

Rye Studio School

The Grove, Rye, East Sussex, TN31 7NQ

Inspection dates

24–25 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- This school has an impressive and pioneering vision of its role and purpose. After only two years of opening, this vision is fully realised.
- Students benefit immensely from being at the school: personally, creatively and academically. They achieve excellently in all subjects and projects. The quality and breadth of their work in visual arts is particularly striking.
- Students realise the importance of their learning, not simply in terms of examination grades, but also in terms of the attitudes and skills they need for successful careers and lives.
- Teaching is excellent and continues to improve. Students enjoy very productive and supportive partnerships with the staff, in which their ideas are highly valued.
- The school evaluates itself robustly and honestly. In some respects, it underestimates its success. This is a sign of its lack of complacency and its desire to continue to improve and innovate.
- The school's improvement plans are very effective working documents. Some of the success criteria and objectives in the plan are not as sharp as they might be. This makes success in areas of the students' development where there is no examination data harder to check systematically.
- The school has very strong partnerships with local businesses and organisations, including the local authority, as well as some further afield. Students benefit from a very wide range of work experience.
- Parents who met with inspectors are very pleased about the school's positive effect on their children.
- The school is led highly effectively by its principal. She is excellently supported by the senior staff, whose skills complement each other's.
- The staff have considerable expertise and commitment. Many are successful artistic and creative professionals in their own right. Students really appreciate this expertise.
- The school's curriculum is superbly organised and fit for its purpose, with a business and arts focus. There are not yet, however, GCSE and A-level courses available in music, which restricts the options for some students.
- The governing body challenges and supports the school very well.
- The academy trust, of which the school is a part, supports and guides the school excellently.
- The school is very supportive to its students. It also has very high expectations of them which are realised.
- Students behave excellently and are encouraging to each other. They quickly grow in confidence and develop impressive social and study skills. They use these in successful work placements.
- All students leaving the school after examinations move on to university, further education, apprenticeships or worthwhile employment.
- Some students have been excluded or have underachieved elsewhere. The school is very successful in supporting such students in regaining their confidence and sense of purpose and vocation.
- Provision and outcomes in the sixth form are excellent.

Information about this inspection

- The school was inspected by two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI), one with a specialism in schools, the other in further education and skills.
- They observed eight lessons across the school, some jointly with senior leaders. They observed the school at work, and were present with students as they worked and socialised together and made presentations.
- They scrutinised students’ work in books, folders, on display and in performance. They looked at students’ visual art and design work which was arranged around the school for examination moderation and an exhibition.
- HMI held discussions with the principal, members of staff, students, local employers, artists who work with the school, the Chair and members of the governing body, as well as the executive principal and Chair of the Rye Academy Trust.
- HMI evaluated and discussed important school documents, including the school improvement plan and self-evaluations, its website, data about students’ progress, information about how staff performance is managed and minutes of meetings.
- They took account of the confidential questionnaires returned by 16 members of staff. Too few parents contributed their opinions on Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire, for these to be taken into account. However, HMI met with a group of parents.

Inspection team

Robin Hammerton, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Victor Reid

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a studio school, which opened in September 2013. Studio schools seek to engage students in enterprise and real work tasks. In its first year it had students only in Years 10 and 12. Now it has students in all years from 10 to 13.
- The school is part of the Rye Academy Trust. It specialises in the creative industries, especially visual and performing arts, media and business.
- It is much smaller than the average secondary school. It is growing in size. More students than average enter the school other than at the usual times.
- The students come from a wide range of previous schools, some of which are far afield. The close proximity of Rye station is useful to many students when travelling to and from the school.
- The school has many links with local employers and other partners, but does not use any formal alternative provision outside of the school. All of its courses are offered internally.
- The school does not yet have a set of GCSE results. Therefore, it is not possible to say that it has or has not reached the government's minimum requirements for grades and students' progress, known as the floor standard.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students in Key Stage 4, entitled to the support of pupil premium funding, is above the national average.
- About an average proportion of students are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Most students are White British.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In the school improvement plans and self-evaluation, sharpen the way in which outcomes for students are measured and analysed, where there is no examination or assessment data.

