

Plymouth Studio School

Derriford Road, Plymouth, Devon PL6 8BH

Inspection dates

6–7 March 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Board members and governors have failed to hold school leaders to account for the quality of education in the school. As a result, pupils make slower progress than in more than 95% of schools in the country.
- In 2017, pupils achieved a grade and a half less in each GCSE subject than pupils in other schools. Disadvantaged pupils achieved two grades less.
- The quality of teaching is poor. Teachers do not set work that challenges pupils to think and to extend themselves. The most able pupils are allowed to coast along.
- The culture of safeguarding is weak. Proper checks to keep pupils safe are not in place. Pupils are not taught how to keep themselves safe effectively. Pupils are not taught about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- There is a significant amount of low-level disruption in lessons. This prevents pupils from concentrating on their work, and so they make less progress than they should.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are poor. Too many pupils are late to lessons and are not ready to start work when they do arrive.
- Nearly a third of pupils are regularly absent. They often fail to catch up the work they have missed. Consequently, they make slow progress.
- The capacity of the leadership team for improvement is very limited. Senior leaders have been unable to significantly improve the quality of teaching so that pupils can make good progress. New middle leaders have not yet had an impact on the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum does not meet pupils' needs. They have very few opportunities to consider moral and spiritual issues. The programme for personal and social education is ineffective.
- The sixth form is weak. Students make poor progress with their A levels because expectations of them are not high enough. The programme of study is poor because there are no opportunities for work experience.

The school has the following strengths

- There is good support for the talented pupils that the school's sports specialism attracts. This allows them to develop their athletic skills.
- The principal acted quickly to stabilise the school on his appointment after a period of significant turbulence. The school is now stable and orderly.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Act rapidly to make safeguarding effective by:
 - reviewing school policies to ensure that pupils are safe, that they are monitored robustly by governors and leaders and that appropriate records are kept
 - ensuring that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, particularly while undertaking sporting activities away from the care of the school's staff
 - ensuring that pupils understand the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - significantly improving the robustness of scrutiny by the board and governors so that leaders are held to account for standards and the quality of teaching in the school
 - developing a culture of monitoring across all aspects of the school so that leaders can effectively evaluate their progress in improving provision, including for disadvantaged pupils
 - improving the leadership of teaching so that teachers receive appropriate training, are clear about priorities for improvement and are held to account for implementing them
 - providing training so that middle leaders can carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of pupils so that they have opportunities for personal growth and to consider spiritual and moral issues.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve
 - ensuring that teaching focuses on pupils' needs, building on what they already know, understand and can do.
- Improve the quality of personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - creating a positive learning culture, tackling low-level disruption and ensuring that pupils come to lessons ready to learn
 - reducing persistent absence to national average levels and ensuring that pupils who are absent catch up.
- Improve the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that teachers set high expectations of students and that teaching challenges students to reach the highest standards of which they are capable

- monitoring the progress that students make and intervening to support them when necessary
- ensuring that the programme of study is compliant with published requirements.

External reviews of governance and of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken to improve these aspects of leadership and management.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Governors and leaders have allowed a culture of low expectations to permeate the school since it opened in 2015. The vision for the school of combining academic focus with sporting excellence is far from a reality.
- The current principal joined the school a year ago. Since then he has been unable to tackle all the many weaknesses in school systems and teaching that he found on his arrival. The leadership team has been strengthened, but leaders have been unable to turn their vision into reality. Standards remain very low and teaching is still weak.
- The capacity of the leadership team to bring about improvements is very limited. A tiny senior team has, until very recently, led the school without effective support. It did not have the capacity to lead the school on a day-to-day basis and simultaneously develop and implement the improvements that it knew the school required. The team has now been supplemented by some middle leaders, but these staff are new to leadership and require support and training to have the impact necessary.
- Governors and leaders do not routinely monitor the school with sufficient rigour or in detail. When they do monitor, they focus on what activity has taken place rather than the impact it may have had. Consequently, they are unable to direct their limited resources appropriately to address the key challenges the school faces.
- The leadership team has not had sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching to acceptable levels. The principal did address the most ineffective teaching on his arrival. However, the day-to-day quality of teaching remains weak and so pupils are not making the progress they should.
- Leaders are not improving teaching rapidly enough because they have been unsuccessful in raising teachers' expectations of the progress pupils can make. They have set very aspirational targets for pupils, but teachers are not responding to them by increasing the degree of challenge they set for pupils.
- Leaders are seeking support from other local schools. This is beginning to help. However, the support is currently not precisely targeted and too reliant on ad hoc arrangements to be truly effective.
- Leaders have made some progress in improving the quality of assessment. Until recently, the quality of assessment was very poor. Teachers were unable to assess accurately and leaders could not monitor progress. Assessment systems are now in place, and teachers are becoming more accurate in their judgements. However, teachers are not using their assessments to set appropriate work for pupils. As a result, pupils are regularly given inappropriately pitched work. For the most able, this often means that work is insufficiently challenging. For pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, the work is inaccessible.
- Leaders are not using the pupil premium funding effectively. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils make poor progress. A significant number of them are absent regularly and they often fail to complete their work. There is no additional support for them in lessons to help them catch up with other pupils.

