

Inspection of Studio West

West Denton Way, West Denton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE5 2SZ

Inspection dates:	3 and 4 December 2024
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

The principal of this school is Andrew Dryden. This school is part of Northern Leaders Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Lee Kirtley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Therese Quincey. There is also an executive principal, Martyn Gordon, who is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' experience at Studio West has not been positive over time. They do not achieve well in external examinations. This limits their options when they leave the school. Prior to recent changes, pupils did not enjoy an ambitious and suitable curriculum. Now, there are signs of effective improvements. Many pupils are happy in the school. They are safe. Pupils speak about how they are learning more. They are also beginning to engage in a wider curriculum that broadens their horizons.

Pupils study a wide range of subjects. Their subject curriculums are well thought through. Many pupils' outcomes in English and mathematics are getting better. The school has high expectations for what pupils can achieve. Many pupils recognise and appreciate the changes the school is putting in place.

Pupils' behaviour is improving. Clear and consistent systems to manage behaviour are in place. The school supports pupils to learn from their mistakes. However, some pupils' behaviour still causes disruption. Pupils who are removed from lessons or suspended miss vital learning opportunities. As behaviour improves, pupils' personal development opportunities are also increasing. Pupils enjoy being part of the school production. They also talk animatedly about 'elective education'. Here, they experience a range of activities in mixed-age groups during the school day. This helps develop social skills and build relationships with staff.

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

Over time, standards in the school have declined. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified concerns about pupils' attendance and behaviour. The school, in more recent times, has put effective improvement strategies in place. Leaders ensure that the school's ethos as a Studio School is central to their vision. They prioritise the development of skills for life alongside learning an academic curriculum. The school also identifies and supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. However, there is more work to do.

With support from the trust, the school has overhauled the curriculum. The intentions of the curriculum are largely secure. However, in some units of work, the important knowledge pupils must learn is not clear. Some aspects lack ambition and stop pupils achieving as well as they should. In addition, pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge. This is because, historically, they have not learned well. As they learn new knowledge in the improved curriculum, pupils struggle. This is because they cannot make effective connections to what they have learned in the past.

Swift identification of pupils who need support with reading takes place. Trained staff carry out targeted interventions. Pupils develop confidence in reading over time. Pupils enjoy listening to their tutor read in form time. For example, Year 8 enjoy 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time'. This helps develop a love of reading. In lessons,

teachers explain ambitious vocabulary well. Pupils use this in their work. For instance, pupils in a hospitality lesson confidently discuss 'coagulation' and 'denaturation'.

An effective pastoral team supports pupils' attendance and behaviour well. Attendance is increasing and behaviour incidents are reducing. This is because of a well-informed improvement strategy. The school's approach is also reducing the number of repeated behaviour incidents. However, the school's high expectations for behaviour are not consistently met. Also, disadvantaged pupils are still absent too often. This impacts negatively on their progress through the curriculum.

Pupils understand healthy relationships and how to stay safe online. They learn from visiting speakers on topics such as domestic violence. Careers education, alongside the Studio School ethos, helps pupils make suitable next steps. However, pupils' understanding of other faiths, religions and cultures is limited. They lack knowledge to engage in informed discussion and debate. They also lack opportunities to celebrate and explore diversity. This does not prepare them well for life in and out of school.

Leaders, including trustees and governors, share a strong vision. They commit to Studio West's improvement for pupils and the community. They oversee the off-site provision for a small number of sixth-form students well. Following changes in staffing and leadership, the school now needs time to review, improve and embed its recent work. Some parents express dissatisfaction with the school. Staff see the positive impact the school is having. They feel valued and supported in their work. They collectively state that leaders are taking the school in the right direction.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Until recently, the curriculum has been weak. Pupils have significant gaps in their learning. The school should take further steps to address gaps in pupils' learning so that new learning builds on stronger foundations.
- In some aspects of the improved curriculum, the knowledge pupils should know and remember is not clear enough or ambitious enough. Some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not build appropriately sophisticated knowledge over time. The school should ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are clearly mapped out and suitably ambitious so pupils can achieve well.
- Disadvantaged pupils' attendance and attainment are not high enough. Some pupils miss too much learning and attain outcomes well below their peers nationally. The school should continue its work to remove barriers to pupils' engagement and achievement in school to support improved outcomes over time.

- The school's work to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain is not developed enough. Pupils lack understanding about fundamental British values and are not well informed about different faiths and cultures. The school should review and adapt its work on promoting fundamental British values to strengthen pupils' preparation for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders and governors have not fully implemented, reviewed and embedded their ambitious plans for school improvement. As a result, pupils do not achieve well overall. The school should continue its work to develop leaders and governors so they can enact rapid school improvement.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

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

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	140965
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	10323058
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Studio school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	555
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Therese Quincey
CEO of the trust	Lee Kirtley
Principal	Andrew Dryden
Website	www.sw.northernleaderstrust.org
Dates of previous inspection	30 April and 1 May 2019

Information about this school

- The principal commenced his substantive post in September 2024. Many staff and leaders are also new in post since the last inspection.
- The school is part of Northern Leaders Trust.
- The small number of sixth-form students learn off site within the same trust. The address of this provision is Kenton School, Drayton Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE3 3RU. We have not made a judgement about sixth form because of its small size and the risk of identifying individual students.
- The school uses three registered alternative provisions and the multi-academy trust's internal alternative provision for some pupils.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive principal, principal, and other senior leaders over the course of the inspection. The lead inspector also met with the CEO for the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, geography and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector met with the leader responsible for SEND and reviewed pupils' support plans.
- The lead inspector met with trustees and governors. She also reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes from meetings.
- An inspector met with leaders with responsibility for the off-site sixth-form provision.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors met with groups of pupils and staff formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- A range of school documents was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

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