

Plymouth School of Creative Arts

22 Millbay Road, Millbay, Plymouth PL1 3EG

Inspection dates 23–24 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Early years provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The Chair of Governors and headteacher have established an ambitious vision of teaching and learning which is shared by governors, staff and parents.
- In line with the school's vision, the pupils quickly learn to lead their own learning by working things out for themselves, under the guidance of the teacher. They are totally engaged in, and enjoy, the activities. This contributes to their good behaviour and growing confidence.
- Teachers' strong expertise inspires the pupils and raises their aspirations.
- Teachers make good use of assessment to identify each pupil's needs and to adapt the learning accordingly.
- Teaching in the early years ensures that the children get off to a good start in their education.
- Across subjects and year groups, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs, make good progress from their starting points. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils achieve above average expectations in reading.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils in Year 7 and the most able pupils in the primary phase do not make as much progress in writing as in other aspects. They are not developing the skills that would enable them to craft a variety of texts with increasing accuracy and effectiveness.
- Middle leaders are not yet checking the quality of teaching and learning to ensure all pupils make consistently good progress.
- Governors are not yet using the information available on pupils' progress to challenge any unevenness.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by 11 teachers, some of which were observed jointly with senior staff. In addition, the inspectors examined pupils' work and heard a few pupils read.
- The inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, teachers, senior and middle leaders, and members of the governing body. They also met informally with some parents.
- The inspectors observed the school's work. They examined a range of documents, including information on the monitoring of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour, the monitoring of the quality of teaching, and documents relating to improvement planning and the safeguarding of pupils.
- The inspectors took account of 77 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey and 39 questionnaires completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

Sue Frater, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Plymouth School of Creative Arts is a 4–16 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 a similar approach to learning as 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 pupils in the Reception studio, Years 1, 2, 3 and 7. Most of the Year 7 pupils were out of school on a trip to France on the second day of the inspection.
- The pupils moved into the new purpose-built school in February 2015.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for pupils' education.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support from the pupil premium is broadly average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for the pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is below average.
- The government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress, do not apply to the school yet as there are currently no pupils at the end of the primary phase or who have taken GCSE examinations.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress in writing in Year 7 and for the most able pupils in the primary phase by:
 - developing pupils' vocabulary, sentence structure and editing skills to enable them to craft their texts accurately and effectively
 - encouraging pupils to read a wide range of texts
 - providing good models of writing across subjects.
- Strengthen leadership by:
 - developing middle leaders' skills in monitoring, evaluating and developing teaching and learning, so that these are more consistently strong
 - ensuring governors maintain an overview of pupils' progress by subject, year and pupil groups.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and Chair of Governors have appointed governors and staff who have considerable expertise and talent. Together, they have quickly established a culture of high expectations and aspirations for all pupils through a distinct vision of teaching and learning. The vision involves encouraging pupils to learn through making, including forming ideas and making scientific investigations, as well as forms of art.
- Most of the parents and all staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school's work. Through regular communication, surveys and opportunities for parents to come into school each morning, the school works well to engage all parents in their children's education.
- The school makes a positive contribution to other local schools through sharing its expertise in the arts. It liaises effectively with local primary schools to support pupils' transition into Year 7, for example, by identifying any enhanced support that is needed for pupils with special educational needs.
- The expansion of the school to eventually accommodate all year groups is very carefully planned and managed. The developing leadership structure ensures that roles and responsibilities are clearly understood.
- Senior leaders are establishing effective systems for checking pupils' academic progress, behaviour and attendance. The performance management of teachers is linked appropriately to their impact on pupils' progress. Staff, like the pupils, have individual learning profiles which identify clearly their professional development needs.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of the school's work is thorough and accurate. It informs relevant priorities for the school learning plan. The impact can be seen, for example, in the good progress that pupils make in reading in the primary phase.
- Phase and subject leaders play a key role in developing the effective provision. They evaluate pupils' progress each half-term and ensure that any underachievement is addressed. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils make as much progress as other pupils in the school. However, the middle leaders are not yet all observing lessons and carrying out scrutinies of pupils' books and other work systematically to identify areas for improvement.
- A key strength of the school's inspiring curriculum is that pupils can see the relevance of their activities to life outside of the school. For example, pupils in Year 7 converted pounds into euros in a mathematics lesson and learnt how to order breakfast in French. Video clips showed the pupils applying these skills confidently and competently on a trip to France. Pupils develop their own science investigations and designs in technology, such as designing a thermo tub with a lid that changes colour to warn parents if baby food is too hot. Younger pupils were observed learning and applying skills as historians, for instance being Henry VIII in role play and excavating 'dinosaur' bones in the sandpit. Pupils' love of learning and thirst for knowledge is palpable.
- The curriculum effectively covers the National Curriculum and the early years curriculum. It is enriched by an extensive range of visiting artists and extra-curricular activities such as dance and football, which support pupils' academic achievement and physical well-being. The activities and visitors, including a refugee group, make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their understanding of life in modern Britain. The school promotes equality of opportunity well and does not accept any form of discriminatory practice.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements. The headteacher and deputy headteacher ensure that all staff are trained regularly and well. Consequently, they identify pupils at risk of harm and respond appropriately. All required checks on the suitability of staff to work with children have been carried out.
- The phase leader has ensured that early years provision is effective, including the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and encouraging children to think and solve problems for themselves.
- The sponsor provides effective support for the school, particularly through its extensive links with artists, which enriches the curriculum. The school also engages well with members of the local authority who monitor the impact of its work regularly. This ensures that leaders' assessment of pupils' achievement is accurate.
- The pupil premium is used effectively to provide additional support to meet the identified needs of eligible pupils. As a result, the disadvantaged pupils make as much progress as other pupils in the school, and more than similarly disadvantaged pupils nationally.
- The sport premium is used well to extend the range of physical education, for example, to include dance and football. This has led to an increase in the number of pupils participating in sport.

