

# Unity College

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Information about the school

Unity College provides full-time education for up to 24 boys and girls between 11 and 16 years of age with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It caters for day students and those who are accommodated in some of the group's residential homes. All students have experienced difficulties and disruption to their education which has had a negative impact on their personal development and academic achievement. The school opened and first admitted students in January 2011 and is located in a large house, formerly used as office accommodation, in High Wycombe. It is run by the Keys Childcare Group under a contractual arrangement with the Thames Valley Cross-Regional Project, a partnership of six local authorities, that places and funds the students at the school. Currently, there are seven full-time students on roll aged between 12 and 15 years of age; all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. The school was first registered in February 2011 and this is its first inspection report by Ofsted.

The school's mission statement is 'together we can build a future' and it aims to build students' self-esteem and independence by 'creating a calm, purposeful environment conducive to effective teaching and learning with a sense of warmth and fun to build positive relationships that have often eluded our students in their young lives'.

## Evaluation of the school

Unity College provides a good quality of education and, having established itself in a remarkably short space of time, it successfully meets its stated aims. Students' good behaviour and enjoyment of school life are evident both in and out of lessons in the calm and purposeful learning environment that pervades. Students' personal and academic progress is good as a result of the good teaching and good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the good, and improving, curriculum. Robust safeguarding and good welfare, health and safety arrangements ensure students' safety. The school meets all of the regulations for independent schools.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

## Quality of education

The curriculum is good. The curriculum has been designed to re-engage students in education, develop their basic skills, build self-esteem and so enable them to achieve success both academically and personally. The curriculum, which includes French at Key Stage 3, is based around National Curriculum subjects and provides sufficient breadth to meet requirements. Schemes of work are based on well-written policies for each subject, many of which detail opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development, and understanding of sustainability and global awareness. A limited range of accreditations are in the process of being successfully introduced and further developed to meet the needs of Key Stage 4 students in particular. These include Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALAN), entry level and/or GCSEs in English, mathematics, science and art. Units from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) are also beginning to be used to support citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) as well as meet the differing interests and abilities of current and future students. While most of the curriculum is covered in school, provision is effectively extended and personalised through the use of out-of-school facilities and activities. This includes horticulture on the school's allotment, weekly physical education at a local gym and access to vocational learning, such as in motor mechanics, and horse riding and stable craft. Work-related learning experiences to help with career choices, coupled with good provision for PSHE, which includes sex education and healthy living, successfully help to prepare students well for the next steps of their education and independence in the future.

Teaching and assessment are good overall. Teachers are highly committed and work with enthusiasm to do the best for their students. Their high expectations for learning and excellent management of any challenging behaviour mean that lessons proceed at a brisk pace so that students' learning is rarely disrupted. While there is some variation in the quality of teaching and lesson planning, over time students make good progress in most subjects and begin to close the gap between their current achievement and their capabilities. In the most effective lessons teachers use a variety of teaching styles and interesting activities. For example: in a mathematics lesson, students made good progress in learning about factors and multiples through playing a game, a practice sheet and an end-of-lesson quiz; and in an English lesson, the use of an audio book helped to bring the text to life for students. Learning slows when lessons are based around less engaging activities and students have fewer opportunities for visual and active learning. Most teachers use questioning well to develop students' knowledge and understanding and promote independence. However, opportunities are missed for students to further develop independence and take ownership of their learning through self- and peer-assessment. The educational support workers, who also teach some lessons, work closely with teachers to ensure no learning time is lost in lessons and to effectively support students' personal development. Students are confident users of information and communication technology (ICT). However, the provision for ICT, while satisfactory, lacks flexibility

to capitalise fully on its use as a tool to aid teaching and learning across the curriculum.

The quality of assessment is satisfactory. Students' personal development and current achievement in English, mathematics and science are carefully assessed on entry. These, together with other information the school receives on students, are effectively used to form individual learning and behaviour plans that provide guidance to teachers for students' academic and personal development. Assessment of students' learning within lessons is good and is used well for future planning and to record students' achievement over time. Good use is made of praise and students receive frequent verbal comments on their work to very effectively support their learning through lessons. However, although some outstanding comments explaining how to improve were seen, the quality of written feedback is variable. While the school is closely monitoring the progress students make, longer-term tracking systems are still in the early stages of development.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although opportunities for spiritual reflection are less strong. Students' personal development is inherent in all aspects of school life. The positive behaviour policy and 'code of conduct' is at the heart of improving students' social skills and behaviour; this sets high expectations for both behaviour and learning that are consistently applied to all students. The rewards system that underpins the policy is a significant contributory factor in students' good behaviour. Both personal and academic successes are praised and celebrated and any difficulties discussed openly, enabling students to build both their self-confidence and self-esteem. Students develop positive attitudes to learning and good social skills because the staff create a stable and secure atmosphere within the school, through, for example, the daily shared breakfast and lunchtime eating and individual support for students. This helps students to become more tolerant, recognise that they need to take responsibility for their own behaviour, and over time be able to cope with life beyond school.

Students' attendance is good; a significant change from their very poor attendance records in previous schools. Through the curriculum and at social times staff help students to consider possible career pathways and so promote their engagement with education; this is enhanced by work-related learning and careers interviews. Opportunities for making a positive contribution are developing well. Students help out around school, are involved in the newly set up school council and are beginning to plan charity events.

