

Stephenson Studio School

Thornborough Road, Coalville, LE67 3TN

Inspection dates

5–6 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The quality of teaching has not been good enough since the school opened. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to discuss and develop their own ideas or use questions systematically enough to check the students' understanding.
- The students' progress in lessons shows their achievement requires improvement. This is because the work they are given to do is sometimes too easy or too difficult.
- The sixth form requires improvement because some students do not make as much progress as they could.
- Leadership and management require improvement. Many essential systems for improving the students' achievement and the quality of teaching have been introduced only recently. They have not had time to have enough impact.
- Several members of staff with leadership roles are new in post. They are still developing into their roles.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher provides purposeful and clear-sighted leadership. She is supported well by a determined trust board (the governing body) and, together with a committed staff, they are now making improvements to the quality of teaching and to the students' achievement.
- Typically, relationships between the students and between the students and the staff are mutually respectful. As a result, the school is calm and orderly, and the students have grown in confidence since joining the school.
- The students' behaviour is good. They display maturity and apply themselves well to their studies. They are motivated well by the variety of opportunities and courses available to them.
- Parents and carers have positive views of the school. They value particularly the way their children are looked after. The students feel very safe at the school and well supported by their personal coaches.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors saw 11 lessons taught by 10 members of staff. They looked at students' work within lessons and separately scrutinised samples of work from English and mathematics.
- They held meetings with teachers, leaders and managers, and with representatives of the board of trustees, which is the governing body of the school. They spoke with groups of students formally, and in lessons and around the school.
- There were insufficient responses from parents and carers on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, for the data to be made available. The inspectors checked the results of the school's survey of parents' and carers' views. They analysed questionnaires completed by all of the staff.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school development plan and self-evaluation, policies and records of monitoring in relation to the quality of teaching, the pupils' achievement, attendance, behaviour, and safeguarding, and minutes of the board of trustees' meetings.

Inspection team

Clive Moss, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jane Austin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school opened and admitted its first students into Year 10 and to Year 12 in September 2011. Those students are the first at the school to sit public examinations, which they were taking at the time of this inspection. This means the school has not yet been evaluated against the government's floor standards.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus. There are currently no students with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The academy receives additional government funding for these students, known as the pupil premium.
- All of the students undertake work experience each week, including for two days per week in the sixth form. The school works with a wide range of employers and organisations that provide the work experience placements.
- There has been a very high turnover in staffing since the school opened. At the time of this inspection, almost all of the teaching staff have been in post for less than 12 months. The headteacher took up post in January 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and achievement, including in the sixth form, by:
 - making more use of information about the students' current levels of learning to plan tasks and activities that meet their particular needs.
 - using questions more systematically to probe the students' understanding and to challenge them to think more deeply
 - providing the students with more and clearer feedback about how well they are doing and how they can improve, both in lessons and through the marking of their work
 - providing more opportunities for the students to discuss and develop their own ideas, including what they need to do next to improve their learning.
- Improve the leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - recently introduced systems for improving the students' achievement and the quality of teaching are sustained and developed over time
 - leaders and managers new to their responsibilities carry them out to full effect.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The only examination results available for Key Stage 4 students are for those that were entered earlier this year for GCSE mathematics. The results were similar to the national average for last year.
- The school's first group of sixth form students sat examinations at the end of Year 12 in 2012. Their attainment in AS-level courses was below average, although the data indicate that they made broadly the progress that might be expected given their starting points. The achievement of the minority that took vocational options was better than average.
- Students made steady progress in the lessons observed during the inspection. Scrutiny of Year 10 students' work showed that work they are given to do is sometimes too easy.
- Students' progress overall requires improvement. The school has only recently introduced effective processes for tracking how well the students are achieving, based on good-quality data. The data indicate that the students have made better progress in the last few months. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their peers, as do those eligible for the pupil premium.

The school has calculated the likely attainment of all students and made a provisional analysis of how students eligible for the pupil premium performed compared with other students using the early GCSE mathematics results. The school believes the likely GCSE results of those eligible for the pupil premium will be similar to those of all students.

- The students have a good awareness of the alternatives and opportunities for careers and further study available to them. Rapidly, they develop a good idea of what they want to do and what is required to make that happen. As a result, all of the Year 13 students who will leave the school at the end of this year have firm offers of places in further education or training, or offers of employment.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teachers' expectations of students are sometimes not high enough. This is because the teachers do not always use information about students' achievement to plan activities that meet the particular learning needs. This stops some students from progressing to higher levels.
- Teachers are not always astute at spotting when the students' energy levels and concentration are dipping and making changes to the lesson accordingly. Consequently, the pace of learning slows.
- There were few examples seen where the students were given opportunities to discuss and develop their own ideas, including about what they should learn about next and how. This prevented students gaining a deep understanding of the topic.
- The teachers' use of questions does not routinely challenge the students to think more deeply or to provide better answers.
- The lessons observed were calm and orderly and the students' behaviour was always respectful.

The teachers give careful thought to structuring lessons but there was rarely a sense of urgency or excitement about learning.