Inspection judgement

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The principal leads with vision and determination. She knows what she is seeking to achieve: a creative, exciting and business like school, with high expectations, in which students are given respect and take real responsibility. She expects they will learn how to develop and then sell their different talents, meet industry standards, and support each other.
- Working with others, she has brought this vision excellently and rapidly to fruition. This school is a very exciting and inspiring place of learning and personal growth for the students it serves.
- The principal is very well supported. The other senior staff have complementary skills and clearly defined roles which they carry out with skill and great care. All leaders have a high profile and are readily available to assist students, staff and parents.
- Under this clear leadership, excellent teaching and behaviour fully flourish. The school's staff understand what is expected of them clearly. They love their jobs. One spoke of the school leaders' 'inspiration and aspiration'. Another justifiably spoke of the 'constant flow of exciting new projects'. Another mentioned 'creative risk taking' and students 'learning in enterprising ways'.
- The school evaluates itself robustly and honestly. Rightly, these evaluations are firmly focused on the outcomes for students. In some respects, the school does not give itself enough credit and slightly underestimates its own success. This shows there is no complacency whatsoever. The school is ground-breaking and keen to keep improving.
- There are strong systems for developing and improving teaching. Staff are well supported and guided, receiving some very useful training.
- The school manages and spends its pupil premium funding very effectively.
- The school improvement plan is very effective and clear. It is focused on sensible, stimulating areas of work. Some of the targets within the plan, however, lack precision about outcomes for students which are not formally examined. For example, the plan quite properly states the need to develop further students' identity as creative practitioners, but without saying how that will be gauged or checked. This makes very sharp evaluation harder to do.
- Equalities are at the very heart of this school. Each student's uniqueness is celebrated and planned for rigorously. All students achieve very well and there is no evidence of any unfair discrimination.
- Most teachers have middle leadership responsibilities, particularly in planning for and developing their subjects. They do this very resourcefully and so students have exciting and rigorous lessons and projects, as a result.
- The curriculum is very carefully designed to meet the school's objectives and students' individual needs. All students follow a core programme in Key Stage 4, including mathematics, English, information technology and science. The other subjects, in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, are based in the creative, performing and production arts, as well as business. In most creative subjects, BTECs, GCSEs and A levels are all helpfully available as options. In music, however, only BTECs are available, which is a limitation for some students.
- The school's procedures for safeguarding students are thorough and fully meet requirements. Staff monitor attendance and any behaviour patterns with rigour, checking constantly the well-being and circumstances of each student.
- The school's programmes for careers guidance are of an exceptional quality. These are firmly rooted in the strong relationships it has developed with a diverse range of employers. Students see the world of work very much as it is and learn quickly the expectations this places on them, as well as the opportunities they have. All students undertake regular work placements.
- The Rye Academy Trust originally had the idea of setting up the studio school. It has very successfully guided the project to fruition. Its strong systems, used across the trust, including for the robust management of the performance of staff, are very helpful to the studio school. The school usefully links to, and shares resources with, the adjacent Rye College, an 11 to 16 school within the trust.
- The school also has developed a productive relationship with the local authority, and is very accepting of the useful support and challenge from the county council's officers.
- **The governance of the school:**
The well-organised local governing body has many responsibilities delegated to it from the Rye Academy Trust. Its members carry these out very well. They have a clear view of what the school is seeking to achieve and support that vision by asking astute and challenging questions of senior staff. They know how teaching is improved through first-hand experience, when visiting the school, and through helpful reports from senior staff. They understand well what school data are showing about students' achievement.

