

Big Creative Academy

16 to 19 academy

Inspection dates

26–28 April 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	
Outcomes for learners	Require improvement	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- All staff work closely with students to help them overcome any barriers to learning, to assure their health and welfare, to maintain good behaviour and a positive work ethic; as a result, students feel safe and are able to achieve their potential.
- Leaders and managers evaluate and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the academy very well, and are having a positive impact on maintaining and improving the overall quality of provision.
- Governors support and challenge leaders and managers well; they use their expertise very effectively to help assure the welfare of students, drive improvement and extend staff skills.
- Teachers strongly promote equality and diversity and British values in lessons, which broadens students' understanding and appreciation of life in modern Britain.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and industrial experience, as well as strong commercial links with practitioners and employers; they use these effectively to help inspire students and provide a strongly vocational context to their development.
- The good standard of accommodation and resources helps teachers deliver a high-quality, vocationally-relevant programme.
- Achievement rates on a minority of vocational programmes, and in GCSE and functional skills English and mathematics, are too low.
- Attendance rates are too low in a minority of lessons, and at times, poor punctuality causes interruptions to the beginning of lessons.
- In a minority of cases, teachers do not provide sufficient support to students who need extra help to achieve.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Big Creative Academy (BCA) is a 16 to 19 academy based in Walthamstow. The academy opened in September 2014 and offers study programmes for students aged 16 to 19 in subjects to prepare them primarily for further study or employment in the creative industries.
- Most students study level 3 vocational courses, in subjects such as performing arts, music technology, media production, art and design, and fashion. A small minority of students study music production at level 2. Students attend BCA from many of the London boroughs. A high proportion of students are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many receive support from academy staff for personal and/or social issues.
- BCA has around 250 students, of whom 136 are in receipt of financial support. The majority of students who attend the academy have achieved comparatively low GCSE grades. In addition, many have not gained a high grade in GCSE English and/or mathematics prior to studying at BCA. At the time of the inspection, the academy was housed in temporary accommodation, prior to the construction of new premises.
- BCA has a strategic link with another training provider, Big Creative Training.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should identify strategies that will most effectively raise achievement rates, prioritising those vocational courses where the proportion of students who successfully achieve their qualification is lower than the national rates. In particular, managers should identify those staff whose work has the most positive impact on raising standards, and create opportunities for them to share their practice more widely with other staff.
- Teachers should continue to prioritise the need to raise standards in GCSE and functional skills English and mathematics.
- Staff should be consistent in their approach to non-attendance and poor punctuality, reinforcing to students the importance of prompt and regular attendance.
- As the academy moves to new temporary accommodation in September 2017, and then to its permanent accommodation in due course, leaders and governors should carefully manage the transition and potential growth in numbers to protect the financial security of the academy and mitigate against any decline in quality of provision. They might also seek to explore opportunities for curriculum developments that fit with the academy's vision, as well as explore possible benefits of closer working with the partner training provider.
- Managers should review the academy's approach to delivering additional learning support to ensure that staff identify those students in need of additional support, and put in place suitable arrangements to integrate support into lessons more effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Under the strong leadership of the principal, managers have successfully developed and implemented an employment-focused culture, centred on the creative arts. All staff, including leaders, know the students very well. Staff work hard to enable students, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds, to overcome any barriers to their education and development, so they can work hard and achieve well.
- Leaders and managers are having a positive impact in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and raising students' outcomes. Achievement rates are rising and teachers' records indicate that, in the current year, a higher proportion of students are on target to achieve than in the previous year.
- Staff scrutinise students' individual progress and course performance regularly and effectively. Staff monitor the progress and achievement of students thoroughly, and provide effective support and intervention for those at risk of dropping out of education.
- Managers monitor teachers' practice well, and support staff to improve further, including through team teachings and sharing good practice. Staff performance management is effective in highlighting strengths and areas for development in teachers' classroom and assessment practice. However, managers do not hold formal mid-year reviews with each member of staff to help review teachers' progress and inform future development actions sufficiently regularly.
- Staff are well qualified, and have good technical skills and links with industry, often through working in their own creative arts companies. Managers are strongly committed to the continuous professional development of staff. Teachers receive appropriate and timely support through well-targeted staff development activities. In addition, managers are supporting and encouraging several staff to undertake post-graduate programmes to extend the collective staff expertise and enhance the longer-term development opportunities of those individuals.
- Leaders, managers and governors have a thorough understanding of the strengths of their provision and what needs to be improved. Their evaluation of the provision is accurate and appropriately self-critical, although at times, overly descriptive. Leaders' reviews of quality-improvement actions do not always identify the progress made against measurable targets, or focus on the overall impact of their work.
- Staff monitor students' destinations well. Leaders recognise that the proportion of 'unknown' destinations is too high, despite efforts to contact ex-students. They are taking steps to mitigate this.
- Leaders, managers and staff place much emphasis on developing students' English and mathematics skills given their starting points. Recent appointments to the English and mathematics team are having a positive impact on students' progress and improving the historically low achievement rates in these areas. Actions to improve English and mathematics teaching have yet to have an impact on raising qualification achievement rates.
- Leaders, managers and teachers design the curriculum well to meet local and borough priorities in the creative arts, primarily at Advanced level. Teachers design and structure

