

Wac Arts College

213 Haverstock Hill, Belsize Park, London NW3 4QP

Inspection dates

7–8 June 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal, deputy headteacher and staff are passionate about the power of creative arts to inspire young people back into education. Together, they have established a safe and nurturing learning environment where pupils thrive academically, socially and emotionally.
- Many pupils arrive with complex needs and have had very poor experiences in their previous schools. Staff quickly build highly positive relationships with them that encourage trust. They employ effective strategies to address pupils' social and emotional needs, so that they are able to develop and learn.
- Pupils are articulate and creative. However, many have gaps in their academic learning. Leaders have designed a curriculum that exploits pupils' interests in media and the performing arts, while ensuring that they achieve well in English, mathematics and humanities.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders and staff are highly vigilant around keeping pupils safe.
- Leaders, staff and pupils are justifiably proud of their school and their achievements to date.
- Links with parents and carers are very strong. They value highly the work of the school. As one parent said, 'The school has been a revelation for my daughter.'
- There is a unanimous feeling among staff and pupils that this vibrant school is 'like a family'. As such, everyone shows respect and tolerance towards each other. The atmosphere is typically calm, safe and productive.
- Governors know the school well, are committed to its success and to turning the school's vision into a reality.
- Sixth-form provision is good. Excellent links with industry professionals ensure that students have many opportunities to study a range of courses and to volunteer and/or work within the sector. Many students achieve well and progress to the next stage of their education and training.
- Some pupils' complex lives, and social and emotional needs, inhibit them from attending regularly. This has a negative impact on the progress they make academically and socially. Leaders are working hard to address this.
- Many pupils make good progress from their starting points academically, socially and emotionally. However, this progress can sometimes be sporadic depending on individual pupils' complex needs. Sometimes, initial assessments of ability are not always accurate. Leaders are working to further maximise every learning opportunity to accelerate the progress some pupils make.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that more pupils and students in the sixth form make good or better progress from their starting points by:
 - reviewing the curriculum and structure of the day to maximise learning opportunities
 - firmly establishing the explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy skills across the creative curriculum
 - improving pupils' attendance, particularly those with complex needs, to enable them to learn more effectively
 - ensuring that checks on pupils' starting points are accurate, in order to identify any gaps in prior knowledge and understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal, deputy headteacher and staff are highly experienced practitioners in education, media and the performing arts. They have established a safe and creative learning environment where pupils can reignite their desire to learn.
- Leaders have established a shared culture that fosters pupils' creative and artistic expression to enable them to grow socially and emotionally and acquire transferable learning skills for the future. Underpinning this are high expectations from staff regarding pupils' conduct and respect for the learning and interests of others. Consequently, the learning environment is typically calm and consistently well managed.
- The creative arts and media curriculum successfully inspires pupils to engage in their learning, when previously they have not. Pupils work effectively to gain accredited qualifications that will enable them to seek future training or employment opportunities, particularly in the creative industries. Leaders believe that learning should be fun and based on a number of principles. These include unlocking individuals' talents, fostering aspiration and achievement, empowering young people to acknowledge and celebrate their heritage, and developing skills pupils can take to their future workplace. British values are systematically taught throughout the curriculum.
- Leaders know that pupils arrive with very complex needs and large gaps in their education. They effectively use the funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to design individual study programmes that enhance pupils' learning and ensure further enrichment opportunities.
- Leaders actively promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the curriculum. Residential team-building trips, sports afternoons and visits to the theatre and productions all encourage pupils to widen their social and cultural experiences.
- Pupils are encouraged to gain practical experiences with industry professionals and leaders have forged strong links to enable this. Equality of opportunity, irrespective of starting points, is given a high priority. Careers advice is regular and bespoke to each individual. As a result, pupils benefit from a personalised programme that addresses their individual needs and prepares them well for the next stage of their education and training.
- Leaders work closely with other schools in the locality and seek advice from educational experts to validate the work they are doing. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and some of the challenges faced since its inception and launch in 2014. They have a detailed plan in place to address some of the issues, particularly around improving some pupils' attendance and the increasingly austere financial situation.
- Leaders carefully check on the quality of teaching across the school. They regularly observe sessions and undertake learning walks. Regular supervision provides opportunities to discuss individual teachers' strengths and requirements for further

training and development linked to individual targets. This ensures that the quality of teaching across the school is at least good.

- Leaders forge very strong links with parents and carers. This ensures that they can address complex issues quickly and efficiently. Parents and carers, who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, believe that their child is happy and feel safe at school. As one parent said, 'The staff are outstanding. They treat me with respect and consult me so that problems are addressed imaginatively. This school is an amazing role model in the way it teaches traumatised young people.'
- Due to pupils' complex needs, disruptions to their previous education and often arrival midway through the term, initial checks on their academic ability and knowledge are not always accurate. Leaders are working with other leaders in the locality to review baseline assessments so that they can measure progress more accurately.
- Leaders are reviewing the structure of the school day. This includes ensuring that there is an appropriate mix of practical and academic activities, in order to maximise pupils' interests and enthusiasms for learning.