Working closely with the academy trust, governors ensure that staff pay progression decisions are well and fairly managed, as is the performance management of the principal.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- Students' behaviour rapidly matures once they join the school. They are confident and attentive. Parents clearly note this, as do the students themselves. They conform to the expectations the school sets with real eagerness.
- Students benefit from meeting inspirational people from the world of business and the creative industries, as well as the excellent role modelling from the staff. Students are polite, well-mannered and considerate of others. They manage and regulate their own behaviour independently, speaking assuredly about their future aspirations.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is consistently excellent. They are always ready to co-operate and learn. They feel trusted by staff and respond, showing excellent attitudes to their learning. They are punctual to lessons and show real professionalism in the way they work individually and together.
- Students take genuine responsibility in the school and in the local community. For example, some are members of the school council. Others play a full and highly valued part in meetings of the organising committee of the prestigious Rye Arts Festival.
- There have been no permanent exclusions, and a very small number of temporary exclusions, which are not recent.
- Attendance is above average and improving. There is little persistent absence and the rate has fallen. In most cases, students' attendance is notably better than it was before they joined the studio school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Students feel very safe and secure in themselves and in their learning. Each student has a member of staff as a personal learning coach. They regard this system very highly. It makes them feel safe in expressing themselves and discussing any problems, whether academic or personal. They are confident they will be heard with respect and any problems addressed.
- Students universally say that they are not aware of any bullying in the school. They feel that the school's atmosphere and its close-knit community make this virtually impossible to imagine. This view is supported by the school's records. No parents raised any concerns.
- Students are very aware, nevertheless, of different types of bullying, and especially on the internet. They can clearly and sensibly explain how they seek to keep themselves safe on the internet, whilst also seeing the power of the web and social media to help them share ideas, and promote themselves and their work.
- The school's tutorial and assembly programme provides very effective teaching and guidance to students on topics such as personal safety, healthy living, faith, democracy, equality and diversity. This helps students to feel safe and secure. It effectively promotes fundamental British values and, with the rest of the curriculum, prepares students well for life in modern Britain.
- There is good evidence of strong and effective parental involvement in cases where students become particularly vulnerable or experience difficulties. One parent simply commented, 'the support here is remarkable'.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching, across all subjects and year groups, is highly effective. It enables students, from all groups, to become poised and successful learners. As a result, they achieve in ways they might not have thought possible. The parents who met with inspectors are delighted about this.
- The school's preferred approach is for teachers to work as partners with their students, as 'first amongst equals'. So, although teachers are clearly in charge of all lessons, they listen carefully to students' views and preferences. Students expect to ask each other questions, and to work things out together, not simply relying on the teacher. One student summed this up by saying, 'It's two way respect. There's more freedom and help. Everyone is respectful'.

