

Stephenson Studio School

Thornborough Rd, Coalville, Leicestershire LE67 3TN

Inspection dates

22–23 September 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have been too slow to ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs. As a result, pupils, especially in the sixth form, have made inadequate progress.
- In both key stages, the standards reached by pupils are well below national averages, and are not improving quickly enough.
- The trustees are not effective in holding leaders to account, nor ensuring that the school has the support it needs to improve.
- Leaders do not have an accurate view of how well the school is doing. They are too optimistic in their judgements.
- Outcomes for pupils are inadequate. Pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of education, employment or training because too many of them lack the basic skills and qualifications they need.
- Some teachers do not make effective use of questioning to assess how well pupils are learning.
- Not all teachers ensure that pupils make good progress in lessons because they do not take pupils' starting points into account.
- Not all teachers ensure that pupils act on advice to improve their work, or make essential corrections.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills. This is especially true of the least-able pupils, who do not get the help they need to catch up.
- Not all teachers have secure subject knowledge. They do not all challenge pupils' misconceptions, nor ensure that they have fully understood the learning.
- The sixth form is inadequate. For too long, too many learners have underachieved because the choice of qualifications on offer is not appropriate to their needs, abilities and aspirations.

The school has the following strengths

- The programme of personal coaching ensures that pupils quickly gain self-esteem and self-confidence. Bullying is rare because any incidents are quickly picked up by staff.
- Pupils' attendance is above average. They enjoy coming to school because they feel safe, well cared for and valued.

Full report

In accordance with 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?

- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that:
 - all teachers use information about pupils' starting points to plan lessons that enable all pupils to make good progress
 - teachers use questioning equally well to check what pupils know and can do, and use this information to help pupils speed up their learning
 - all teachers ensure that pupils act on the advice they give them to improve their work
 - there are more opportunities in all subjects to develop pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - least-able pupils, especially in mathematics at Key Stage 4, rapidly receive the support and help they need to do well in their courses
 - the progress of groups is monitored more closely so that any underachievement is quickly identified and tackled.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - urgently reviewing the suitability of sixth form courses to ensure that they build on pupils' prior attainment and enable all pupils to succeed
 - ensuring that the curriculum at both key stages allows pupils to develop the reading, writing and mathematical skills they need to do well in the next stage of their education, training or employment, and is suited to their needs and aspirations
 - reviewing the process of monitoring and evaluation of teaching to ensure that leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and use this information to target improvements more closely
 - urgently reviewing the effectiveness of governance and external support to ensure that the school makes rapid improvements and that standards rise more quickly
 - building on the newly established links with partner schools to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in the school.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leaders have not been successful in driving up standards because the curriculum has not allowed pupils to achieve as well as they can. Although recently improved at Key Stage 5, hitherto courses offered at both this key stage and Key Stage 4 have not adequately matched pupils' abilities, interests and aspirations.
- The curriculum has significant weaknesses in its promotion of pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills across subjects, especially at Key Stage 4. Pupils spend a significant proportion of the school week undertaking project work and work experience. While these experiences are effective in boosting their confidence and developing their social and employability skills, they do not do enough to address the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- Leaders recognise these shortcomings, and have recently taken steps to review and revise the courses on offer, but this has been too late to stem the tide of underachievement that has blighted pupils' prospects for too long.
- The headteacher has taken increasingly firm action to link the pay of teachers to the quality of their performance. However, leaders are too optimistic in their judgements on the overall quality of teaching. Their routine monitoring has not identified or addressed some of the key weaknesses in teaching, and as a result teaching has not improved quickly enough.
- The progress of groups of pupils is not tracked with sufficient rigour. For example, leaders were not aware that in the last academic year disabled pupils and those with special educational needs were not doing as well in mathematics as they were in English. As a consequence, not enough was done to ensure that they achieved as well as they could. A very small number of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, but actions to improve their achievement have not been consistently successful. In some areas, their rates of progress were better than their peers, but this was not the case in all subjects.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to read for pleasure, and the reading materials available to pupils are not appropriate to their reading levels.
- Leaders have taken some action to address the shortcomings in pupils' literacy: for example, by insisting that all teachers correct pupils' spelling and grammar mistakes. However, they do not check that all teachers ensure that pupils make the corrections themselves.
- Leadership of the sixth form is inadequate. A narrow curriculum, coupled with teaching that does not always ensure that pupils make good progress, has led to a history of underachievement. This area of the school's work has not been monitored with sufficient rigour because leadership of the sixth form focuses chiefly on pastoral matters.
- The school's sponsor has not put in place adequate support for the school. It has been too slow to recognise and address the unsuitability of the curriculum.
- Pupils report that there is very little disharmony between different groups of pupils because they are encouraged to get on with other people and respect others' viewpoints. The school's ethos of teamwork and emphasis on developing workplace skills ensures that pupils are given a good start to life in modern Britain. However, leaders have not been able to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils because the curriculum has prevented least-able pupils from succeeding.
- After-school enrichment clubs offer pupils a range of opportunities to learn new skills and try something different. These sessions, alongside the termly 'super learning days', make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils who had just joined the school were excited by the chance to try something new. As one said, 'I don't exactly know what colour therapy is, but I can't wait to find out!'
- Leaders have been successful in establishing better relationships with local schools and as a result, transition arrangements for pupils are quickly improving.
- The school has begun to develop links with partner schools, including a teaching school. These links have not yet had an impact on raising standards.
- **The governance of the school**
 - has not done enough to ensure that the curriculum is meeting the needs of pupils. Trustees were not aware, for example, of the numbers of pupils on A-level courses, the range of courses on offer and the success rates of these courses.