Governance of the school

- Governors are an experienced group who share the principal's and staff's vision for re-engaging young people in their learning. They actively pursue support from educational experts in order to undertake their roles efficiently. For instance, they commissioned a local authority review of safeguarding and were quick to make suggested alterations to the school's practice. They are clear about their statutory responsibilities and devote time to supporting school activities and performances. Governors have undergone appropriate safeguarding training and are aware of the Prevent duty.
- Governors are conscious of the financial strain the school is currently under and are seeking ways to secure additional funding. They know that more needs to be done to secure better attendance for some young people.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school are comprehensive and in line with current statutory guidance.
- Staff are vigilant, well trained and clear about their statutory responsibilities to help keep pupils safe. All staff have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the complex needs and home contexts of individual pupils. These are quickly identified so that early help can be offered and strategies shared. Some pupils have complex medical needs. Staff work very closely with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that care and support are available quickly. Staff know that there are many risks faced by the vulnerable pupils in their care. These include gang involvement, child sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect, homelessness, radicalisation, crime and knife crime. Consequently, the well-planned curriculum successfully ensures that pupils have a range of strategies to keep themselves safe when away from school.
- Implementing the recommendations from a recent local authority safeguarding review has strengthened security at the site. The school shares the facility with Wac Arts, a community-based arts venue. Leaders are aware of the need to be vigilant in 'shared'

areas of the building. The addition of security gates at the back of the building and a new electronic registering system for staff, pupils and visitors has made the site more secure. Effective security systems and high staff presence with pupils at all times minimise any risks on site.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The majority of staff are experienced media and performing arts industry professionals who share their enthusiasm and expertise with pupils. They have created a safe learning environment where pupils can take performance 'risks' without fear of ridicule. Consequently, pupils are keen to participate in practical activities that develop their social and emotional as well as their performance skills. Expectations are consistently high and staff give informative verbal feedback to ensure that they maximise each pupil's talents. Staff keep detailed records of pupils' progress and leaders report regularly to parents and carers.
- Staff know pupils' academic, social and emotional contexts. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils and a consistent 'can do approach' ensures that pupils are keen to learn and improve. Pupils are highly supportive of each other and give encouragement and advice where necessary.
- Whole-school projects and productions help pupils to consolidate learned skills and engender a sense of pride and belonging in the school. These collaborative performances are fully inclusive and enable individuals to showcase their particular talents.
- Leaders ensure that all pupils focus on improving their literacy and numeracy skills. Regular English and mathematics sessions support pupils as they prepare for either functional skills qualifications or GCSEs. A number of mentors and volunteers support pupils on a one-to-one basis to ensure that misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge are quickly rectified. Humanities lessons help pupils to reflect on the wider world, global issues, other religions and historical contexts. Scientific enquiry is taught through the practical subjects – for instance, knowledge of the windpipe during singing lessons and the cardiovascular system in dance.
- Pupils keep regular reflective blogs, read and learn scripts, analyse music scores and lyrics, and practise presenting their ideas verbally. However, leaders know that they could do more to promote and teach literacy and numeracy skills more explicitly across all subjects. Plans are in place to maximise opportunities for pupils to practise core skills, so that they make more substantial progress from their starting points.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff have nurtured an open and sociable community of learners. Everyone eats together, encouraging dialogue and opportunities to share stories and concerns. New arrivals are warmly welcomed and staff quickly gauge their interests and aspirations.

- The school is completely inclusive and differences are explored and celebrated. While many pupils have had difficult experiences at previous schools, at Wac Arts College they are expected to respect those around them and, in turn, are respected. Inspectors found the pupils to be highly articulate, very positive about their experience at Wac Arts College and full of praise for their teachers.
- Pupils receive high-quality information, advice and guidance on keeping themselves safe both in the community and online. Staff unanimously work effectively to encourage pupils to make the 'right' choices both in school and in the wider community. External professionals offer further advice and guidance to address quickly any growing concerns or anxieties. All pupils said that they trust school staff and that they would share any concerns, and they are extremely confident that issues would be effectively dealt with. Many said that in the future, having left Wac, they would still seek advice from staff if they were experiencing issues in their life. Such is the level of trust and respect built between Wac Arts College staff and its pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Many pupils have struggled to comply in their mainstream schools and so have a history of poor attendance and unacceptable behaviour. However, the calm and purposeful atmosphere at Wac Arts College, underpinned by high staff expectations, encourages a productive ethos where pupils can learn. Consequently, irrespective of past difficulties, the majority of pupils work hard and are, often for the first time, aspirational for their future destinations.
- Expectations around conduct are high and, consequently, the atmosphere is typically calm and supportive. Both staff and pupils described the college as 'an extended family' looking after everyone's needs. Visitors to the school are treated with courtesy and respect. Bullying is extremely rare and when it does occur, dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Leaders carefully track the conduct and attendance of each pupil and the support put in place both internally and externally. They work closely with parents, carers, social services and the probation service to ensure that each pupil's needs are met.
- Regular attendance at school has been a major hurdle for the majority of pupils over a long period of time. Leaders spend considerable time addressing the specific issues that prevent some pupils attending school regularly. Leaders know that for some, academic progress is impaired through poor attendance. For some, this leaves them highly vulnerable in the wider community. Leaders also know that the reasons preventing good attendance are multifold, complicated and difficult to address. Consequently, a range of external agencies work with the school to minimise some of these complex problems and encourage better attendance. Leaders have rightly made this a priority for the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders carefully track the progress of every pupil. Individual learning plans contain information about pupils' prior experiences and strategies to enable them to re-engage