- Teachers offer positive and very helpful feedback to students, in their high-quality marking of work and verbal comments in lessons. Students find this very useful and constructive; it contributes well to their rapid learning. They are also consistently mature and appropriately self-assured in the way they offer feedback and help to each other.
- Lessons allow students to think deeply for themselves, share ideas with adults and each other and learn in real depth. For example, in a Year 10 GCSE English lesson, students made very astute and profound remarks about the motivation of characters in 'Romeo and Juliet', showing real appreciation of Shakespeare's insights and language. They bounced ideas off each other, reaching maturely evidenced conclusions, such as 'Romeo wants to be loved and is in love with the idea of love'.
- Students are motivated to learn, not simply to get a good examination grade but because they are genuinely interested in the subject matter as it is presented. Teachers skilfully build up and use that intrinsic motivation. They then very effectively help students to apply their deep learning to examination criteria.
- Staff offer a good variety of activities in their teaching, which often include the use of practical apparatus. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson, students' understanding of formulae related to solid shapes was helped by the fact that they physically handled such shapes in the lesson. Students pointed out that a science lesson was enhanced by the use of modelling dough to make representations of atomic structures.
- Teachers have very high expectations which are shared with the students. They adapt the work and tasks they set well to suit individual needs. For example, in a sixth form textiles lesson, the teacher ensured students worked to industry standards, adjusting the tasks to suit the students' needs and interests. She provided much personalised verbal feedback to each student. All students were highly motivated and challenged to produce the very best work they could.
- School staff consistently show very strong knowledge of their subjects. This is well respected by students and also leads to excellent learning.
- Much of the teaching is developed through tasks and projects which have real purposes, leading to a performance, presentation or display. Students find this very motivating. At the time of the inspection, students and staff were preparing together for a private viewing and public exhibition of their very impressive art, photography, textiles and fashion work. Students' work is available for purchase or commission.
- Teachers ask students to use their reading, writing and numeracy skills widely and effectively to support other activity and real tasks. For example, in an A level graphics lesson, students wrote a very clear and lively explanation of surrealism for primary age children, which required sophisticated understanding.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- When joining the school, usually in Years 10 or 12, students' attainment or grades are generally below average. The progress they have made in their prior secondary education is also below average.
- This pattern changes dramatically as soon as they start at the studio school. Students' progress and achievement immediately increase very notably and the improvement is sustained. This is shown in the school's data and fully supported by inspection evidence.
- Swift improvement was clearly shown in the school's first set of public examination results at AS level in 2014. The students concerned did very well in the subjects taken, especially in art, with their results typically being one grade higher than the national average.
- The school takes firm action to deal with the students' low initial achievement. Steps include well-focused and successful additional teaching in English and mathematics.
- Teachers set challenging target examination grades with the students. The school reasonably expects that most students will reach these grades and achieve very well, given their starting points.
- Students are firmly encouraged to develop their own views and grow in self-knowledge. This is evident in their sketchbooks, portfolios and displays, which demonstrate very high standards of work.
- All groups of students achieve equally well. The school's specific provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs is very well organised and managed. The students concerned do as well as their peers.
- Students with particularly high abilities achieve very well. The expertise amongst the staff means that students are stretched and their skills developed to a very high level.
- The school spends its pupil premium funding very well. It effectively ensures that the disadvantaged students make the same very rapid progress as their classmates. As the school does not yet have a set of GCSE results, it is not possible to compare students' achievement with students from other schools.
- Students who have left the school, or who are about to do so, consistently move on to relevant further

education, university, apprenticeships or suitable employment. The school equips them very well for their futures, to the delight of parents. Their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is of a high order.

- Students undertake many projects in which they must achieve highly. For example, the school has developed a very successful partnership with the annual Rye Arts Festival and a professional opera company. Many students are involved, undertaking critical work such as costume and set design for the professional artists and a well-informed paying audience. If the students' work did not meet the exacting standard required, it could not be used.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations and has no plans to do so.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The majority of the school's students are in the sixth form. The sixth form is not managed separately from Key Stage 4. The outstanding leadership and management, and all the other outstanding inspection outcomes earlier in the report, fully apply to the sixth form.
- Sixth form students enjoy their courses and find their work relevant and challenging. The teaching meets their needs well. Their work is carefully and very helpfully marked. Their progress is monitored closely. They make fast progress in relation to their starting points.
- Sixth form students follow a very well-considered curriculum, covering business and visual, performing and production arts, including BTEC and A level options. However, there is no music A level available.
- The school is about to start offering a foundation diploma in the visual arts. Several sixth form students have opted for this innovative course, or are considering it. It provides a natural progression for many into higher education.
- The majority of current Year 13 students have secured offers of university places. Other students are moving appropriately to apprenticeships or employment. Staff offer students many very constructive opportunities to gain a very clear knowledge of the world of work, including internships, visits out and visiting speakers from business and other employers.
- Attendance rates among sixth form students are high. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent.
- Study programmes include a wide range of high quality activities to develop students' personal and social skills, and their safety and wellbeing. Participation rates in these are high. Students speak passionately about the activities they undertake outside of lessons and how these have developed their understanding of themselves and their roles as citizens or representatives of the community and school.

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	139689
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	450035

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy studio school
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Schlesinger
Principal	Jo Townshend
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01797 228434
Fax number	01797 224343
Email address	office@ryestudioschool.co.uk

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