

Big Creative Independent School

Silver Uplands House, Blackhorse Lane, Walthamstow E17 5QJ

Inspection dates

29–31 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders aspire to help disengaged pupils reintegrate positively into education and make a success of their future lives.
- Leaders provide pupils with a curriculum that nurtures their creative talents and engages their interest. It makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and safety.
- Leaders extended the curriculum this year by offering GCSE courses in English and mathematics, in addition to functional skills qualifications. This is broadening pupils' opportunities to reach higher standards.
- Leaders pay much attention to pupils' welfare and improving their behaviour and attitudes. As a result, pupils feel safe and know how to stay safe in different situations. Their attendance is stronger in this alternative provision than was the case in their previous schools. They develop positive attitudes to learning.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers make good use of assessment information to plan learning that meets pupils' needs. Teachers and mentors provide extra support to pupils who arrive with gaps in their knowledge and those falling behind in their work. As a result, pupils make strong progress from their starting points.
- Sometimes, teachers accept superficial answers to their questions, and they do not challenge pupils enough to deepen their understanding. Occasionally, pupils fail to complete their work. This means that pupils do not routinely make the substantial progress of which they are capable.
- At the start of the inspection, a few aspects of the independent school standards were unmet. Leaders quickly addressed these, and the school is now compliant.
- The school prepares pupils well to continue with post-16 education.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and pupils' outcomes by:
 - teachers asking probing questions that deepen pupils' thinking, not accepting superficial answers
 - making sure that pupils routinely complete their work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by keeping abreast of Department for Education (DfE) requirements and ensuring that the school is consistently compliant with the independent school standards.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and school leaders share a vision to improve the lives and prospects of vulnerable pupils who have been unsuccessful in their former schools. Their aims are to nurture pupils' creative talents, so they re-engage in learning, and to support them in improving their behaviours and attitudes. Members of staff are committed to delivering these goals. As a result, pupils succeed at the school and learn to become good and successful citizens. They are ready to continue into post-16 education.
- Leaders provide teachers with an effective programme of training so that they can continuously develop their skills. Leaders regularly check on teaching and learning and give teachers developmental feedback. Teachers observe each other and share good practice. Teachers and leaders also benefit from one-to-one coaching sessions. As a result, teaching is good and supports pupils' good progress.
- The curriculum provides pupils with a suitable range of courses. The school specialises in vocational courses in music and media to engage pupils' interests. In addition, pupils study functional skills in English and mathematics, and physical education delivered off-site by a specialist coach. Leaders recently enhanced the curriculum by doubling the teaching time in English and mathematics. They also introduced the more challenging GCSE courses in those subjects.
- Pupils study an accredited course in developing interpersonal skills and employment. Further, leaders designed courses that are effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and understanding of fundamental British values. Among the topics that pupils learn are democracy, anti-radicalisation, sexuality and gender identity, racial discrimination and young people and the law. The curriculum therefore prepares pupils well for the next stages of their careers and life in modern Britain.
- The school benefits from being part of, and sharing premises and specialist resources with, the Big Creative Training (BCT) post-16 provision. Leaders across the site work together to ensure pupils' welfare and safety and to develop the skills of leaders and teachers. Pupils who wish to continue studying music or media continue with their post-16 courses at BCT. These arrangements make a good contribution to meeting pupils' needs and maintaining leadership and teaching that are routinely good.
- The school relocated after the previous inspection. It appears that the Department for Education was not aware of the change of address.

Governance

- The proprietor spends most of the week at the school and so has a good understanding of day-to-day practice. He supports senior leaders and holds them to account for the school's performance.
- The proprietor works closely with school leaders to check the effectiveness of all aspects of the school's work. They use the information to plan credible actions to improve the school.

