

Plymouth School of Creative Arts

The Red House, 22 Millbay Road, Millbay, Plymouth, Devon PL1 3EG

Inspection dates

16–17 January 2019

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
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Too many pupils across the primary and secondary phases of the school are making insufficient progress. Staff expectations are not high enough.
- Leaders do not evaluate the effectiveness of pupil premium and catch-up funding. Consequently, funding does not lead directly to higher outcomes for pupils.
- Absence overall, and for different groups of pupils, is too high and not showing signs of improvement. Persistent absence is also too high, as is exclusion from school.
- Across the school there is too much low-level disruption. Teaching does not engage pupils and the learning environment is not conducive to learning.
- Leadership and external support, over time, have not improved teaching quality sufficiently to enable pupils to realise their potential.
- Teaching and assessment do not meet the needs of different groups of pupils. The most able pupils are not challenged to achieve their best. The least able pupils are not provided with adequate support.
- Governors have not held leaders to account for pupils' outcomes in key subjects, such as English and mathematics, over time.
- Exclusions from school are above average. They are not declining quickly enough.
- Provision in Reception is not yet good because the curriculum and learning environments require development to maximise children's progress.
- The curriculum does not enable pupils to acquire knowledge and skills across a broad range of subjects. Most pupils do not receive adequate careers advice.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior and middle leaders, who are very new in post, are making positive changes, but it is too soon to judge their impact.
- The large majority of parents and carers who shared their views are supportive of the school.
- Safeguarding is effective.
- Staff morale is high. Staff are supportive of each other and work hard to foster positive relationships with pupils, who are well cared for.
- The physical education (PE) and sport premium is spent effectively to improve staff training and opportunities for pupils.

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?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - providing new leaders with the support they require to establish their strategies for improvement
 - refining strategic planning processes to focus on the most important issues and the impact of leaders' actions
 - raising leaders' and governors' expectations of staff and pupils
 - ensuring that systems to monitor the quality of teaching take account of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and outcomes
 - ensuring that all pupils benefit from a suitable curriculum that prepares them well for their next steps
 - ensuring that pupil premium and catch-up funding is fully evaluated for effectiveness
 - ensuring that external support helps to raise pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that governors form an objective and accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness in all areas of its work.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and raise pupils' achievement, by:
 - raising staff expectations of what different groups of pupils can achieve, particularly the most able and disadvantaged
 - ensuring that the arrangement of classes and resources enables staff to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities
 - ensuring that leaders find ways to improve the learning environment, particularly the acoustics, so that it is more conducive to high-quality teaching and learning
 - providing teachers with the training required to ensure that assessment is accurate and used to promote strong progress
 - ensuring that the feedback provided to pupils to help them improve their work is applied consistently in different subjects across the school
 - ensuring that staff plan and deliver teaching that enables them to meet the demands of the new national curriculum.
- Improve personal development, welfare and behaviour, by:
 - improving the attendance of different groups of pupils

- developing pupils’ attitudes to learning so that there are fewer instances of off-task behaviour
 - reducing rates of exclusion for different groups of pupils
 - ensuring that all pupils have access to high-quality careers advice and guidance.
- Improve provision in early years, by ensuring that:
- the curriculum is developed to enable children to better meet all the early learning goals
 - the learning environment, both inside and outside, is improved for children in Reception.