- has not been effective in holding school leaders to account. Trustees have too readily accepted information provided by leaders, without ensuring its accuracy.
- has not ensured that all statutory duties are fulfilled, for example by checking that the information report for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is available on the school website. This was quickly rectified by leaders during the inspection.
- has not fully evaluated the impact of pupil premium spending. Trustees have not checked carefully enough on how well different groups of pupils are doing.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have created a culture where pupils' concerns are listened to and acted on, and pupils are confident that their concerns will be taken seriously. Home visits by personal coaches ensure that any families experiencing difficulties get the help they need to ensure that pupils attend well, and are safe and supported. Procedures for reporting concerns are well understood by staff, including those who are new to the school. Checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers meet requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **requires improvement**

- Teachers do not routinely take pupils' starting points into account when planning lessons. This means that some pupils do not understand what to do, and do not get the help they need to move on, while for others, expectations are not high enough.
- Teachers mark pupils' work consistently in line with the school's policy. They provide helpful feedback to pupils and highlight their spelling and grammatical mistakes. Pupils do not always respond to their teachers' comments, or correct their work, because teachers sometimes move them on too quickly from this task. As a result, they do not all have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes or improve their work.
- Pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills are not well developed across the curriculum. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to read in lessons or practise their mathematical skills.
- In some examples seen, teachers used effective strategies to check that pupils had fully understood the learning, and adapted the lesson accordingly. Not all teachers, however, use questioning well to assess the progress that pupils make in class. This means that they are not always aware when to move the learning on, and when they need to consolidate what has been learned.
- Teachers and learning support assistants do not always correct pupils' misunderstandings, or enable pupils to gain a deeper understanding of an issue by responding to their questions and ideas. This is because, in a few instances, their own subject knowledge is not secure.
- Positive and trusting relationships between teachers and pupils rapidly help to remove the barriers to learning that many pupils have faced in their previous schools. Pupils soon gain the confidence to share their ideas and take risks with their learning. As one said, 'It's better here, because I'm not afraid to speak up!'
- Where pupils learn well, it is because teaching engages their interest, captures their imagination and builds on what they can, or cannot, do. For example, in an English lesson, lively and engaging teaching inspired pupils to think of a range of interesting and original adjectives to describe an abandoned theme park. In another lesson, the teacher successfully used a misunderstanding from the previous session to develop pupils' understanding of effective narration.
- At the heart of the curriculum is an emphasis on teamwork and cooperation. Teachers encourage pupils to listen to and respect the views of others. They plan activities that encourage pupils to cooperate, share ideas with each other and work together to solve problems. As a result, pupils develop good social and teamworking skills which contribute positively to their preparation for the world of work.
- In some lessons observed, teachers used a range of well-considered and well-planned activities to help pupils rapidly build their skills. As a result, pupils gained a good understanding of how to develop their examination technique.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils arrive at the school having faced significant challenges in their previous schools, and some have missed considerable periods of schooling. The school's calm, supportive and caring ethos soon helps them to settle, and they quickly grow in confidence and self-esteem.
- Personal coaches work very effectively with pupils experiencing difficulties, and equally well with teachers to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to address and deal with any concerns. This approach is successful in helping to break down the barriers to learning that many pupils have faced in their previous schools.
- Coaches provide much individual support to help pupils plan and prepare for their next steps in learning. This begins in Year 10, when they work with pupils to identify and plan suitable work placements. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on these experiences, and can identify the skills and attributes they have developed that will help them in the workplace. The school has developed strong links with local industries and businesses, and these are used to good effect to develop pupils' readiness for work.
- The school's programme of personal, social, health and economic education emphasises the importance of well-being and good mental health. Pupils feel comfortable in sharing their problems and concerns, because they know they will get the support they need. Staff are well trained to look out for signs of distress, and there are clear and well-understood procedures to record and report them. Safeguards for pupils on work experience placements are appropriately stringent, particularly for more vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe in a range of situations. For example, although the site is shared with the college, pupils are very clear about which areas they are not allowed to use. School staff are a visible presence around the site. Coaching staff in particular have good knowledge of the issues that concern pupils, and work with leaders and teaching staff to ensure that opportunities to develop self-awareness and resilience are built into the wider curriculum.
- There are very few instances of bullying because, as one pupil explained, 'We're a small school, so if we do fall out with each other, it gets picked up straight away.' In the past year, there have been no instances of prejudice-based name calling, racism or homophobia. Pupil ambassadors have worked with staff to raise awareness of bullying and hate crime.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils value their school and feel that its small and inclusive nature is well suited to their needs. As one pupil told inspectors, 'I feel I have finally found where I belong.'
- Pupils enjoy coming to school, and their attendance has been above average for the past two years. Staff support pupils and their parents to address and remove any issues that prevent pupils coming to school. This has been effective in improving the attendance of the very small number of pupils who were persistently absent from school.
- Teachers and coaches use effective strategies to help pupils reflect on and improve their behaviour. Records show that the few pupils who have demonstrated more challenging behaviour have been helped to overcome their challenges, and their behaviour has improved as a result. There have been no permanent and very few fixed-term exclusions.
- Pupils are good ambassadors for their school: they are well presented, courteous and respectful. They behave calmly and maturely around the school site and need little, if any, reminding to get to lessons. At break and lunchtimes they use the facilities sensibly, although some of them told inspectors that they would like more things to do in their free time. There is no litter or graffiti on the school site, and pupils take good care of their books. Behaviour logs show that disruption to lessons is rare.
- Pupils are encouraged to make a positive contribution to their communities, for example through volunteering and working together on projects that will improve their local areas. These opportunities help to foster in pupils the qualities they will need to become mature, responsible citizens.