courses well to enable students to progress to an apprenticeship or employment on completion of one year, or to higher education after two years of study.

- Representatives from the creative industries contribute well to academy life, to ensure courses link to industry practices. Plans to broaden the curriculum further are under way with a partner organisation but are restricted until the academy moves into new accommodation in 2019.
- The good standard of accommodation and resources helps teachers deliver a high-quality, vocationally-relevant programme. Staff manage resources well within the current temporary accommodation.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is effective. The eight governors have been closely involved with, and strongly committed to, the college since it opened. They have a wide range of relevant experience to support the strategic development and performance of the academy and provide valuable support to the leadership team.
- Governors challenge leaders and managers well, scrutinising and advising leaders in their work. Governors attend meetings regularly and have received relevant training in safeguarding, safer recruitment and in the 'Prevent' duty.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective. Appropriate pre-employment checks on staff are in place. Staff undertake assessments of risk and checks on visiting speakers, work experience placements and for external visits, to help ensure that students are safe. All staff have received training on safeguarding and in the 'Prevent' duty.
- Staff carry out thorough assessments of students when they join the academy to provide appropriate help and support in their health, welfare and behaviour, so that students achieve their potential. Managers also maintain close links with the local police schools' liaison officer, to promote safety and build relationships with the local community and parents. The schools' liaison officer contributes well to students' safeguarding by leading sessions as part of the academy's well-being programme, such as on their rights in 'stop and search'.
- Staff monitor safeguarding referrals very effectively and maintain strong links with local multi-agency groups to provide students with the support they need to help them focus fully on their studies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and managers encourage and promote high standards and expectations from students. They plan and deliver high-quality lessons. Students respond positively, engage enthusiastically, and as a result, make good progress.
- Many students start their courses at BCA with comparatively low GCSE grades, having previously lacked motivation and underachieved at school. Teachers quickly establish their

own views of each student's ability. They set suitably challenging targets for students and provide constructive guidance, which helps them to develop and succeed.

