

Inspection of Walsall Studio School

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

Inspection dates:	25 and 26 March 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of the school is Krissi Carter. This school is part of The Mercian 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), Dan Parkes, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Kevin Davis.

What is it like to attend this school?

Walsall Studio School is a place where everyone is valued and included. Pupils understand and follow the 'MAGIC' ethos, which includes 'motivation', 'aspiration' and 'grit'. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and respectful. Most pupils work hard and achieve well, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For some pupils, the school's high aspirations have not been achieved fully, but all pupils say this is a positive environment to learn in.

There is a purposeful atmosphere around the school. During lessons and unstructured times, such as breaktimes and lunchtime, most pupils behave sensibly. Where pupils' behaviour is not acceptable, staff speak quickly and efficiently with these pupils to explain the school's high expectations. Pupils are safe. They know who to talk to about any concerns they may have.

The school places a strong emphasis on supporting pupils' personal development, including their mental health and well-being. Leadership opportunities for pupils include sixth-form students mentoring younger pupils in lessons such as music. These opportunities help students understand how to be responsible. Pupils regularly take part in additional activities around dance, music recording and show rehearsals. These opportunities significantly enhance pupils' learning of the curriculum and prepare pupils well for the next stage of their careers.

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

The school has undergone a significant period of change and development since the last inspection. This includes a new headteacher and changes to staff in senior, subject and pastoral leadership roles. The school has taken effective action to review how well pupils learn its curriculum and achieve their potential. The school considers carefully what pupils know when they join from Year 10 or into the sixth form in Year 12. Focused leadership has brought about improvements in how pupils learn curriculum content in many subjects. However, this focus has not yet led to consistently improving outcomes in some subjects by the end of key stage 4.

Pupils appreciate the broad range of subjects they can choose from. These include a range of vocational courses such as 'content creation - broadcast', which prepares pupils effectively for work in the media industry. Students in the sixth form are positive about their learning and enrichment opportunities. Teachers engage students in ambitious, challenging and independent learning, particularly in the sixth form. This enables many students to achieve well in the vocational curriculum. This success is also reflected by the wide range of high-quality destinations students move into.

The school identifies the important information that pupils need to know to succeed. Teachers generally present new subject matter clearly and consistently, particularly in key stage 5. Teachers use activities at the start of lessons to help pupils recall and build on their learning well. However, sometimes, teachers do not check pupils' understanding of some subject content carefully enough. When this happens, teachers do not have a

sufficiently detailed understanding of whether pupils remember what they have learned before. This means that, on occasion, teachers do not address pupils' wrong ideas or missing knowledge well. This leads to some pupils having gaps in their knowledge, which limits their progress.

The school quickly and effectively identifies the needs of pupils with SEND. Staff use precise information to adapt the learning for each pupil well. While reading is a priority at this school, some support for pupils who struggle to read well is not as effective as it could be. The school is also developing a reading culture across the school and considering how it can encourage pupils to read regularly.

Absence from school is preventing a significant number of pupils from achieving their full potential. There are too many pupils who miss school unnecessarily. This means that they miss out on too much learning. The school is aware of the need to continue with its current work on the importance of attendance and to further engage with pupils, parents and external agencies.

The personal, social, health and economic curriculum is well thought through and ordered logically. Pupils learn about topics such as healthy relationships and online safety well. The school provides pupils with opportunities to develop their knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity. A comprehensive careers programme is in place for all pupils. Pupils engage enthusiastically with this programme.

All leaders, including those responsible for governance, understand deeply how the school's local context and pupils' previous experience of school impacts pupils' learning and attendance. The school reviews and develops all key aspects of its work effectively, including teaching, curriculum and pupils' well-being, with a strong focus on safeguarding. Trustees and governors support and hold the school to account for the decisions taken. The school and trust have implemented a well-thought-out training programme for its staff. The school also consults staff well on policy changes and carefully considers their workload, all of which staff appreciate.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school does not make sure that teachers check carefully enough that all pupils understand and remember what has been learned. This means that, sometimes, teachers do not help pupils fully understand the necessary knowledge as effectively in some subjects as others. The school should ensure that all teachers check and act on gaps in pupils' understanding well so pupils understand and remember the key knowledge they need.

- The school has not fully developed its support for pupils who struggle to read or the opportunities that promote wider reading in school. As a result, some pupils do not have the precise support they need to improve their reading, and some pupils do not read widely and regularly enough. The school should strengthen its support for pupils who struggle to read and develop wider opportunities for pupils to read regularly.
- Some pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, miss too much school. This holds back pupils' progress and achievement. The school should continue its work with parents and external agencies to secure more regular attendance for all pupils.

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	139789
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10344012
Type of school	Other 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	186
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	64
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kevin Davis
CEO of the trust	Dan Parkes
Headteacher	Krissi Carter
Website	www.studioschoolandsixth.org
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 September 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Mercian Trust. There are nine schools in the trust.
- The headteacher joined the school in January 2025.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, media, performing arts and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspectors also looked at the curriculum, lessons and pupils' work in other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about pupils' behaviour, attendance, the school's curriculum and improvement planning.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day as part of their evaluation of safeguarding and pupils' behaviour. Additionally, inspectors spoke to pupils to discuss their views about school life.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and other trustees and the chair, vice-chair and other governors. The lead inspector also met with the CEO and director of education for the trust.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also took into consideration the online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Stuart Clarkson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Russell Hinton

Ofsted Inspector

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