Outcomes for pupils are inadequate

- Pupils who join the school in Year 10 have often faced considerable challenges in their previous schools, and many have significant gaps in their learning. Too little is done to ensure that these gaps are addressed quickly enough, which means that least-able pupils, in particular, do not catch up quickly enough.

- Pupils join the school with levels of prior attainment that are typically below, and sometimes significantly below, average at Key Stage 2. Until very recently, at both Key Stages 4 and 5, the options open to them were not appropriate to their needs. For example, too many pupils sat GCSEs in subjects such as French and history. Their previously low levels of literacy meant that they were very unlikely to be successful on these courses. Typically, fewer than a quarter of the pupils entered for these subjects achieved an A* to C grade. In some cases, the pass rate was much lower.
- Standards at the end of both key stages have been below national averages since the school opened. At Key Stage 4, the school did not meet the minimum floor standards in 2013 and 2014. Information from the school, which has yet to be verified, suggests that the standard will not be met for the 2015 results.
- Leaders are optimistic that a much higher proportion of pupils will make expected progress in 2015. Examples of pupils' work seen by inspectors show this to be unrealistic, because not all pupils have mastered the basics that they need to do well.
- The progress of pupils currently in the school is, at best, variable. The least able do not make rapid enough progress, because they do not get the help and support they need to catch up soon enough. The progress of some pupils continues to be adversely affected by the choice of courses open to them.
- In the sixth form, a small number of pupils have been successful and continued into university education. For too long, however, outcomes for pupils in the sixth form have been well below average, with low pass rates, low average grades and too few pupils staying the course.
- A small number of pupils are supported by the pupil premium. Outcomes for these pupils are inconsistent: actions taken to raise their achievement, such as one-to-one teaching, have not always had the desired effect. There are too few of them to compare their achievement with that of other pupils, however.
- Pupils with disabilities, and those with special educational needs, do not do equally well across different subjects. In 2015, for example, they achieved less well in mathematics than they did in English. This is because they do not always receive the support they need to do well.
- Most-able pupils make better progress than their peers, because the courses are better suited to their needs.
- Work experience placements are successful in ensuring that pupils develop some of the skills they need to be successful in work. However, too many lack the basic English and numeracy skills essential for moving forward, and have pursued inappropriate courses. This means that, despite the good support they receive from their coaches, they are not well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- At Key Stage 4, there are signs of improvement. The school's own information suggests that a greater proportion of pupils made expected progress in English last year, and pass rates for both English and mathematics improved.

