Digitech Studio School

Tower Road North, Warmley, Bristol BS30 8XQ

Inspection dates	18–19 October 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders, academy councillors and the trust have not ensured that teaching, learning and assessment are consistently good. Some leaders do not have the skills they need to improve teaching more rapidly.

- Pupils' progress varies across the school. It is not consistently good in English, mathematics and science. Standards and achievement require improvement.

- Teaching does not routinely provide pupils with sufficient challenge to speed up their progress. Expectations of how pupils present and complete their work vary considerably.

- Pupils, particularly boys, often lack the skills and confidence to write well. Pupils' literacy skills, including spelling, punctuation and grammar, are not good enough.

- The oversight of partnership arrangements for post-16 media programmes requires improvement. Leaders do not check carefully enough that the partner provider is ensuring that teaching and assessment are effective.

- Provision for pupils' personal, social and emotional development requires improvement, including in the post-16 partnership provision. Leaders have only very recently introduced a suitably comprehensive programme and it is too soon to see whether this is having a significant impact.

- The assessment of students' work in the partnership provision requires improvement.

- Leaders' evaluation of the impact of their actions is not sharp enough. This adversely affects how well leaders and councillors can review actions and plan further improvements.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and the trust have successfully developed a curriculum that is closely matched to their vision for a specialist provider of vocational and academic education.

- The partnership with a large local employer is providing an authentic, high-quality and innovative learning experience for post-16 students. This provides students with valuable insight into future choices and careers.

- The school provides a strong focus on skills for employment, training and further education. For example, media students typically organise and present their work to a standard expected by the media industries.

- Leaders have successfully implemented a range of strategies to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour. Attendance is above average and behaviour is typically good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on pupils' outcomes, including in post-16, by:
  - ensuring that teaching is sufficiently challenging to speed up pupils' progress and improve their skills, knowledge and understanding in all subjects
  - raising expectations of the quality of pupils' work, including presentation and accuracy
  - ensuring a strong focus on the quality of pupils' writing, particularly pupils' ability to write neatly, accurately and effectively at length.
- Strengthen the impact of leadership and management by:
  - developing the capacity of leaders at all levels to drive improvement, particularly to the quality of teaching
  - improving the evaluation of the impact of actions taken, so that leaders and academy councillors can better understand what is working and why, and plan future actions more effectively.
- Improve pupils' personal development and welfare by fully implementing the new programme for personal, social and emotional education and well-being, including in post-16.
- Improve the impact of 16 to 19 study programmes in the partnership provision by:
  - improving the oversight of partnership arrangements to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are of the highest quality
  - putting in place arrangements to check students' progress towards their targets and provide support for their personal, social and emotional well-being.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- Despite improvements in some important areas, leaders and managers have not ensured that teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' outcomes, are consistently good. Improvements to teaching have had some, but not sufficient, impact and there are also important weaknesses in the provision for pupils' personal development which have only recently been addressed. Leaders have not made sure that checks on the quality of all post-16 courses are rigorous enough.

- Leaders have recently introduced a new framework for checking the quality of teaching and providing support for teachers' professional development. This framework is linked to teachers' targets and the annual appraisal process. Opportunities to work together to improve teaching have been well received by staff, but this new framework has not had sufficient time to eliminate weaknesses, such as reducing the variation in teaching quality across the school.

- Senior leaders and the trust are working hard to develop the skills and confidence of leaders at all levels. Although this work is beginning to bear fruit, leaders throughout the school are not yet making a sufficiently strong contribution to improvement. For example, subject leaders are not being held fully and effectively to account for their impact in driving improvements to teaching, learning and assessment. Recent initiatives to improve pupils' literacy skills, particularly the quality of pupils' writing, are not yet fully established across the school.

- Suitable actions to improve the school are in place for the next stages of the school's development. However, this improvement planning is not fully underpinned by a rigorous process of self-evaluation. For example, plans for the use of the pupil premium, and for the deployment of funding to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, are not linked to clear checkpoints and impact measures. This makes it difficult for leaders and academy councillors (governors) to assess how well the school is improving.

- Leaders and the trust have successfully developed a curriculum which is now more suited to the school's vision and ethos as a specialist provider of vocational and academic education. In the past, the school's curriculum was, to an extent, determined by providing for pupils joining from a school on the same site which was closing. As the school has matured, a more bespoke and appropriate curriculum has been designed, including through a range of enrichment choices.

