Inspection of Big Creative Academy

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 January 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	**Outstanding**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Outstanding**
Personal development	**Outstanding**
Leadership and management	**Outstanding**
Education programmes for young people	**Outstanding**
Provision for learners with high needs	**Outstanding**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Big Creative Academy (BCA) is a 16 to 19 academy based in Walthamstow. The academy offers study programmes for students in the creative industries and sport. At the time of the inspection, there were 434 students enrolled. This includes 33 learners in receipt of high needs funding. Most learners study programmes at level 3, including art and design, media, music and performing arts, with 13 learners studying art and design at level 2.

A high proportion of learners study English and mathematics qualifications as they have struggled to achieve high grades in GCSE examinations before joining the academy.

BCA does not subcontract any of its provision.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners experience a broad range of exceptional learning opportunities which helps them realise their individual ambitions. Learners are able to express the passion for the creative and sports industries that they share with staff. Learners push themselves to realise their aspirations in the safe and professional community that staff have built across the academy.

Learners are rightly proud of the inclusive culture of the academy. They value the positive relationships they have with staff, who are highly vigilant to their needs and respectful of their individuality. Learners understand their own role in preserving the kind and respectful atmosphere for all learners. Often, learners work with others studying different subjects. For example, learners studying art and design partner with others studying music and media to learn techniques beyond their subject, such as camera work and set design. Learners gain a deep understanding of the creative media industry and develop the skills to work effectively with other professionals.

Learners show exemplary professional behaviour across the academy, including when using the range of industry-standard facilities and equipment. Learners are committed to attending their programmes. They arrive early, well prepared and are often engrossed in performance from the start of lessons.

Learners feel safe and comfortable in the academy. They appreciate the excellent support that they receive from staff, all of whom know learners and care for them well. Learners explore sophisticated concepts through a thought-provoking well-being curriculum. Learners learn the skills to navigate and maintain heathy relationships as skilled staff teach them about attachment theory, love language and coercive control. Where learners need additional support, they visit mental health officers on site.

Staff prepare learners well for their next steps through extensive guidance on career opportunities available to them. A plethora of external speakers give talks about their own work and career paths. Most learners move on to well-earned places at specialist arts universities or go straight into employment in creative industries, often that they did not think were within their reach.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have high ambitions for learners, many of whom have not performed well in national examinations, to gain the knowledge and skills they need to embark on careers in the creative arts. Leaders, managers and staff are steeped in the creative industries. They work closely with industry professionals to expertly plan and design curriculums that include technical and production skills which are needed in the sector. Learners leave BCA with up-to-date skills and knowledge that meet the needs of local and national employers.

Teaching staff are skilled dual practitioners with current industry experience. They check learners' starting points accurately and introduce learners to a wide range of media and techniques early in their programmes. Teaching staff inspire learners to work outside of their established style and preferred medium. For example, art and design teachers ask first year students to make marks in different media using willow twigs with ink and oil pastels, in the style of different known artists. Learners become braver and more adept at using different materials.

Teaching staff set learners increasingly demanding projects in which learners revisit topics they had learned previously. Learners both broaden and refine their skills over time. In media, staff teach learners how to analyse and create still image scenes before moving on to apply these techniques to moving images, sound and social media projects. Through recapping and practising their skills, over time, learners remember and master the range of techniques, theory, and specialist terminology they need for their next steps.

Teaching staff present new concepts clearly. In mathematics, teachers repeat clear steps in calculations, and help learners to identify crucial information they need to calculate accurately. Through thorough learning checks, teaching staff make sure that learners secure new knowledge before moving on to new topics. For example, in music production, teachers ask learners to define key terms such as 'repetition' in the context of song writing. They move on to ask learners to cite different examples. They skilfully question other learners to build on each response to show they fully understand the effect of the technique.

Teaching staff give learners very useful feedback that clearly explains how learners can achieve high grades. For example, drama learners swiftly improve their diction to perform impactful monologues. As a result, learners' work is of a remarkably high quality. Learners produce vibrant digital portfolios of their work. They are rightly proud of their work, which is displayed prominently in the academy and beyond, through national radio performances and on local billboards.

Staff support learners who have high needs or special educational needs extremely well. Suitably trained staff meet with learners and parents before the start of courses to make sure learners join the best course for them. Staff ensure learners receive any support they need from external professionals, such as speech and language therapy. They produce individualised plans to help learners make the right progress in their courses. Teaching staff and learning coaches teach learners confidently and understand their shared responsibility for the welfare and well-being of learners with high needs. Learners with high needs produce very high-quality practical work and achieve in line with their peers.

Learners take part in relevant work experience placements with reputable organisations. They also benefit from a wealth of trips and encounters with prestigious organisations, employers and industry professionals. Staff make sure that all learners take part in valuable opportunities to see professional creative work during regular trips and gallery visits. Learners understand the quality of work they must produce to work as creative practitioners.

Staff arrange several opportunities for learners to showcase their talents, for example, through performances at large music venues such as the Barbican Centre. Learners studying sport partner with a local charity to run youth club sessions and summer activities for local children. As a result, learners make useful contributions in their communities.

Leaders include well-considered and thorough careers advice throughout the curriculum. Careers and teaching staff give learners information about job opportunities in the sector and teach them how to form bands or begin production companies. During business lessons, staff teach learners about the financial considerations associated with freelance work. Staff teach the importance of body language when attending interviews. Consequently, several learners get relevant jobs or start their own businesses while they are still studying.

Staff teach learners essential English and mathematics skills. Drama learners are responsible for managing budgets in shows. Art learners gain the skills and confidence to present their work articulately. As a result, learners gain the vital skills they need to progress to their next steps.

Governors and trustees have an extensive range of suitable expertise. They provide additional industry links and challenge leaders to make sure they maintain ambitious standards and strive for high achievement for learners. Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked diligently to significantly improve the proportion of learners who achieve all elements of their studies. They have increased the number of learners who achieve in English and mathematics. Learners consistently achieve well in examinations and most achieve high grades.

Leaders and managers thoroughly check the quality of education. They provide valuable opportunities for teaching staff to improve their practice, for example by visiting other institutions or conducting action research projects. As a result, the quality of the learning experience at BCA is exceptional.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	141030
Address	38, Clifton Avenue Walthamstow London E17 6HL
Contact number	020 8498 3300
Website	http://www.bigcreative.education/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Sacha Corcoran
Provider type	16 to 19 academy
Date of previous inspection	26 to 28 April 2017
Main subcontractors	Not applicable

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the further education and skills inspection handbook and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Rebecca Jennings, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Saskia Niderost	Ofsted Inspector
Claudia Harrison	His Majesty's Inspector

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