Knowledge of other cultures and religions, British institutions and public services is satisfactorily developed through the ASDAN, PSHE and citizenship lessons. However, opportunities are missed to reflect on wider issues and to undertake visits to, or have visitors from, local and national institutions or services.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The provision for the students' welfare, health and safety is good. Students are extremely well supervised at all times both in school and during off-site visits. Risk assessments are rigorously completed for all aspects of school life, including on- and off-site activities as well as for individual students. The school works very closely with parents, carers and home staff to provide excellent day-to-day care. End-of-day staff meetings help staff develop an exceptionally consistent approach to students' safety and well-being. This consistency in approach and the strong relationships between staff and students ensure that students know there is always an adult they can turn to.

Arrangements for child protection are rigorous and staff are trained in line with requirements. The school has all of the required policies, including for first aid, in place to ensure that students are well cared for and these are all set to be reviewed annually. Almost all are of good quality and underpinned by very effective systems which are carefully adhered to by all staff. However, the bullying policy does not make reference to the latest guidance and a minor amendment was made to the child protection policy. Students say that they feel safe and incidents of bullying are extremely rare and are managed very effectively. Students' behaviour improves significantly over time reflecting the highly effective positive behaviour policy. Accidents, incidents and interventions by staff are recorded meticulously and used to inform student reports. Similarly, checks on equipment, including portable electrical equipment, and fire safety monitoring are conducted routinely. However, while such data are routinely reviewed, longer-term analysis to show trends has yet to be developed. All staff, including those who are temporary, are fully informed about health and safety procedures through an exceptionally wide range of documentation and guidance that includes 'red flag' incidents and detailed fire safety procedures.

Students learn to grow vegetables at the school's allotment and these are often used to prepare healthy meals at lunchtimes. This contributes well to their good understanding about healthy eating. While they understand the importance of exercise and other health-related aspects such as smoking they do not, however, always make the best healthy lifestyles choices. The school's admission and attendance registers are diligently completed and fully meet requirements. The school has prepared an accessibility plan to improve provision in line with the requirements of the Equality Act, 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school has robust procedures for the recruitment of the proprietors and staff which meet all the regulations. The school's single central register includes the proprietors, both permanent and temporary education staff and those who work for short times in the school each week. It meets all requirements although it required a minor amendment during the inspection.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school is housed in a two-storey detached building which has been appropriately modernised and refurbished to provide effective and safe learning environments. This consists of nine reasonably well-equipped classrooms, which includes a hair salon and four specialist rooms for art, food technology, design and technology, and ICT. The food technology room is used as a social and dining area. The building is clean, tidy and well maintained; the good condition of the décor and furniture reflects the students' respect for the school and staff. Washrooms and facilities for students who are ill meet requirements and a safe outside area has been provided where students can play.

## **Provision of information**

Some general information about the education provision provided at the school and other schools, run by the Keys Childcare Group, is provided on its website. The school's prospectus provides a good overview of the provision covering all of the requirements; short explanations about most of the required policies such as behaviour management and complaints are also helpfully included. Daily and end-of-term written reports and regular telephone calls keep parents and carers well informed about students' progress, their achievements and any concerns. Detailed formal reports are provided for the required regular review meetings.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school's written complaints policy meets the requirements.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations')<sup>3</sup>.

## **What the school could do to improve further**

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Develop the curriculum by:
  - improving the range of accredited courses and qualifications offered
  - strengthening students' spiritual development

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<sup>3</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made).

- providing a wider range of enrichment activities, including off-site visits, so as to build on and broaden students' school learning experiences.
- Improve teaching so that students make even better progress by:
  - increasing the use of ICT as an aid to their learning
  - making better use of school assessment data so that progress trends over time can be tracked
  - providing more opportunities for students to develop independence and build self-esteem through assessing their own and others' work.

## Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Special school		
<b>Date school opened</b>	1 January 2011		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16 years		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 4	Girls: 3	Total: 7
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 4	Girls: 3	Total: 7
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£25,350		
<b>Address of school</b>	150 West Wycombe Road High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP12 3AE		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 446371		
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:loishubbard@keyschildcare.co.uk">loishubbard@keyschildcare.co.uk</a>		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Lois Hubbard		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Broadwood Education		

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**

14 October 2011

Dear students



### **Inspection of Unity College, High Wycome HP12 3AE**

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I very much enjoyed talking with you and visiting your lessons. Your school has developed rapidly since it was opened in January 2011 and offers you a good education. Here is a summary of our main inspection findings.

- Your attendance at school is good. You develop good attitudes to learning and so make good progress.
- You enjoy the opportunities that are offered to you, such as growing your own vegetables at the school's allotment.
- Teaching is good and you receive good advice in most lessons on how to improve but tracking your progress over time is still developing.
- You feel safe in school because good attention is given to your welfare, health and safety.

Your highly committed and very enthusiastic headteacher and staff are working hard to improve the school. To help them with this, I have said that the school should improve:

- teaching and the use of assessment by better tracking of your progress over time; making more use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for teaching; and giving you opportunities to assess your own and others' work
- the curriculum by developing the range of accredited courses and qualifications offered, strengthening your spiritual development, and providing you with a wider range of enrichment activities.

You can help by making the most of the opportunities offered to you.

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett  
Her Majesty's Inspector