- Pupils from schools across the area are now choosing the school because of the distinctive curriculum it provides. For example, a significant partnership with a large local employer is providing an authentic, high-quality and innovative learning environment for post-16 media students.

- Despite these improvements, there are weaknesses in how well the curriculum, including through tutorial sessions, caters for pupils' social, emotional and personal development. Although leaders have rightly identified these weaknesses, a more suitable programme to meet pupils' needs has only very recently been put in place.

- The leadership of behaviour and attendance is very effective. Since the school opened,

there have been marked improvements in both aspects. Any concerns that affect pupils' attendance are quickly identified and tackled. The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision benefit from the support they receive.

Governance of the school

■ Academy councillors (governors) are fully committed and dedicated to the school's success. They ask challenging questions about how well the school is meeting its aims and ambitions. Sometimes, the impact of this challenge is limited by the quality of the self-evaluation that leaders provide. This does not always provide the insight into the impact of leaders' actions that councillors require.

■ Academy councillors benefit from a range of support to improve their skills and confidence, including through the trust. Their understanding of the strategic role of governance is developing. The trust ensures close monitoring of the work of the academy council, although this has not yet ensured that the council is fully effective in supporting improvement at the school.

Safeguarding

■ Leaders, academy councillors and the trust have ensured that arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

■ Procedures to ensure the safe recruitment of staff and their suitability are fully in place. Staff training is thorough and regularly checked. Safeguarding matters are routinely reported to the academy council.

■ Where there are concerns about pupils, referrals are timely and record-keeping is thorough. Leaders manage any concerns carefully and ensure that work with partner agencies is prompt and effective.

■ Leaders make every effort to avoid the use of exclusion. Where exclusion is used, arrangements are in place to ensure that this does not put pupils at risk. The school makes good use of partnerships across the trust and with other schools locally to support pupils at risk of exclusion.

■ Leaders encourage pupils and adults to share any concerns they may have, including about bullying or any discriminatory behaviour. This reflects an open culture where pupils' safety in school is paramount.

■ During the inspection, inspectors identified a concern over the risk assessment of students working off-site on assignments as part of the post-16 partnership provision. Leaders and the trust acted swiftly to remedy this issue, and the safety of students was not put at risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment   Requires improvement

■ The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies across the school, and is not yet good overall. Teaching is not strong enough in English, mathematics and science to help lower-attaining pupils to catch up, or to challenge the most able to achieve more highly.

- Expectations of pupils' work are often too low. This includes how pupils set out their work in mathematics, where too little attention is sometimes paid to accuracy and presentation.

- In mathematics, leaders have focused on tackling the gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge. However, too much of the work pupils tackle in mathematics does not push them to make faster progress, right from the start of Year 10. Pupils who spoke with inspectors agreed. They feel their work is sometimes too easy and their targets should be more challenging.

- Expectations of pupils' written work vary greatly. Too many pupils, particularly boys, do not write confidently or lack the skills or resilience to do so. It is too soon to see much impact from leaders' new focus on pupils' writing. For example, weaknesses in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar are not being tackled consistently by staff.

- Nevertheless, the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. Some teaching shows strong subject knowledge. Previous non-specialist teaching and the use of temporary staff has been tackled effectively.

- As a result of stronger teaching in some subjects, more pupils are working at the standards expected for their age. For example, in history, geography and product design pupils are making better progress. In art and design, assessment and feedback make an effective contribution to learning in this subject.

- On the whole, learning is managed well and pupils say their lessons are orderly and purposeful. Relationships between staff and pupils are constructive and respectful. Pupils say that they have greater confidence in their teachers to help them to succeed. Some pupils who said they had struggled in their previous schools commented to inspectors how much they appreciate the individual care and support they now receive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.

- The quality of pupils' wider education, outside of examined subjects, requires improvement, including in the post-16 provision. Pupils have a weak understanding of issues and concerns to do with their social, emotional and personal development. The promotion of pupils' welfare, well-being and safety through the curriculum, tutorials and the assembly programme is underdeveloped. Their knowledge of contemporary issues, including, for example, of faiths and cultures, is limited.

