

Inspection of Walsall Studio School

14a Lower Hall Lane, The Goldmine Centre, Walsall, West Midlands WS1 1RL

Inspection dates: 17–18 September 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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What is it like to attend this school?

This school gives students a fresh start in education. Many who have not been successful in their last school thrive here. Students enjoy learning, especially in the practical areas they choose to study. They behave well and are keen to learn. The school is calm and orderly throughout the day.

Staff support and look after students very well. They know each student well, including any individual needs they have. Students are happy and feel safe in school because of the support that staff give them. They are confident that adults will help them overcome any problems they face. For example, bullying is very rare in the school. When it happens, staff deal with it quickly.

All staff and governors are committed to students doing as well as they possibly can at the school. Students achieve particularly well in the practical subjects they all study. These include music, dance, drama and digital media. Many students carry on studying these subjects after they leave the school. Several move on to prestigious conservatoires. The school ensures that all students are well prepared for their next steps, whether they leave at the end of Year 11 or Year 13.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school was set up in 2013 with the aim of promoting vocational learning in a small, professional setting. It also aimed to be part of regenerating the local community. Many staff and governors who set up the school up are still present. They have been successful in achieving this vision since the school opened.

Students study mainly vocational subjects. In Years 10 and 11, they also study English, mathematics and science. Those who do not achieve a grade 4 in English and mathematics in Year 11 continue with these subjects into the sixth form. Teachers plan learning well in almost all subjects. Vocational subjects and English are particularly successful. Students learn well in these subjects. Many achieve excellent results at the end of Year 13.

All students complete extended projects in their practical subjects. These often involve working with experts from outside the school. Here, students apply what they are learning to real-life situations and develop skills that will help them in later life.

In recent years, students have not achieved well in GCSE mathematics by the end of Year 11. However, those who stay into the sixth form have been more successful. Leaders have recently made several changes in mathematics. There are early signs that things are improving.

Leaders know that how science is taught in Years 10 and 11 is not successful at the moment. Students do not learn well enough.

Students enjoy school. Many told inspectors how much they now enjoy their learning. Because of this, they attend regularly and behave well. They accept each other and value those who are different from them. They are happy, courteous and polite. The school is a harmonious community. One student told inspectors, 'Nobody is seen as being different.'

The school provides many ways for students to develop as responsible young people. They learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They learn how to manage money and how our country's democratic system works. Many students help in the school and the local community. For example, they perform in other schools and they collect food for the local food bank.

Pastoral care for students is a strength of the school. All staff contribute to making sure that students are supported well. Every student has a personal coach who helps them in any way they need. This might be providing careers advice or help with organising their time, or helping them catch up with work they have missed. Many students told inspectors how much they value this support.

The school does not currently have a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). They hope to appoint one soon. The Mercian Trust, to which the school belongs, is providing help while the school has been without a SENCo. This means that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported appropriately. However, there are gaps in students' support. For example, those who struggle with reading are not helped as well as they could be.

The school is well led. The staff form a united team who are proud to work there. They value the support and guidance that leaders give them. Governors are committed to the school. They carry out their duties diligently. The Mercian Trust provides much helpful support for the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff understand that keeping students safe is their top priority. They are vigilant to the signs that students might need extra help. This is because leaders have trained staff well. The school's safeguarding team quickly deals with any concerns about students. Members of the team make sure that students get the help they need, from outside agencies when appropriate. Leaders are tenacious. They challenge and chase if they believe that a student is not getting the right support.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures are clear and detailed. Leaders carry out all required checks on new staff before they start work at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Standards of achievement in mathematics, especially at the end of Year 11, are a cause for concern, despite some improvement this year. The recently appointed curriculum leader has correctly identified past weaknesses in the mathematics curriculum. Revised content and teaching strategies are now in place but it is too soon to judge their success. Leaders should ensure that the revised curriculum is implemented well so that standards rise.
- The school has been without a SENCo for several months. The lack of leadership of special needs education has affected provision. First, some teachers do not use information about students' needs as well as they should when planning learning. Second, there are students in school who struggle to read. There is little support for them to improve their reading. Leaders should secure permanent, high-quality leadership of this area so that provision is effective across the curriculum and for all students.
- Leaders have sought to make the science curriculum more relevant by having students study GCSEs in biology and chemistry rather than in combined science. This has not been successful. Leaders should review the science curriculum in key stage 4 to ensure that it meets students' needs and is appropriate, given their different starting points on entry to the school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged students](#)' refers to those students 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.

School details

Unique reference number	139789
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10048052
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy studio school
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	277
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	166
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Will Hodson
Principal	Darren Perry
Website	www.walsallstudioschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	21–22 April 2015

Information about this school

- The school became a founding member of The Mercian Trust in January 2018.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized school. More than half of its students are in its sixth form. Students apply to join the school at either the beginning of Year 10 or Year 12.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors met with the principal, the assistant principal, the director of vocational specialisms, governors, trustees and the chief executive officer and director of school improvement of The Mercian Trust. The principal is also the

school's designated safeguarding lead member of staff.

- We talked to many students about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. We observed students at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- We scrutinised several documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection. We checked that the single central record contained all required information.
- We took account of parents' views by considering 16 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including nine free-text comments.
- We took account of 20 responses received on Ofsted's staff inspection questionnaire.
- As part of this inspection, we paid particular attention to English, mathematics, performing arts and media. In these subjects, we met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, scrutinised students' work and spoke with teachers and students.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Victor Reid

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gwen Onyon

Ofsted Inspector

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