with their learning. Pupils' progress often fluctuates depending on their attendance, the complexities of their home lives or their engagement with school. However, staff offer bespoke support and advice to minimise the outside influences that might prevent them from making progress. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points over time, academically, socially and emotionally.

- In a number of cases, pupils' behaviour is transformed so that they achieve well, particularly on practical and work-related courses.
- Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils, as other pupils, are given bespoke support so that they can access the whole curriculum and enjoy the many opportunities available. As a result, they make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or children looked after, all have a personalised education plan that details their starting points, specific interests or needs and strategies to enable them to succeed. As a result, they make good progress from their starting points.
- Many pupils arrive articulate and able to read. However, some lack the inference skills necessary to show a detailed understanding of a writer's style or intent when reading texts that are more complex. Leaders are reviewing how they assess pupils' reading on entry, so that they can provide focused individual support to accelerate the progress pupils make. Writing is encouraged across the curriculum, because many pupils struggle to express their ideas coherently enough to excel in written examinations.
- Leaders are not complacent. They are committed to ensuring that more pupils make good or better progress so that they can achieve appropriate qualifications ready for the next stage of their education and training. For example, they have revised admission points, restricting them to January and September, rather than allowing pupils to be admitted throughout the year. This ensures that staff can help pupils to settle quickly into school life within a supportive group, measure accurately their academic ability and address any issues that might prevent them from learning.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the inclusive sixth form is good. Students arrive keen to study a range of courses in creative media production, performing arts, sound engineering and music technology. All are encouraged to take appropriate qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Many students have had a legacy of underperformance in their previous educational history and some, consequently, lack self-confidence. Many have independently applied or been referred by external agencies. Staff work hard to utilise their interest in media and the performing arts and, as elsewhere in the school, re-engage them in their learning and give them a sense of self-belief.
- Students in the sixth form, who attend regularly, work very hard and prove themselves to be resilient and genuinely interested learners. They are polite and show respect towards each other. They mix well with younger pupils, offering friendship and advice.
- Teaching in the sixth form is at least typically good. Students are encouraged to work on projects and/or productions and they do so enthusiastically. Teachers support and encourage, offering sound advice and guidance to help them to make progress.

Consequently, outcomes in the sixth form are very good. In 2016, all students successfully passed the course they were studying, particularly in performing arts.

- Links with industry professionals through the school's links with the performing arts and Wac Arts, provide many opportunities for work placements and volunteering. Some decide that they want to progress to careers in other areas, for instance, engineering, hair and beauty or mechanics. School leaders ensure that they find suitable placements to encourage the full range of appropriate destinations when they leave.
- As in the main school, relationships between staff and students are very strong. Staff work hard to nurture students' preferences and interests, so that they can grow in confidence and be successful members of society. For instance, in the lead-up to the recent general election, staff helped those who were eligible to vote register. Students then considered the full range of manifestos so they could make an informed choice.
- Past students are encouraged to return and share their experiences, both negative and positive, of the outside world. Leaders admit that, despite their best efforts, some students do not initially move on to relevant work, training or further study. Consequently, they continue to track their movements when they leave and offer further support with references and applications. As one parent said, 'I am convinced my son has made progress that he could not have made elsewhere. I feel he is now placed to move on to higher education.'
- Safeguarding in the sixth form is effective.

School details

Unique reference number	141164
Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	10031699

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

Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Free school
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Bolt
Principal	James Fornara
Telephone number	020 7692 5860
Website	www.wacartscollege.co.uk
Email address	info@wacartscollege.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Wac Arts College is an alternative provision free school that opened on 1 September 2014.
- Almost a third of the pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium.
- Almost half of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive special educational needs support is above the national average.

- Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs and/or disability or those with an education, health and care plan is much higher than the national average.
- No pupils attend off-site training.
- The school shares its premises with Wac Arts – a community-based facility.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment across a range of year groups and subjects with school leaders. They observed practical sessions, English, humanities and mathematics lessons. Inspectors listened to pupils reading.
- Inspectors held discussions with governors, including the chair. They spoke to the principal, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, staff, pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form. Inspectors spoke to the head of the virtual school for children looked after in Camden and the head of alternative provision for Haringey.
- Inspectors took account of the five responses to Parent View, 10 responses to the staff survey and the views of current pupils.
- The inspection team scrutinised a wide range of documentation including records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, minutes of governors' meetings, information on pupils' progress and the school's own self-evaluation.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, policies and procedures, including incident logs.

Inspection team

Helen Matthews, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Grace Marriott

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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