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

Inadequate

- The school is facing significant challenges. It has grown from having 292 pupils on roll in 2015 to over 1,000 pupils on roll in 2019. In keeping with this rapid expansion, the nature of the school has changed as it has evolved from being a primary school to an all-through institution. Greater numbers of pupils with increasingly complex needs have joined the school since the previous inspection. Over time, leaders have not ensured that school systems and procedures are in place to cope sufficiently with these changes and maintain high standards.
- Until recently, some leaders have not exercised their duties effectively. The interim headteachers, who are very new in post, are seeking to distribute leadership better throughout the school. Leaders, such as the phase leaders, welcome this new approach because they feel trusted and empowered in their roles. However, they are still adjusting to this new way of working. The extended leadership team has not yet had a chance to demonstrate the impact of its work, because leaders are either new to the role or working in a different way.
- Over time, leaders have not done enough to monitor and improve the quality of teaching across different subjects in both the primary and secondary phases. Consequently, pupils are not making enough progress, particularly in core academic subjects, to ensure that they are well prepared for the next steps of their education.
- Over time, leaders have not had high enough expectations of staff and pupils. This has created a culture in which there is too little emphasis on rigour and challenge. This is now beginning to change under the new interim headteachers, but the changes are very recent.
- External support has not resulted in improvements in teaching quality and higher outcomes for pupils across the school. Children achieve well in early years, but their achievement declines as they move up through the school. Leaders have not used external support effectively to arrest this decline.
- Leaders are not evaluating how well pupil premium and catch-up funding is being used. Although the funding supports strategies to raise pupils' achievement, leaders do not know which strategies are working and whether the money is spent on the pupils who need it most.
- The curriculum is a work in progress. Currently, it does not provide pupils with a broad foundation of skills and knowledge across different disciplines. For example, some pupils in the secondary phase do not study sciences or humanities from Year 9 onwards because of the options process. The curriculum attempts to embrace the school's vision and philosophy, with an emphasis on creative, independent learning and 'learning through doing'. However, it does not support pupils to acquire the knowledge and skills that are a prerequisite for independent working.
- Over time, leaders have failed to form an objective, accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Strategic planning has not focused with clarity and precision on what most needs to improve. Leaders have not ensured that there is a correlation between theoretical planning and the day-to-day reality of life in the school.

- The large majority of parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, and who spoke with the lead inspector, are satisfied with most aspects of the school's work and would recommend the school. Most parents feel positive about the school's distinctive vision and approach to education. However, some parents expressed concern about the quality of communication between school and home.
- The interim headteachers have worked hard, and successfully, to energise and motivate the staff team. Their efforts have produced a cohesive, united staff team whose members are highly supportive of each other. Consequently, staff morale is high and adults are keen to do their best by pupils.
- Additional funding is used well to support sport in school and pupils' physical development. It has helped leaders to establish partnerships with external providers and make better use of the local gym and swimming pool. Funding has also enabled staff to offer a range of extra-curricular sporting activities and to secure high-quality training for staff.