- Teachers are well qualified, with good subject knowledge and relevant industry experience. Many teachers maintain vocationally-relevant commercial work alongside their teaching role. This enables teachers to act as positive role models for the students. As a result, teachers motivate and inspire students to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and experience they need to achieve their qualifications.
- Teachers often use employers to help design, deliver and assess assignments. For example, a group of design students worked with a representative from a well-known soft drinks company on a project to rebrand and create an advertising campaign for the product. This helped enhance students' knowledge of professional standards.
- As a core component of their study programmes, students benefit from purposeful work-related activities and work experience in a range of relevant sectors. For example, event management students participated in the organisation and staging of a series of events across London, including the UK entertainment awards, and the urban development music festival. As a result, students develop a good range of personal, social and employability skills and an in-depth understanding of the vocational areas in which they aspire to work.
- Despite the temporary nature of the current buildings, students benefit from good-quality accommodation and technical resources such as industry-standard recording studios, well-equipped fashion and art workshops and high-quality information and learning technologies facilities. Teachers create a positive learning environment and use these facilities well to enhance the quality of students' learning. For example, in a music technology lesson, the teacher used a well-equipped recording studio effectively to engage students, develop their understanding and involve them in the classroom activities.
- Teachers skilfully embed English and mathematics into most lessons. For example, in music technology, students developed their mathematics skills while discussing the frequency and impedance ranges of different microphones. Similarly, in a performing arts lesson, the teacher used a vocal warm-up exercise well to test students' understanding of spelling and grammar. As a result, students are improving their confidence in mathematics and English. However, teachers make too many spelling and grammatical errors on handouts and on the smart board.
- Teachers very effectively embed equality, diversity and British values into lessons. For example, music students explored the impact of ethnomusicology in reinforcing different cultural identities. Similarly, media students used a practical project to explore a broad range of social issues including sexual orientation, gender identity and bullying. As a result, students have a particularly good understanding of these themes.
- In a small minority of lessons, activities lack sufficient pace. As a result, students are less engaged in these sessions, and tend to make slower progress.
- While teachers successfully identify the additional learning support needs of some students, in-class support is limited. As a result, students do not benefit sufficiently from a comprehensive range of additional support activities, and therefore the progress of those requiring additional support is, at times, too slow.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Most students demonstrate a high level of commitment to learning, they are respectful of each other and of staff. As a result, students are keen to learn and work industriously in lessons.
- Students develop their self-confidence well, for example by regularly presenting their ideas and designs to employers, teachers and their peers. Students learn how to peer-review and provide constructive criticism; they recognise and appreciate the skills they develop by giving and receiving this feedback.
- Students receive highly effective impartial careers advice and guidance through a good range of activities including college careers events, and frequent presentations and visits by industry professionals. This helps develop students' awareness of a wide range of career opportunities within their chosen field.
- Students develop good employability and transferable skills, such as team working, which prepare them well for the next stage of their education or employment. Staff encourage and support students to consider both industry-specific and wider opportunities outside the creative industries, giving them a range of career choices. For example, as well as progressing into industry-related higher education, some students have successfully progressed to courses such as psychology, criminology and politics.
- Teachers maintain very good links with current practitioners and employers. These links provide a broad range of work-related and work experience opportunities for students, for example with radio and television companies, music events and creative festivals. Through these links, students develop a good range of skills related to their chosen industry.
- The large majority of students' behaviour is very good. Staff successfully encourage students to work constructively with others, through a range of assignments where students from different courses work together. Students learn the importance of teamwork and the need for everyone to contribute, to ensure successful outcomes.
- Students value and enjoy exploring a wide range of activities in well-being lessons, including healthy living, foods of the world, drugs/alcohol awareness, yoga, mindfulness and meditation. Students also frequently explore and discuss socially-relevant themes such as domestic violence, homophobia, poverty, women's rights, and mental health. These lessons help raise students' awareness of how health and well-being can affect their resilience and future success, and also help develop their awareness of social and ethnic differences, tolerance and respect. Students feel very safe while at BCA.
- Attendance of a small number of students is too low. In a minority of lessons, poor punctuality is also an issue; the late arrival of students causes a disturbance to the smooth running of the lesson. Managers have worked hard to address these weaknesses, which has resulted in a modest improvement in these areas.

Outcomes for learners

Require improvement

- Achievement rates on all vocational programmes have improved significantly year-on-year. In 2016, achievement rates were high on creative media production, music and music technology; however, they were too low on art and design, production arts and performing arts courses.
- Many students come to BCA with comparatively low prior achievement in their GCSEs. For example, more than 60% of new entrants to BCA have not achieved grade A* to C in GCSE English and/or mathematics. Staff work skilfully with students to support them in overcoming a broad range of personal, social and emotional issues. This enables students to develop a real sense of purpose, determination and a desire to achieve. As a result, students significantly increase their sense of self-worth in the community, and many achieve well on their primary vocational programme.
- In 2016, achievement rates in functional skills and GCSE English and mathematics were very poor. Leaders have put in place a number of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement rates in these areas. The progress students are making in these subjects has improved significantly from their starting points. However, at the time of inspection it was too early to evaluate the full impact of these improvement strategies on qualification results.
- Managers carefully monitor the performance of different groups of students. They have recognised that achievement rates of female students is lower than that of male students, and are putting in place strategies to address this gap. There are no other significant differences in the performance of different groups of students. Those students who are, or have been, in the care of the local authority receive particularly good support to help maximise their chances of succeeding.
- The majority of students produce work which meets awarding body standards, and demonstrates a suitable level of understanding and insight into the subject. For example, music technology students spoke knowledgeably and confidently about the different features, characteristics and uses of a range of different dynamic and condenser microphones. In a few instances, particularly in fashion, and art and design, students' drawing and making skills are underdeveloped.
- Staff support students particularly well to gain the skills, knowledge and insight they need to progress successfully to employment, further or higher education, or apprenticeships. Staff are particularly adept at raising students' aspirations. For example, for the second-year cohort, the proportion of students who have applied to, and received offers from, universities has increased significantly. Around half of the students who progress to university are the first in their family to commence a degree course.

Provider details

Unique reference number	141030
Type of provider	16–19 free school
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	264
Principal/CEO	Sacha Corcoran
Telephone number	0208 498 3306
Website	www.bigcreative.education

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	0	0	18	0	228	1	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	N/A							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of performance, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and reviewed learners' assessments. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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Paula Heaney	Ofsted Inspector

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