

Inspection of Big Creative Independent School

Uplands House, Blackhorse Lane, Walthamstow E17 5QJ

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils do well at this alternative education setting. They successfully re-engage in education through their study of an effective creative curriculum. Staff work well to help pupils overcome the range of challenges they face. Pupils appreciate this support.

Pupils enjoy being here. They feel well cared for. Pupils said that they learn well thanks to the small class sizes, friendly staff and relaxed atmosphere. When compared to their previous placements, pupils' attendance rates usually have significantly improved here. Where this is not the case, leaders and staff do all they can to encourage pupils to attend school as regularly as possible.

Pupils trust the staff because they really understand pupils needs. Leaders and staff are experts in balancing a flexible, nurturing approach with high expectations of pupils' behaviour and engagement. Pupils behave well as a result. The very few incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively when they arise.

Leaders are particularly successful in developing pupils' confidence, creativity and communication skills. However, the curriculum is not as broad as it should be because science is not taught. The careers education and extra-curricular offers are also limited.

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

Leaders have developed a curriculum that meets pupils' needs and interests. As a result, pupils want to learn and succeed. The curriculum includes accredited learning in English, mathematics, self-development, music and creative digital media. Subject-specialist staff have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn and when. This curriculum thinking is reflected in the school's consistent and logically sequenced curriculum plans. These plans are implemented and adapted well, including for pupils who arrive at any point during an academic year. Leaders are successful in ensuring that teaching across the curriculum helps pupils to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills and knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with education, health and care plans (EHC plan) are well supported. Suitably trained staff are ready to support any pupils who may join the school at the early stages of learning to read. Staff make regular checks on pupils' learning, adapting teaching accordingly. Teachers deploy support staff effectively, providing pupils with personalised support when they need it. As a result, pupils continually build on their prior learning and go on to achieve a small but valuable range of qualifications, often in a short amount of time. Almost all pupils progress successfully into further education.

Leaders provide an effective self-development (personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education) programme. This includes teaching pupils about

fundamental British values, treating everybody equally, managing learning and making healthy choices. However, while pupils learn about relationships and sex education (RSE), leaders have not checked that the planned curriculum includes all the required statutory content. They did not consult parents and carers about their RSE policy and curriculum as required until after the start of this inspection. Similarly, while pupils receive some high-quality careers education from school staff and within the PSHE education curriculum, they do not receive personalised, impartial careers information, advice and guidance. These oversights limit pupils' personal development.

Most pupils enjoy the school's reward trips, which recently included go-karting and a visit to a theme park. There are some subject-linked outings too, including to a recording studio where pupils recorded their own podcasts. Pupils can choose to attend a football club on a Monday evening. These few activities, alongside the core curriculum, are not sufficient to provide fully for pupils' talents, interests and cultural development.

Leaders are passionate and committed to providing vulnerable pupils with a tailored, high-quality educational experience. They are successful in re-engaging pupils in education, keeping them safe and giving them a second chance to succeed. Leaders provide staff with high-quality professional training and coaching. Staff enjoy working at the school, feel well supported and reported no concerns about workload.

Leaders do not know the independent school standards. They have no systems in place to keep their knowledge of statutory requirements up to date or to check whether they comply with all the requirements for running an independent school. This meant that multiple oversights had to be resolved during the inspection, and some independent school standards are not met. For example, the curriculum does not include science, which is a required area of learning.

Leaders do not organise information relating to the building's safety well. Although the inspection identified no immediate threat to safety, leaders do not ensure compliance with fire safety legislation. For example, leaders do not ensure that the required checks on emergency lighting are carried out. An external fire risk assessment conducted during the inspection identified some concerns. Leaders acted swiftly and remedied urgent concerns and commissioned works to fix lighting, improve signage and replace doors.

While leaders demonstrate the capacity to secure improvement, there are no external arrangements to check the effectiveness of their work. This means that nobody checks whether the school complies with the independent school standards and associated requirements.

The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school's safeguarding team works effectively. Leaders implement the school's procedures effectively to refer, manage and monitor concerns. Leaders work collaboratively with other professionals. When there are concerns, they are persistent in ensuring that the right action is taken without delay.

Leaders ensure their publicly available safeguarding policy, and processes for staff recruitment and training, reflect statutory requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The curriculum lacks breadth. Pupils do not receive education in all the required areas of learning. This limits their educational experience. The proprietor and leaders should realise their plans to reintroduce science to the curriculum.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to explore and broaden their interests and talents. The proprietor and leaders should realise their plans to review and enhance the school's extra-curricular offer, ensuring pupils have access to a wide, rich range of experiences.
- Leaders do not ensure that pupils receive suitable and impartial careers advice and guidance. This limits pupils' understanding and readiness for their next steps. The proprietor and leaders should realise their plans to ensure that pupils receive regular, impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance.
- Leaders have not implemented the RSE statutory requirements. They did not consult parents until during this inspection. They have not ensured all the statutory content is covered within the PSHE education curriculum. This limits pupils' knowledge and understanding of RSE. The proprietor and leaders should review their RSE policy in light of parents' feedback and ensure that pupils receive education that includes all the required content.
- Fire safety requirements are not met. The proprietor and leaders should ensure that all the required fire safety checks are completed on time, in line with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. They should ensure that the required actions from external fire risk assessments are completed as quickly as possible. They should ensure that information, such as certificates and logs, are organised and readily available.
- There is no system in place to check the effectiveness of leaders' work or compliance with the independent school standards. The proprietor should realise their plan to expand the organisation's advisory board, ensuring a rigorous procedure is put in place to provide support, hold leaders to account and check compliance with the independent school standards.
- Some of the independent school standards are not met. These are listed in the annex to this report. The proprietor and leaders should ensure that they know the

independent school standards and take action to ensure that these are all met consistently.

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School details

Unique reference number	141411
DfE registration number	320/6005
Local authority	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Inspection number	10267669
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	15 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Alexis Michaelides
Headteacher	Ian Morton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£11,250
Telephone number	020 3873 5800
Website	https://bigcreative.education
Email address	ian.morton@bigcreative.education
Date of previous inspection	29 to 31 January 2019

Information about this school

- Big Creative Independent School is an alternative education provider for pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have an interest in creative music and media. The school works with pupils with SEND with a range of additional needs, including EHC plans.
- The school's previous standard inspection was in January 2019.
- All pupils are on a dual-registration agreement with their local authority secondary schools in the London Borough of Waltham Forest.
- The school is part of the BCE group, which includes BCE training and the BCE Academy (a 16 to 19 academy). It shares the building, some teachers, policies and pupils' services with BCE training. The proprietor and headteacher are both directors of the BCE group.
- The school makes no use of any other alternative provision.
- The school's registered age range is 15 to 16. In practice, pupils on the school roll may be as young as 14. Leaders applied during the inspection to make a material change to their registration agreement with the Department for Education, requesting a change in age range from 15 to 16, to 14 to 16.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspection was conducted with one day's notice.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these areas: English, self-development (PSHE education) and creative digital media. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders and staff, visited available lessons, talked to pupils and looked at pupils' workbooks.
- The inspector met with the sole proprietor and headteacher throughout the inspection. The inspector met with other leaders, staff, pupils and a representative from the placing local authority.
- The inspector considered a wide range of evidence to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards and Equality Act 2010. He also

considered the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

James Waite, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that-
 - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner;
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 2A(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2),
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e).

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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