- The quality of marking varies, and not enough provides the students with clear guidance about how well they are doing and how they can improve to higher levels. Similarly, in lessons, the teachers provide much encouragement to the students, but not enough feedback focused on the quality of the students' work, of their answers to questions, or about how those can be improved.
- Teachers demonstrate a good command of their subjects and select topics and materials for learning that mostly interest the students. They organise a variety of types of activity in lessons.
- The inspectors found various examples of students' work that showed good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development, including research into human rights as part of a project to organise charitable contributions to educational causes in Guatemala, and consideration of whether the playwright's views of religion influenced the play *An Inspector Calls*.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The students demonstrate willingness to learn in lessons and respond to their teachers by getting on with the tasks set for them. They want to do well.
- A strong focus on the students' personal development underpins their growing self-confidence as they progress through the school. It also raises their aspirations. Students appreciate and respond well to the small size of the school, and state that it contributes significantly to the quality of the relationships, both between themselves and with the staff. They feel known personally, understood, cared for, and that the courses and experiences with which they are provided are adapted well to meet their personal interests and needs.
- The students' personal development is well supported by the CREATE framework (Communication, Relating to others, Enterprise, Applied, Thinking, Emotional intelligence) which underpins this studio school's distinctive curriculum.
- Personal coaches are the lynchpin of the school's support for the students, and the students express great confidence in them, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Where necessary, the school works well with external agencies to provide support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- There have been no exclusions since the school opened. Instances of misbehaviour, bullying, or racism are few. The students have a good awareness of the different forms that bullying can take and express no concerns about such matters, describing themselves as 'more mature than that'. They are confident that any such matters they might raise would be dealt with swiftly by the personal coaches, or directly by the headteacher.
- The students told the inspectors that the school is increasingly taking account of, and responding to, their views. As a result, their level of engagement and commitment to it is also increasing.
- Attendance is above average and students' punctuality is good. The level of persistent absence is low and the school has a suitable range of strategies to promote good attendance and deal with absence.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- In a period of significant change and less than two years since the school opened, the headteacher has necessarily had to focus on bringing stability and putting essential systems and structures into place. Many of the staff are new to the school this academic year and have taken on management responsibilities even more recently. They are approaching their tasks with evident commitment, but have inevitably had little time to have maximum impact.
- The school has now made appropriate arrangements for the appraisal of the staff. It has begun to collect evidence about the quality of teaching, which, along with the good-quality data now available about the students' achievement, will be used to inform the performance management of the staff when it begins.
- There are many opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of the students, although they are not always used well. Good opportunities to promote discussion amongst the students about important and complex issues are sometimes overlooked.
- The new headteacher has approached the task of improving the students' achievement and the quality of teaching with urgency. The staff and students alike confirm the positive impact of the headteacher's work. Her efforts have rapidly brought coherence to the staff group and improved their morale. Students acknowledge the positive ethos as do parents and carers.
- Suitable systems for gathering evidence about the quality of teaching and the students' achievement are now in operation, though they are still relatively new. The information gathered is used as part of the school's self-evaluation and has enabled the headteacher to form an accurate view of the school's current stage of development. The information has been used well also to develop a carefully focused improvement plan and professional development opportunities for the staff that are leading to improvements in teaching.
- The school sets ambitious targets for the students' achievement. It entered a majority of Year 11 students for GCSE mathematics early this year in order to get a better indication of attainment and to provide a stimulus for improvement. All of the students involved have been entered for the examination again this summer, which means that the early experience of the examination has not restricted their attainment.
- The students find the range of courses, subjects, experiences, and other learning opportunities provided for them very motivating. In particular, work experience provides them with a significant stimulus for learning and personal development. The opportunity to discuss this with the inspectors typically brought smiles to the students' faces.
- Arrangements for managing and monitoring the students when they are on work experience are carefully structured and draw effectively upon the expertise, experience and procedures used by the college of further education, which is the sponsor of the school.
- The pupil premium funding has been used effectively on additional coaching for the eligible students and to ensure those students are able to participate fully in all of the opportunities available at the school.
- The curriculum is organised very flexibly and there are good examples of how it is adapted to meet particular needs. For example, additional literacy lessons have promoted greater interest in reading for some students and increased their ability and confidence to read.

■ The governance of the school:

- The trust board is well informed and appropriately experienced. It is sharply focused, and has a good understanding of all aspects of the school's work. This includes the quality of teaching and what the performance data show about the progress of different groups of students, such as those eligible for the pupil premium. The board provides robust challenge to the school, based upon detailed and rigorous checks on the school's work. It acts swiftly and decisively to bring about improvements when necessary. It has effective arrangements to inform parents and carers about developments at the school, to obtain their views directly, and to report to them subsequently on action that has been taken. It has been involved fully in establishing the arrangements for the performance management of the staff. The board ensures that arrangements for safeguarding meet current requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137317
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	399859

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

Type of school	Academy studio school
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	17
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Leigh
Headteacher	Gillian Laird
Date of previous school inspection	Not inspected previously
Telephone number	01530 519099
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