■ The governance of the school:

- is effective
- is committed to maintaining the vision for teaching and learning as the school grows in size
- knows the school well through regular visits which are followed-up with insightful reports for the full governing body
- understands pupils' achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage and by the end of Key Stage 1
- is not yet using the information available on pupils' progress in all year groups and for all pupil groups and subjects to challenge any inconsistency or underachievement and to hold senior leaders to account for the standards pupils reach
- monitors the impact of the pupil premium on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the sport premium on the increasing engagement of pupils in physical education
- ensures the efficient management of financial resources so that staff and resources are effectively deployed, especially as the number of pupils is rapidly increasing
- addresses issues which arise from surveying parents' views, for example, clarifying the dress code expected of pupils
- ensures the school's safeguarding and performance management procedures are robust.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Throughout the school, pupils are engaged in making and working things out for themselves. This leads to high levels of enjoyment and increasing confidence and self-esteem. Pupils' enthusiasm for, and positive attitudes to learning have a good impact on the progress they make.
- Pupils work well with each other and with staff. They respond very quickly to teachers' requests, so disruption of lessons by minor incidents of misbehaviour is rare. However, at times, lessons become too noisy and this impedes the quality of pupils' reflection.
- All staff and most parents are positive about pupils' behaviour. A few parents do not agree that behaviour is good. Pupils say that a few of their peers end up bickering at play and lunch times because there are not enough activities for them. Inspectors found that break times were calm, orderly and well supervised by staff, but agree with pupils that the range of play activities is limited.
- There is a positive ethos in and around the school. Lessons start punctually and pupils' attendance, which is currently broadly average, is improving. A high proportion of pupils partake of the healthy school lunches and all sit together in the spacious dining hall. Pupils take pride in their studios but some, particularly in Year 7, do not take enough care to present their work well.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Through the curriculum, pupils learn about different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, and how to keep themselves safe in different situations. The school's records confirm that there are few incidents of bullying and these are dealt with effectively.
- The school's records also show that there are marked improvements in behaviour over time for individual pupils with particular behavioural needs.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and most parents who responded to Parent View agree. Pupils are confident that staff would deal effectively with any concerns they may have. One pupil stated, 'We are all different, but equal'. They clearly feel valued by the staff.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers' strong subject knowledge and expertise, especially in the arts, inspire the pupils and raise their aspirations. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan interesting activities that are pitched at the right level of challenge for each individual. As a result, most pupils, including disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and the most able, are totally engaged and make good progress in almost all aspects of their work.
- Teachers and other adults create a positive climate for learning in which pupils develop the confidence to communicate their ideas or to perform their work without fear of making mistakes.