- Despite these weaknesses, leaders have only recently introduced a suitably comprehensive programme to tackle these shortcomings. It is too soon to see the impact of these changes on pupils' personal development and welfare. This is also the case for students in Years 12 and 13. The limited tutorial programme for students who attend courses provided in partnership with a local employer is not fully effective in meeting the full range of students' personal development and welfare needs.

- Nevertheless, the school provides effective care for pupils and keeps a close eye on

how well they settle into school. Many pupils appreciate the 'fresh start' they have at Digitech.

■ Through their 'digitech plus' sessions, pupils in Years 10 and 11 are helped to understand a wide range of future options and choices for employment, further study or training, such as apprenticeships. Pupils value the impartial advice and guidance they receive and are developing good employability skills, such as making job applications and undertaking work experience.

Behaviour

■ The behaviour of pupils is good.

■ Behaviour around the school and in lessons is calm and orderly. Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are typically positive and productive.

■ Leaders have recently introduced a new system known as 'ready to learn'. This is helping to pinpoint where behaviour in a few lessons sometimes gets in the way of learning. Although disruption in lessons is unusual, some pupils, particularly boys, have not yet developed consistently good attitudes to learning.

■ Bullying, including the use of discriminatory language or behaviour, is rare. Pupils have confidence in the school's approach to tackling any such instances. As a result of the school's focus on improved behaviour, the proportion of fixed-term exclusions from school is falling, and few pupils are excluded more than once.

■ Attendance is above average and has improved steadily since the school opened. Most notably, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, is strong. Leaders keep a close eye on any decline in pupils' attendance and take swift action. This includes where patterns in pupils' absence may indicate possible safeguarding concerns.

Outcomes for pupils	**Requires improvement**

■ There is too much variation in pupils' progress across the curriculum and, overall, outcomes require improvement. This is true for all groups of pupils, including for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This variation is apparent between subjects and within some subjects. This is particularly the case in English, mathematics and science, where pupils are not making consistently good progress over time.

■ The achievement of the most able pupils also requires improvement. Some teaching is not challenging enough to help pupils to achieve more highly. For example, the curriculum in mathematics is not effective in developing pupils' reasoning skills and their deeper understanding of the methods and techniques they learn. By contrast, where teaching has higher expectations, progress is more rapid and sustained.

■ Weak literacy skills are preventing pupils, particularly boys, from making sufficiently rapid progress. Too many pupils do not present their work well, or take enough care with handwriting. Some pupils lack the confidence and skills to write well at length. Some pupils' poor spelling, punctuation and grammar are not being tackled consistently well by staff.

■ Nevertheless, rates of progress for pupils currently in school are improving, including

for disadvantaged pupils. Actions to tackle the weakest teaching, including limiting the use of temporary and supply staff, are having a positive impact.

- Differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers are reducing only slowly. Leaders do not understand enough about the impact of previous initiatives on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

- Boys' achievement is not as strong as girls', although the difference is narrowing. Overall, boys tend to do less well in English than girls do. Boys are not challenged enough to produce work of a higher quality.

- Pupils enjoy their learning in the school's specialist subjects. Pupils say the links to practical and workplace contexts add greatly to the relevance and enjoyment of learning. Learning in art and design, media and in photography is improving.

16 to 19 study programmes	**Requires improvement**

- In the past, the post-16 curriculum was not focused on the school's specialist subjects sufficiently. During the first two years after the school opened, a high proportion of students following academic and vocational routes left before the end of their courses. Of those who completed their programmes, too few achieved the grades expected of them.

- Since September 2017, leaders have revised the post-16 curriculum to provide students with clear choices and pathways from Year 10 to Year 13. The curriculum has been redesigned to support the school's focus on creative, media and digital technologies. A small number of students also follow a limited number of academic courses on the main school site.

- As a result of this improved course offer, and through better information, advice and guidance, students are now on track to complete their courses successfully. This is the case for students following vocational and academic routes.

- The majority of post-16 students follow media or performing arts courses taught at two centres in Bristol through a partnership arrangement with a large local employer. This arrangement started in September 2017 and has contributed to a marked increase in the number of post-16 students at the school. The popularity of these courses is seen in the improvements in attendance of post-16 students over the last year.

