commitment to retain this different provision so that it is available for young people with relevant interests and aptitudes.
- Progress across each of the subjects is typically good, with strengths in mathematics and physics. Students attained good results in these subjects, among others, in 2016. Students in Year 13 who sat AS-level qualifications in 2016 achieved good standards and are on track to attain well in their final A-level examinations.
- The success of students on 16 to 19 study programmes is partly due to the small sizes of classes. Students benefit from direct tuition and the amount of focused support teachers are able to provide. Pupils benefit from teachers' extensive subject knowledge.
- The few students who join the 16 to 19 study programmes without a GCSE grade C in English are given support and extra tuition to reach this milestone. All pupils have at least a grade C in mathematics when they join at the beginning of Year 12.
- Leaders are ambitious for the students and know them all well. Leaders are currently reviewing the curriculum so as to make the 16 to 19 study programmes as attractive as possible to new recruits. Students join the sixth form from a wide range of secondary schools, not just those in Banbury.
- Students generally complete their programme of study successfully. A lower-than-average proportion does not stay for the full two years. Those who are unsuccessful are given every opportunity to repeat their studies so that some are in Year 14 of their schooling.
- Some parents and students commented that they did not have access to good-quality careers information, advice and guidance. Some students felt that they would have liked more help with applications to university and the whole Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) process. Leaders provided clear evidence that preparation for the world of work and university life form a considerable proportion of curriculum time. Leaders are currently reviewing the extensive employability programme to check it is as effective as it needs to be.
- Students benefit from an extensive range of work-shadowing experiences and other projects aimed at developing their confidence and employability. As with younger

pupils, this gives them opportunities to work in realistic work-like contexts.

- Students behave impeccably. They demonstrate admirable leadership qualities and put many of these to the service of younger pupils. Students' behaviour contributes well, therefore, to the friendly, nurturing and family-like climate in the school.

School details

Unique reference number	140886
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10024488

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	34
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Steve Kenning
Principal	Sylvia Thomas
Telephone number	01295 257942
Website	www.spacestudiobanbury.org
Email address	office@spacestudiobanbury.org
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 Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Space Studio Banbury is a much smaller-than-average school. The number of pupils on roll has declined recently.
- Girls comprise just a quarter of the school's population.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.

- About half the pupils are from White British backgrounds. A few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- Pupils come from households with below-average levels of deprivation.
- Space Studio Banbury is on the same campus as Banbury Academy. The executive principal of Banbury Academy is also executive principal of Space Studio Banbury.
- Space Studio Banbury is part of the Aspirations Academies Trust.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning across the curriculum in 13 parts of lessons. Senior leaders observed learning jointly on most of these occasions.
- The inspector also observed pupils learning independently in the open spaces and quiet study areas. The inspector looked at a range of pupils' work and discussed projects and other tasks with them.
- The inspector met formally a group of four key stage 4 pupils and a group of four key stage 5 students. He spoke with several other pupils informally. The inspector took into account 55 responses to Ofsted's confidential online pupil survey.
- The inspector met with school leaders and representatives of the local and district boards. He also met with representatives of the Aspirations Academies Trust. The inspector considered the views of 24 members of teaching staff who contributed to Ofsted's confidential online survey.
- The inspector met with a group of five parents. He considered carefully 27 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and 13 free-text comments submitted by parents. He also took into account one letter received during the inspection.
- The inspector examined a wide range of the school's documents including leaders' own evaluation of its performance. He looked at documents relating to the governance of the school. He also reviewed key policies and materials relating to safeguarding, the curriculum and the school's plans for the future. With school leaders, the inspector examined in detail the performance of pupils currently in the school.

Inspection team

Simon Hughes, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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