Governance of the school

- Governors have not held leaders to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement across the curriculum, particularly in academic subjects. The findings of a recent review of governance are still being implemented. It has not yet led to notable improvements in teaching quality and pupils' achievement.
- Governors have not used their strategic role to ensure that effective leadership and management systems, including lines of accountability, are in place. Over time, they have not been provided with, or interrogated well enough, information to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of the school's key areas for improvement.
- Governors are highly committed to the school's distinctive vision and philosophy of learning. They have integrity, and care deeply that pupils should experience enjoyable, stimulating learning that broadens their horizons.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding lead, who is also one of the interim headteachers, has effective oversight of safeguarding procedures and systems in the school. He understands the importance of his responsibilities, given the high level of need and the number of vulnerable pupils in the school. Consequently, all staff are trained to understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and to be vigilant.
- Staff know to whom they should speak, and the procedure to follow, should they have concerns about a pupil. All staff know how to record referrals on the online system. The system organises records clearly, indicating the chronology of events, staff involvement and actions taken. Referrals are monitored closely by leaders.
- Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are complete, up to date, comprehensive and well managed. Staff who have received training in safer recruitment also help to ensure that adults who apply to join the school are suitable.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teachers across the primary and secondary phases do not match tasks and activities well enough to pupils' different needs. As a result, the most able pupils are not encouraged routinely to think at a deeper level and they become bored. The least able pupils, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), find learning difficult. Some pupils are supported by teaching assistants, but often these staff are helping pupils to stay on task, as much as assisting their learning.
- Many pupils do not exhibit positive attitudes to learning and there is too much off-task behaviour. This is because teaching fails to engage them, for the reasons explained above. Inspectors observed many pupils who were bored or distracted in lessons. Pupils were sometimes seen slumped in their seats with their heads resting on their arms, idly chatting with their peers or looking around at other distractions.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour and what they can achieve in some subjects. There is too little monitoring of their progress and the pride they take in their work. Consequently, many pupils are allowed to achieve too little. Where leaders have taken steps to tackle this, such as in English, higher expectations, more organised planning and greater rigour are encouraging pupils to engage with their learning.
- Some areas of the learning environment are not conducive to learning. The open plan nature of some of the spaces means that noise levels are often very high, particularly during staggered breaks when some pupils are still learning. In these areas, pupils and staff are in close proximity to each other, so there are many distractions. It is to their credit that staff battle to teach in these difficult conditions. Some pupils also deserve credit because they work hard despite these conditions. One pupil in Year 11, whose view was typical, told the lead inspector that learning, 'was exhausting because of the noise'. However, leaders are working purposefully with the building contractors to take action to overcome the problem.
- Pupils do not know how to improve their work in some subjects. This is because they do not receive suitable feedback, which, in keeping with the school's policy, would help them to identify, and learn from, their mistakes.
- Assessment is not consistently used well across the school to set targets, monitor progress and inform future teaching. Systems are relatively new and staff are still becoming familiar with them. In some subjects, pupils are unclear about the next steps in their learning.
- Pupils benefit from strong relationships with their teachers. Staff care about their pupils and create learning environments that are safe spaces where pupils can express opinions and participate.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils feel ambivalent about their school. Too many pupils from different year groups who spoke with inspectors and responded to the pupil survey expressed disillusionment with their school experience. They feel that they are not learning enough and are not being pushed to do their best. Some pupils lack confidence and self-assurance, particularly in respect of their learning. In part, this is informed by previous negative experiences of education.
- Nevertheless, pupils' pastoral care is a key priority for staff. They invest time, energy and resources in helping pupils to overcome various social, emotional and behavioural issues. Pupils who require extra support benefit from nurture and learning support, which are provided in dedicated spaces. Pupils can also access support from a counsellor, school nurse and a well-being practitioner, should they need it. Staff have effective processes in place to identify vulnerable pupils and their needs, which enables them to be more proactive in their work. The very small number of pupils attending alternative provision are provided with appropriate care to support their mental health.
- Most pupils do not receive a comprehensive programme of careers advice and guidance. This work is being developed as leaders implement the Gatsby Benchmarks. However, at present, only pupils with SEND are provided with one-to-one careers interviews.
- There is little bullying in the school, because of the inclusive, tolerant and accepting attitude of pupils and staff. Pupils who spoke with inspectors reported that if on occasion it does occur, bullying is dealt with effectively by staff. This view was also supported by most of the pupils who responded to the survey issued during the inspection.
- The personal, social and health education programme has been revised recently to give pupils a stronger voice in matters pertaining to their experience of school. It has been improved to give greater attention to British values, mental health and helping pupils to keep themselves safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Attendance overall, and for different groups of pupils, is well below average. On the first day of the inspection, only 86% of pupils were in school. Although attendance over time is higher than this, it is still unacceptably low. Persistent absence is also too high and punctuality has worsened.
- Securing good attendance is a significant challenge for staff because of high levels of pupil mobility and some pupils' negative experiences at previous schools. Staff have developed strategies to overcome these challenges, but they are new and it is too soon

to judge their impact.

- Too many pupils are excluded from school. Leaders' actions are not helping to reduce exclusion notably over time.
- In lessons, there is too much off-task behaviour and low-level disruption. Around the school site and during social times, however, pupils behave in an orderly and considerate way. They are respectful towards each other and staff. Staff model appropriate behaviour, which has a positive influence on pupils' behaviour. This aspect of behaviour has improved because of leaders' recent actions to improve pupil movement around the school.
- Pupils look after the school environment well. There is no litter, graffiti or vandalism.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Work in pupils' books and learning observed by inspectors, as well as the school's own performance information, all indicate that pupils are making inadequate progress. Teachers' expectations are too low and pupils receive too little feedback on how to improve their work.
- Many groups of pupils are making inadequate progress. The most able pupils are not presented with enough challenge to push them further. Disadvantaged pupils are not making sufficient progress, because additional funding is not being managed or evaluated effectively to meet individual needs.
- In 2018, the overall attainment and progress of pupils who left key stage 2 were significantly below the national average for reading, writing and mathematics. This was also true for different groups of pupils, including those who were disadvantaged.
- Across different subjects and year groups, too many pupils do not take enough pride in their work. Books are scribbled on, handwriting is poor and pages are torn or ripped. Often tasks are left unfinished, or pupils are not provided with enough opportunities to develop high-level skills. For example, pupils do not develop their extended writing skills or mathematical reasoning well enough.
- Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 in 2018 was below the national average in all subjects. Pupils currently in key stage 1 are not making sufficient progress in mathematics or writing.
- There are pockets of strength, such as the work produced in English in some year groups. In Year 6, some books showed evidence of disciplined writing for different audiences and purposes, reflecting rigour and high expectations. However, these were exceptional and highlighted the extreme variability in quality across the curriculum.
- Pupils make better progress in certain creative or vocational subjects, such as media, photography, childcare and performing arts. This is because they engage with stimulating teaching, activities and resources that spark their interest.
- Pupils are not adequately prepared for the next stage of their education because their achievement at the end of different key stages, with the exception of early years, is too low. Overall, pupils are not prepared adequately for the demands of the new national curriculum.