- At the start of the inspection, the inspector found that the proprietor had not made sure that the school meets all the requirements of the independent school standards. Leaders quickly addressed the deficiencies so that, by the end of the inspection, the school complied with all the standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding team makes sure that all staff are up to date with latest government guidance. Leaders and members of staff are aware of the range of safeguarding issues in the local area and to which pupils may be vulnerable. They are alert to pupils' needs and immediately report any concerns.
- Leaders work closely with external agencies to promote pupils' safety and well-being, including the local authority's safeguarding and welfare teams and the Safer Schools police officer.
- Through the curriculum, pupils learn about risks and how to keep themselves safe. They recently attended a talk from a visitor affected by knife crime, and have had workshops on safe sex, for example.
- The school publishes its safeguarding policy on its website. The policy has proper regard to current government requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Effective teaching supports pupils' good progress from their varying starting points.
- Teachers assess pupils' English and mathematical skills when they join the school. After a short induction, they also set pupils a short project to test their skills in the creative subjects. Teachers use this initial information and regular testing to plan activities and extra support to meet pupils' needs.
- Teachers and mentors make their expectations for good behaviour and adherence to routines clear to pupils. They establish a good rapport with the pupils and help them develop positive attitudes to learning. As a result, pupils learn to work purposefully and make gains in their learning.
- Teachers plan learning sequentially, enabling pupils to build on their prior knowledge and skills. They set them regular revision exercises so that pupils can recall and apply what they have already learned. In line with the school's policy, teachers and mentors give pupils frequent feedback on how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Consequently, pupils make good progress.
- Although teachers regularly question pupils, sometimes they do not probe their thinking deeply enough. On occasion, they accept one-word, basic or superficial answers. This limits the opportunities pupils have to think hard and deepen their understanding.
- Evidence in books shows that, occasionally, some pupils do not complete the work that their teachers set. This leaves gaps in their learning and limits them from making the substantial progress of which they are capable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils join this school because they had a poor experience in their previous schools, usually learning little and misbehaving. Typically, therefore, they arrive with low self-esteem. Because staff pay much attention to pupils' well-being and create a nurturing environment, pupils regain their confidence. They engage positively in learning, make good progress and aspire to pursue successful careers.
- Pupils feel safe in the school. They say that everyone respects each other and there is virtually no bullying. They speak highly of the range of support that they can access if they have any concerns. For example, they know that the school counsellor and mentors will take their concerns seriously and help them overcome their difficulties.
- Leaders support pupils' physical well-being, providing weekly sporting activities. They are taught about healthy eating and the dangers of substance abuse.
- Staff help pupils understand how to look after their mental and emotional health. For instance, the school participates in a national initiative encouraging open discussion to understand issues that affect mental health.
- Pupils benefit from well-planned impartial careers advice and guidance that helps them make well-informed choices that support their aspirations for the future.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders make clear their expectations for good behaviour. Leaders help pupils learn how to improve their behaviour and how it will help them succeed in their studies and future lives. Therefore, pupils' behaviour markedly improves as they settle into the school and develop positive attitudes to learning. As a result, they make good progress in all subjects.
- Leaders work very successfully to increase pupils' attendance. As a result, most pupils significantly increase their rates of attendance compared to their previous schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter this school with standards that are below those expected for their age because they were disengaged in their previous schools. They make good progress during their time at the school, including in English and mathematics, because of the good teaching and effective pastoral care that they receive.
- Pupils gain qualifications in functional skills in English and mathematics, vocational accreditation in music and media-based courses and in personal development and employability.

- Building on their success in achieving basic qualifications, pupils typically proceed to further education. Recent graduates, for instance, are studying media, music performance, music production, health and beauty, and electrics.
- Current pupils are making good progress from their varying starting points. For the first time, the school is preparing the most able pupils for GCSE examinations in English language and/or mathematics.
- Leaders prepare pupils well to leave this school ready for life in modern Britain as successful and responsible citizens. This is because they help pupils to make substantial improvements in their behaviours, attitudes and academic achievements.

School details

Unique reference number	141411
DfE registration number	320/6005
Inspection number	10067217

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

Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	15 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Proprietor	Alexis Michaelides
Headteacher	Ian Morton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£11,250
Telephone number	020 3873 5800
Website	www.bigcreative.education
Email address	ian.morton@bigcreative.education
Date of previous inspection	8–10 March 2016

Information about this school

- The Big Creative Independent School is an alternative to school for Year 10 and 11 pupils interested in creative music and media. The school caters for pupils who have a record of poor behaviour and attitudes, and/or a history of poor attendance.
- Its aim is 'to transform the lives of young people through inspirational teaching and by providing exceptional access to career opportunities in the creative industries'.
- All pupils are referred from local authority secondary schools in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. This is managed through the Hawkswood Group, the local authority's group of schools that provide alternative provision.
- 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 does not use any alternative provision.
- The Big Creative Independent School was registered by the Department for Education in September 2014 and this was its second standard inspection. The first standard inspection was in March 2016.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's prior notice.
- The inspector observed learning in several sessions, all of which were visited with the headteacher.
- The inspector scrutinised samples of pupils' work. He checked the school's information about pupils' progress.
- The inspector spoke with the headteacher, other leaders, members of staff and the proprietor. He met with a group of pupils, a former pupil and had informal discussions with pupils during social times and lessons.
- The inspector took account of eight responses to the staff questionnaire and seven from the pupils. There were no responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents.
- The inspector checked documentation, policies and all aspects of the school's work for compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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