- Leaders do not ensure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress. They do not monitor the progress these pupils make closely enough and they do not ensure that the strategies to help these pupils are consistently in place in classrooms.
- The principal has improved pupils' conduct around the school since he arrived. He has raised expectations of behaviour and most pupils have responded. A small minority of pupils still act inappropriately, but parents and carers and pupils say that instances of poor behaviour have decreased significantly. As a result of the principal's focus on behaviour, there is a calm and orderly atmosphere around the school at lunchtimes and as pupils move between lessons.
- The principal has acted decisively to address significant staffing issues. This stabilised the school and has created a unified staff who are keen to improve the school.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of all pupils. There are very few opportunities for pupils to consider moral issues and spirituality. The personal and social curriculum is not taken seriously by pupils and they disengage from the few opportunities there are to debate current issues. Some pupils enter the school with relatively low levels of literacy and numeracy. The curriculum makes no allowance for this, and they receive little additional support.
- Leaders have failed to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremist views. These topics are absent from the curriculum and from discussions with pupils. Leaders do encourage pupils to consider values such as democracy and tolerance, but these are given a low profile in the life of the school.
- The school is successful in allowing elite athletes to combine academic and sporting opportunities. Pupils value the flexibility to attend training and coaching during school times and catch up on their studies later. They feel well supported by their teachers. As a result of this approach, a number of pupils can compete successfully at national and international level.
- It is recommended that governors and leaders do not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- The board and governors do not hold leaders to account with sufficient rigour. In the first two years of the school's life, governors did not challenge leaders to account for the quality of education. As a result, the very weak progress that the first cohort of pupils made went unchecked. There has been some improvement more recently. Governors have undertaken training to increase their understanding of the school's performance information, and the board has strengthened the governing body by appointing new governors with appropriate skills. Nonetheless, governors accept that there is more to do before the principal is held to account effectively.
- Governors do not insist on receiving enough information to monitor the effectiveness of the school. For example, they are not able to challenge leaders on school outcomes, absences or behaviour because they do not receive sufficiently detailed information to do so.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- The culture of safeguarding is weak. Leaders have not considered the safeguarding implications of the school's sports specialism sufficiently. For example, there is no effective monitoring of the agreed school policy of videoing pupils undertaking sporting activity. Governors and the principal have no means of ensuring that this practice is not misused to put pupils at risk. Additionally, the school has not considered the personal safety of pupils who routinely work one-to-one with coaches and adult athletes away from the school environment.
- Pupils are vulnerable to radicalisation because the dangers of extremism are not part of the school's curriculum. Staff are not appropriately trained to spot and support pupils who are vulnerable.
- The school's systems for checking on the suitability of staff to work with pupils and its record-keeping are in place and complete. Staff have undertaken the appropriate training and know what to do should they become aware that a pupil is in danger.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching does not meet pupils' needs because teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils and sixth-form students can achieve. Too often, teachers set low-level tasks that do not challenge pupils to think deeply about a topic. This prevents them from deepening their understanding.
- Teachers regularly set work for pupils that does not meet their needs. In some cases, teachers do not have a sufficiently detailed understanding of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. In others, teachers do work with pupils to create a checklist of strengths and weaknesses. However, this is then only infrequently used to tailor work that will help pupils make good progress.
- Pupils' progress is slowed further because they do not know how to improve their work. Teachers rarely provide them with detailed support that focuses on the next steps a pupil should take. Consequently, pupils tend to repeat the same errors or continue to produce work of the same level.
- Some teachers are not specialists in the subjects they are teaching. This makes it difficult for them to stretch and challenge pupils and to know exactly what support pupils need to improve.
- Pupils' standards of literacy are low. Both in English and across other subjects, they are not given enough opportunities to write extended passages, so do not learn to link their ideas into a coherent argument. The most able are rarely challenged to consider the facts, build an argument based on those facts and finally explain their thinking. This prevents them from reaching the highest standards at GCSE, so they are not well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not receive the additional support in lessons they need to help them overcome the challenges they face. Their work is often incomplete and there are gaps caused by absence. As a result, these pupils fall further behind and lose heart.

- Teachers do not meet the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders do provide teachers with some strategies to help support pupils, but these are not used consistently by teachers. Consequently, pupils find it difficult to make progress.
- There are some examples of better teaching. Here, teachers are subject specialists who know their subject and their pupils well. They ask good questions of pupils that encourage them to think and to explain. Consequently, pupils are enthused and keen to be involved and so they make better progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Leaders have failed to create a positive learning culture within the school. The result is that pupils' attitudes to learning are poor. Few pupils are self-motivated and many need to be cajoled into classes at the start of their lessons. They are often reluctant to start work. Some are keen to be involved and answer the teachers' questions, but a significant proportion are not.
- The school's programme to support pupils' personal and social skills is ineffective. There are limited opportunities to develop these skills in the curriculum, and pupils do not engage positively with them when they do occur. Many pupils have a low regard for their own learning and their self-worth is low.
- Pupils have no understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. The school has yet to address these issues.
- Pupils say that instances of bullying are now relatively infrequent and that teachers deal with any instances well. They say that the small size of the school means that most pupils know one another and they respect and work alongside those who are from different backgrounds.
- Leaders ensure that vulnerable pupils, such as those with emotional and mental health issues, are well supported. They work well with external agencies, including the local authority social care team and the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS).
- Leaders ensure that pupils who excel in their sporting field are given the support they need to combine school with the rigours of top-flight training and competition. They give these pupils flexible timetables and support them with additional coaching and training. Pupils greatly value this support.
- The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils value these and are keen to be involved.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- There is a significant amount of low-level disruption in classes. This leads to a poor climate for learning and prevents pupils from concentrating on their work. Where