- The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator has improved procedures to identify pupils' special educational needs and monitor their progress. He is also providing training and support for staff to meet pupils' needs. However, this work is not yet having sufficient impact on pupils' achievement.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Curriculum provision in Reception Year is not providing children with enough opportunities to meet all the early learning goals equally well. However, provision in the pre-school is strong.
- The learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, but particularly the latter, is not arranged to best effect to ensure that children can maximise learning opportunities. Nevertheless, staff have ensured that the environment is bright, colourful and designed to make learning seem fun and exciting.
- Children's behaviour and attitudes to learning are positive in the main. However, some children struggle to maintain their focus on the task in hand. The consideration and respect that characterise pupils' relationships higher up the school are established in early years.
- The phase 1 leader coordinates provision well across Reception and the pre-school. She has a good understanding of the phase's strengths and weaknesses and is taking appropriate, decisive action to make improvements. She ensures that there is a seamless transition between the pre-school and Reception.
- Staff know children's needs well because effective assessment processes are in place. Staff have implemented a tightly focused early intervention process, which helps them provide effective, timely support. This ensures that children make expected progress.
- In 2018, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was in line with the national average. Current children are making similarly positive progress.
- Children are safe and well looked after. Staff in early years apply the same vigilance and robust approach towards safeguarding as is the case elsewhere in the school.

School details

Unique reference number	139923
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10085624

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,023
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Brewerton
Headteacher	Dave Strudwick
Telephone number	01752 221927
Website	www.plymouthschoolofcreativearts.co.uk
Email address	info@schoolofcreativearts.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 June 2015

Information about this school

- Plymouth School of Creative Arts is a 3–16 mainstream, city-centre academy free school. It is sponsored by Plymouth College of Art. Its aim is to secure academic excellence in all subjects through taking an approach to learning similar to that used in the college, to develop the arts and creativity.
- The primary phase opened in September 2013 in local offices. The secondary phase opened the following year with a cohort of Year 7 pupils from local primary schools. At the time of the inspection, there were, for the first time, pupils in all year groups.
- The pupils moved into the new purpose-built school in February 2015.
- At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had very recently left the school. The two deputy headteachers stepped up to become joint interim headteachers after Christmas and had only been in post a matter of days.

- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is much higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND who receive support is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is also significantly above the national average.
- Two pupils attend alternative provision to support their mental health needs. The two alternative providers used by the school are ACE Schools Multi-Academy Trust and Quay Partnership Plymouth.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning and behaviour in lessons, sometimes jointly with leaders.
- Meetings were held with members of the extended leadership team, including phase leaders, governors, the special educational needs coordinator, parents and the resident inspector.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation. This included the school’s self-evaluation, progress information, minutes of governing body meetings, the school improvement partner’s notes of visits and the resident inspector’s most recent report. Inspectors also scrutinised information pertaining to the curriculum, the monitoring of teaching, behaviour, attendance and exclusion, and safeguarding.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils’ work and observed pupils’ conduct around the school.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils.
- The lead inspector took account of 250 responses to the online Parent View survey with associated free-text comments, 331 responses to the pupil survey, completed by sixth-form students, and 112 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Steve Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Marie Hunter	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Fox	Ofsted Inspector
Malcolm Willis	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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