16 to 19 study programmes

are inadequate

- Too many sixth form pupils fail to pass AS- and A-level qualifications. This has been the case for each year since the school opened and has shown no signs of improving. In several cases, pupils have repeated their AS-level programme only to achieve similarly poor results the second time around.
- In too many subjects, the majority of pupils either fail their exams or achieve only the lowest grades. Consequently, standards in the sixth form have been well below average since the school opened.
- Leaders have recognised that the current curriculum of the school sixth form is not fully meeting the needs of all pupils. They have begun to introduce vocational qualifications, taking appropriate note of the areas of employment growth in the local area. For example, business programmes are being developed that focus specifically on supply chain management. However, very few current pupils are following these programmes.
- Pupils do not make enough progress in lessons because teaching, learning and assessment are not good enough. In a number of subjects, teachers' own subject knowledge is not secure enough for them to help their pupils learn rapidly.
- Teachers do not plan lessons that take pupils' starting points into account. Pupils are not always clear about the purpose of the learning, because this is not communicated to them clearly.
- Often, too much praise is given for mediocre answers and written work, leading pupils to believe that their knowledge and understanding are often better than is actually the case.

- Teachers of other subjects do not do enough in lessons to help pupils improve their written English. Too often, basic English errors are not identified by teachers who consequently do not do enough to help pupils correct these.
- The narrow curriculum offer has resulted in pupils joining programmes that are not suited to their needs. In many cases, these courses are too difficult for them and they either fail completely or achieve only very low grades. A large proportion of pupils do not continue their studies into the second year. These pupils receive good support and all progress to further learning or employment, but their options have been limited by the choices they have made for their AS-level courses.
- The very few pupils who do successfully complete A-level courses have gone on to study at university or have taken up apprenticeships and training programmes. Personal coaches work with pupils to advise them of, and support them with, the application process.
- All pupils undertake work experience that helps them develop an appreciation of the demands made by employers and the skills they need to develop to become valued employees. Teachers and coaches help pupils identify their needs and work with employers to ensure that they provide opportunities for their trainees to develop these skills. The personal skills and attitudes that pupils develop while studying in the sixth form help them to secure meaningful employment when they leave.
- Those pupils who have not yet achieved a grade A* to C in either English or mathematics retake these programmes at the school. In English, pupils make good progress and most gain a grade C. In mathematics, the numbers taking the qualification are too small to make a judgement.
- The behaviour of sixth form pupils is good. They attend well, arrive on time and conduct themselves well in lessons. They answer questions enthusiastically, and are keen to make a positive contribution to discussions. They work well in groups, showing an interest in the views and experiences of their peers.
- Pupils appreciate the 'family feel' of the sixth form. They feel safe, and know how to raise any concerns they may have. Their personal development and well-being are effectively developed through a range of curriculum experiences, including 'super learning days' and enrichment sessions.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers use a range of well-considered activities to help pupils rapidly build their skills in preparation for examinations. For example, in one English lesson the teacher helped pupils analyse the structure of a particular question type and then used group discussion to help pupils develop their own questions. Well-judged strategies helped all pupils to gain a good understanding of this question type.

School details

Unique reference number	137317
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	10005768
This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.	
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Studio school
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	142
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Leigh
Headteacher	Gill Laird
Telephone number	01530 519099
Website	http://stephensonstudioschool.co.uk
Email address	info@stephensonstudioschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 June 2013

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. When it was last inspected in 2013, it was found to require improvement.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is much higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is in line with the national average. This is government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- All pupils undertake work experience each week, including for two days a week in the sixth form. The school works with a wide range of employers and organisations that provide these placements. There are no pupils in alternative provision.
- In 2014, the school did not meet the government's floor standards. These are the minimum standards for pupils' attainment and progress at Key Stage 4.
- The school is sponsored by Stephenson College.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 16 lessons. Some were jointly visited with school leaders.
- Inspectors observed pupils during registration time and visited an assembly.
- They held meetings with senior leaders, teachers and coaches, and with members of the board of trustees, which is the governing body of the school. Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils formally and informally in lessons and around the school.
- A range of documentation was considered, including present and past achievement information; school self-evaluation and improvement plan; attendance, behaviour and safeguarding records; and minutes of the board of trustees. There were only five responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. These were evaluated, alongside parental surveys carried out by the school, and the responses to a staff questionnaire were also taken into account. Inspectors looked at the quality of work in pupils' books and folders.

Inspection team

Deirdre Duignan, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Russ Henry

Her Majesty's Inspector

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