teaching is better and pupils' needs are met, the climate is positive and pupils are keen to learn.

- Pupils' conduct around the school is generally calm and orderly. Most pupils treat each other well. Parents and pupils say that this has improved markedly in the last year. However, there are still some instances of poor behaviour around the school site.
- Attendance is substantially below that of other schools. Leaders are working with parents and the local authority, but the improvement in attendance has been very limited. Three out of 10 pupils are absent on a regular basis. There has been some improvement over the last year, but the figure remains unacceptably high.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- The school opened in 2015 and the first cohort of pupils took their GCSE examinations in 2017. The results were extremely poor in almost all categories. In English and mathematics, pupils had made slower progress from their starting points than in 97% of other secondary schools. In science and geography, their results were even worse. Pupils make better progress with their BTEC sports studies.
- In 2017, about one in 10 pupils achieved a strong pass in both English and mathematics. This is about a quarter of the national rate.
- Pupils in the school now are not making substantially better progress. There is some improvement, but it is limited. Standards remain very low.
- The most able pupils are not reaching the highest standards. They are not challenged to think deeply about issues or solve complicated problems. They are not encouraged to think through a problem or issue from start to finish and then offer an explanation of their thinking. Consequently, they underachieve.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are not achieving all they should. They do not receive the targeted support they need to make progress from their starting points.
- Disadvantaged pupils make very slow progress. In 2017, they achieved two grades lower than other pupils in schools across the country. They are not making substantially better progress this year because they are not receiving the additional support they need to overcome the barriers they face.
- Standards of literacy are low. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are weak across the school. Standards of handwriting and presentation are often poor. This prevents pupils from getting a good start in the next phase of their education.
- Sixth-form students achieved a grade lower in their A levels than students in other schools in 2017. Those that took applied courses, such as BTEC sport, achieved results broadly in line with other schools. The most able students are not achieving the highest grades. This is because they are not challenged to extend themselves and tackle complicated problems without support.

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- Students make slow progress with their A levels because the quality of teaching, learning and assessment they receive is weak. Teachers do not meet students' needs

and address gaps in their understanding sufficiently well, nor do they challenge students to explain their thinking in depth. They do not provide opportunities for students to develop their own learning and research skills.

- The quality of teaching in applied subjects, such as sports studies, is stronger. Students know what they need to do to succeed and are motivated and supported by their teachers.
- The leadership of the sixth form has been weak. Leaders have not monitored students' progress closely enough and so they cannot intervene when students fall behind and need additional support. A new leader is now in place, but he has not had an opportunity to make an impact so far.
- The requirements of the 16 to 19 programme of study are not being met. Leaders have not ensured that students have the opportunity to put the skills and knowledge they are learning in school into place in a work environment. Teaching does not make enough links with the world of work. Students are given few opportunities to reflect on their personal strengths and weaknesses because there is no formal pastoral programme.
- Leaders do not analyse and evaluate sufficiently whether the courses students study are the right ones to prepare them for the next phase of their education. As a result, in 2017, many more students than average did not complete their courses.
- Students feel safe and know who to go to should they need support or to report an incident. They feel that any occasional bullying is dealt with well. However, students are not clear about how best to keep themselves safe from radicalisation or child sexual exploitation.
- Most students progress to higher education locally. For many students, this is appropriate. However, few progress to the most prestigious universities and few take up apprenticeships or related employment.

School details

Unique reference number	142116
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10042656

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
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	158
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	72
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Phil Davies
Principal	Mark Cahill
Telephone number	01752 243900
Website	www.plymouthstudioschool.co.uk
Email address	info@plymouthstudioschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in 2015. It is a small school that specialises in supporting talented athletes. However, it is open to all 14- to 19-year-olds. The first year of GCSE and A-level results was in 2017.
- The current principal joined the school in February 2017. He is the third principal since the school opened.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium is in line with the national average.
- Less than one in ten pupils is from a minority ethnic group.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The school's performance in 2017 is below the floor standard. The floor standard is the government's published figure that represents the minimum acceptable standard.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about its scheme of delegation on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour data, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and groups of pupils. An inspector had a telephone conversation with a senior officer of Plymouth City Council and the chair of the academy board.
- Inspectors took account of 18 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and a discussion with a parent. They also took account of responses to staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Andrew Lovett, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jules Steele	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sarah McGinnis	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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