- Teachers, particularly those who are more established, listen to, carefully observe and skilfully question pupils to encourage them to think about how they can improve their artefact or performance.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics (the sounds that letters make), is taught very effectively in the primary phase, enabling pupils to achieve standards in reading that are above the national average. The teaching of mathematics is improving across the school so that most pupils are making good progress, particularly in solving problems. Pupils in Year 7 who had previously lost confidence in their mathematics skills, are now re-engaged and enjoying the subject.
- Most pupils in the primary phase make good progress in their writing. However, the most able pupils in this phase and pupils in Year 7 are making less progress in this aspect of their work than in other aspects. This is because writing skills are not taught well at this level. The pupils, particularly in Year 7, are not reading widely enough to develop their vocabulary and understanding of sentence structure. Teachers across subjects do not ensure that pupils understand what is required in different forms of writing for different purposes, such as newspapers and diaries.
- Pupils' work is marked effectively, with good quality written feedback. However, the marking does not always lead to improvements in the quality and presentation of pupils' written work. This is not the case when pupils create other art forms. For example, pupils in Year 7 all took great care and pride in the decoration of their crepes in a culinary art lesson and were proud to present them to the class. The presentation was of a consistently high standard.
- Teachers assess accurately pupils' progress each half-term and ensure that pupils at risk of underachievement receive appropriate support, including from other adults. They use a range of effective teaching strategies. A small minority of parents do not agree that their child receives appropriate homework for their age. Inspectors found that there was lack of clarity around the homework policy. The school has identified the need to communicate the policy clearly to parents.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Progress across year groups in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics, is mostly strong. Evidence in pupils' work indicates that they achieve well, apart from some pupils who do not make good progress in writing. Many of the most able primary pupils and pupils in Year 7 do not have a sufficient vocabulary or knowledge of sentence structure and editing skills to enable them to create effective, well constructed texts and to reach the higher levels in writing.
- As there is not yet a full complement of pupils in the primary and secondary phases, it is not possible to make comparisons with national figures for the proportions of pupils making and exceeding expected progress.
- The school's comprehensive monitoring of progress indicates that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is similar to other pupils in the school. Published data for the end of Year 2 in 2014 shows that the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was above that for similar pupils nationally, although below other pupils in the school.
- Pupils in the primary phase make particularly good progress in reading and attain standards that are above the national expectations. However, the most able pupils in the primary phase and pupils in Year 7 are not reading widely and often enough to develop a good understanding of how texts are formed.
- Pupils apply their skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics very effectively to develop their knowledge in a wide range of subjects. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 3 designed and made games based on those used in Tudor times. This involved applying the skills of researching, planning, discussing and measuring. The development of such skills ensures that the pupils are well prepared for the next phase of their education.
- Disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and the most able learn as well as all pupils in most aspects of their work. This is because teachers assess their needs and use their individual learning profiles to plan suitably challenging activities and appropriate support for them.

The early years provision is good

- Outcomes in the early years have been above those typically expected for this age group for the past two years. This represents good progress for all children from their starting points, which are broadly in line with age related expectations. All groups, including disabled children, those who have special educational needs, disadvantaged children and the most able develop the key skills needed to make a good start in Year 1.

- The quality of teaching is consistently good. The teachers and other adults have high expectations of what the children can achieve based on their accurate assessment of the children's skills, knowledge and understanding when they join the school.
- A key factor in the success of the early years provision is the teachers' use of on-going assessment to adapt activities to meet the needs of individual children. Any gaps in children's learning are quickly addressed, so that they can all make good progress.
- The seven areas of learning are covered effectively in interesting and challenging activities which motivate the children. The children are eager to learn and listen carefully to the teacher and each other. They learn to work things out for themselves, but some of the activities they undertake do not promote efficient learning.. This slows the rate of the children's progress.
- Children's good behaviour shows that they feel safe. They safely and confidently explore their studio and the outside area.
- Parents contribute to initial assessments of children's starting points when they join the school and they are kept well informed about their children's progress through regular digital images of their work. Parents value the opportunity to join their children in school every morning for half an hour.
- As in the rest of the school, safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures are implemented consistently. Staff review and clearly evaluate practice regularly.
- The early years phase leader has an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the provision through effective self-evaluation. She takes appropriate action to further improve the provision, including the training and development of staff.
- Comprehensive monitoring of the children's progress in their learning and in their personal development informs any support they may need, including from external agencies.

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	139923
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	450183

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	4-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	292
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Prof Andrew Brewerton
Headteacher	David Strudwick
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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