- However, leaders do not check the quality of provision for students in this partnership closely enough. They have not ensured that the 16 to 19 study programmes are sufficiently comprehensive. For example, leaders have not identified weaknesses in the assessment of students' work and have not made sure that the provider is checking and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Leaders have not ensured that all students in the partnership provision who need to continue to study GCSE English or mathematics are able to do so. However, leaders have plans to ensure that suitable arrangements for English and mathematics lessons are in place.

- Teaching does not ensure that students consistently strive to achieve the highest standards. At times, teachers too readily accept work that contains spelling and grammar errors and do not ensure that students are taught effectively about how to

correct these errors.

- The assessment of students' work in the partnership provision requires improvement. Teachers do not monitor learners' progress, or provide sufficient feedback on the work they are producing. Students do not get enough high-quality feedback about what they have done well or what they need to do to improve.

- Tutorial time is not effective enough to meet students' needs. Staff in the partnership provision do not keep a close enough check on students' progress, set suitable targets or support students' social, emotional and personal well-being sufficiently. Similarly, for students following courses provided on the school site, a suitable programme for students' personal development has only recently been introduced.

- Senior leaders acted quickly during the inspection to tackle a weakness in safeguarding that they had not previously identified. As a result, arrangements to assess students' safety while filming on location are secure.

- Students in the partnership provision benefit from working in a media centre in the centre of Bristol. This gives them a very good insight into the jobs and behaviours of employees in the media industry. Students use resources and equipment well to produce innovative work. Media students use websites to organise their work and present it professionally and to a standard expected by the media industries.

- Students' work is mostly of a good standard. In media, students produce websites and blogs to record and manage their own work. Films produced by students use a good range of camera and editing techniques. Media students quickly gain a good understanding of their responsibilities to abide by legal and ethical expectations of the industry.

- Teachers on media and performing arts courses have very good experience of their respective industries. Through the partnership, there are excellent opportunities for students to work with clients from community groups, voluntary organisations and businesses in Bristol.

- The curriculum provides a strong focus on the skills students need for employment and higher education. For example, students following a media programme through the partnership develop their ability to take decisions independently by planning their day's work and filming schedules.

School details

Unique reference number	142079
Local authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10037179

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	241
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	118
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of board of directors	Professor Jane Harrington
Chair of academy council	Chris Smith
Principal	Lis Jolley
Telephone number	0117 9927100
Website	www.digitechstudioschool.co.uk
Email address	info@digitechstudioschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Digitech Studio School is much smaller than the average secondary school. Pupils typically join the school at the start of Year 10 from other secondary schools. Its specialism is in creative and digital media. It is part of the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF), a large multi-academy trust based in the south west of England. Across the federation, local governance arrangements are known as Academy Councils, and governors as academy councillors.

- The school works in partnership a large local employer, 'BoomSatsuma', which is a creative media provider. In addition to 16 to 19 study programmes provided at the

school, courses are also provided at 'The Engine Shed' and 'The Station' based in Bristol city centre. Most of the students following courses at 'BoomSatsuma' are in Year 12 and the remainder are in Year 13. A very small number of academic courses for post-16 students are also provided on the main school site. The school makes use of alternative provision at the 'Pathways Learning Centre' in South Gloucestershire.

■ The school first opened in September 2015, on the site of The Grange secondary school. It moved into new buildings on its existing site in November 2016 and the current principal was appointed in December 2016.

■ 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.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a range of lessons and other activities. They talked to many pupils about their experiences of school and their learning. In visits to lessons, inspectors looked at the quality of pupils' work and talked to pupils about their learning. Many of these lessons were observed jointly with members of the school's leadership team.

- Discussions took place with the principal and with a senior principal supporting the school as part of the Cabot Learning Federation. Inspectors also met with other leaders and with various members of staff. The lead inspector also held meetings with two members of the academy council and with representatives from the Cabot Learning Federation multi-academy trust.

- Inspectors considered the school's self-evaluation, school improvement planning and plans for the use of pupil premium and special educational needs funding. A range of assessment information, behaviour and attendance records and the minutes of meetings of the academy council were looked at. Safeguarding records and documentation were also examined.

- The views of 27 staff and 24 pupils and students who responded to online surveys were also considered. Inspectors looked at the seven responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

| Lee Northern, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Steven Tucker | Her Majesty's Inspector |

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.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted