

Unity Learning Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135767
Local Authority	Nottingham City
Inspection number	360745
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	106
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Terry Dixon
Date of previous school inspection	14 December 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Twelve lessons were observed involving nine teachers. Meetings were held with senior leaders and staff, a group of students and a representative of the management committee. Inspectors observed the school's work, and visited six off-site vocational projects. They looked at policies and procedures for safeguarding students and a wide range of data on students' attendance, attainment and progress. Four parent and carer questionnaires were scrutinised as well as questionnaires completed by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Has there been sufficient improvement across all of the settings used by the school in students' behaviour, attendance and punctuality?
- Has there been improvement in the quality teaching, learning and assessment across all of the settings?
- Are core skills taught effectively?
- Are students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities well supported and enabled to make progress?

Information about the school

The Unity Learning Centre provides full-time education for students in Key Stage 4 who have been permanently excluded from school, are at risk of exclusion or do not have a school place. There are 106 students on roll, the majority of whom are White British although the student population reflects the ethnic diversity of the City of Nottingham. The number known to be eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The great majority of students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Along with 11 other similar centres across England, the centre is taking part in 'Back on Track', a national trial of alternative educational provision. It is working with 12 providers of vocational education projects located mainly in Nottingham. Half of the students on roll have their education entirely in off-site projects. The other half are taught at the centre for part of the week and join projects for the remainder of the time.

The previous inspection found that the centre required significant improvement and, in accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, it was given a notice to improve.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The Unity Learning Centre is a good school. It has made good progress in all of the areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection and has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Strong leadership and effective management are established at all levels. The centre benefits from senior leaders' clear direction and high expectations and this is being communicated to good effect to all the external providers of off-site provision. Staffing, which had not been in a stable state at the time of the previous inspection, is now settled and organised into roles and responsibilities that drive improvement. As a result, students' rates of attendance and punctuality are increasing in the centre and at off-site provisions. Students enjoy school, achieve well and their behaviour is good. Comprehensive and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching, the curriculum and student support gives leaders good command over the work of the centre and that of all its partners. Students' progress is closely tracked and the detailed analysis emanating from this allows a wide range of challenging targets to be set for staff and students. This has produced a trend of improving results over a three-year period. Self-evaluation is accurate, giving a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses which provide a firm basis for planning improvements.

From a low base when students join the centre, their attainment is low overall although, as a result of the good progress they are making, the gap is narrowing rapidly between their performance and that of mainstream students nationally. Over three years the number of qualifications achieved and the number of students achieving them has increased significantly. The large majority attend well and they leave having gained vocational and GCSE qualifications, which count significantly towards a good preparation for leaving school and their future economic well-being. The curriculum offers a good breadth of opportunities matching most students' interests and capabilities. A good proportion of students continue their education at college when they leave and are well prepared for the demands college presents. The patchy attendance or persistent absence of a very small minority of students means they fail to make good progress although the number concerned is being reduced.

Relationships with staff are positive, enabling students to develop self-confidence, share concerns and to feel safe. They are cared for well and given good support and guidance by staff and through strong links with a wide range of agencies. While students know what counts for a healthy lifestyle, some are ambivalent in their commitment towards this. Some students are helpful in school and at the off-site projects and also in small ways in

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the wider community but opportunities to take responsibility and contribute in substantial ways are limited.

Good teaching helps students considerably to overcome any reluctance to learn. Well-planned work and lively interactions in lessons engage students, giving them the confidence to contribute constructively and make good efforts with work. They value the opportunities to gain qualifications and focus well on achieving these. Leaders have invested heavily in assuring the quality of teaching in the off-site projects with good results, although there remains a need for some further support there.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attendance by:
 - eliminating as much persistent absence as possible
 - achieving an overall attendance rate approximating at least the average attendance for secondary schools.
- Increase the amount of good teaching by ensuring in off-site provision that lessons are always well planned and teaching sets high expectations.
- Strengthen students' self-confidence, self-esteem and preparation for the future by:
 - encouraging students to adopt a healthy lifestyle
 - providing more opportunities for students to contribute in school and in the wider community.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Thorough assessment of each student's attainment on entry ensures they have a well-tailored curriculum closely matched to their interests and capabilities. This contributes to the great majority of students settling, being cooperative and learning effectively. Higher attaining students following GCSE courses rise to the challenge of coursework and work hard, as they often have to complete this over a shorter time span than normal. In English, Year 11 students responded with empathy and gave a detailed analysis of the work of Indian and African poets. Most students have special educational needs and/or disabilities which are quickly identified and supported through good individual planning and targets. Where students have literacy difficulties, interventions using specialist schemes to support reading, writing and spelling ensure basic skills are consolidated. Students who have difficulties in articulating and understanding their feelings were encouraged in one lesson to learn a vocabulary for emotions by discussing and describing those experienced by Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's play. Students attending one of the off-site projects used the internet to investigate loans, interest rates and costs of repayment, found the exercise revealing and improved their financial awareness.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour is good because most students subscribe to the centre's values and meet its high expectations. These are matched also in the off-site projects they attend. Students value the education they are offered and show respect for the adults who teach and support them. Improved attendance is a reflection of an increase in their confidence and self-esteem. Students

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demonstrate a positive regard for each other and respect differences, which is enhanced by the good opportunities in the curriculum to learn about different cultures.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching has improved as a result of good appointments, rigorous monitoring and through developing the expertise with which lessons are taught, at the off-site centres in particular. Teaching in the school benefits from well-qualified teachers who are knowledgeable in what they teach and of students' abilities and needs. Lessons are planned well; learning objectives are clearly defined and adhere to course requirements and their assessment criteria. Teachers' expectations are appropriate to students' different abilities and work set is challenging. Lessons are often lively and enjoyable, creating a good rapport with students and eliciting their positive contributions and good efforts. Most teaching in off-site centres is good in meeting students' needs and promoting learning. While most is carried out by experienced and effective practitioners, some teaching lacks expertise. This means a few lessons are not well planned and focused on clear objectives and, therefore, not as challenging or engaging for students.

The breadth of work and activities offered to students makes the curriculum interesting, relevant and provides them with many opportunities to gain accreditation before leaving school. The school week is enriched by a wide range of enjoyable activities especially in

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sports and the arts. The 'Back on Track' initiative has provided direction and substantial resources enabling the school to re-engage the large majority of students in learning.

The school provides a welcoming and supportive environment which is replicated in off-site provision. Staff are caring and attentive to students' needs and this is clearly reflected in what students say. The large team, made up of achievement managers and mentors, keeps a close track of every student and provides a bridge between home, school and the agencies involved with students and their families. They have been instrumental in the rapid improvement in students' attendance and, being on-hand to deal with any crises, are effective in managing behaviour and helping students stay focused. Students are helped to prepare for college and most settle successfully while a few indicated they would like more opportunities to visit and spend time in college before leaving school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has embedded ambition effectively and driven improvement. A good team of experienced staff provide strong leadership and management. This is satisfactorily supported by the management committee whose members are well qualified and experienced but who have yet to fully engage in supporting the school's work. The local authority is effective in supporting the school and its improvement. Permanent staff have been appointed, the team of achievement managers and mentors, in particular, who are instrumental in the success of an increasing number of students. The local authority, in partnership with the school, ensures that the external providers meet requirements for keeping students safe and providing them with an acceptable education. The monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, which was at an early stage at the time of the previous inspection, is now well implemented. This is giving leaders a clear direction for improvement and provides them with the knowledge to set challenging targets and the capacity to achieve them. The effective management of off-site provision, and the quality of teaching and learning in particular, ensures students are served well and make good progress. The school takes good steps to ensure students are safe by robustly implementing policies and procedures to safeguard them. The school's success with students means their equality of opportunity is well promoted and this contributes significantly to eliminating the discrimination they might suffer otherwise. Parents and carers are kept well informed and stay closely in touch with their children's progress through regular contact with an achievement mentor. Parents and carers receive regular reports, their views are sought and they are offered courses such as first aid training. Partnerships with numerous agencies ensures staff are able to contribute to the support for students and families and also have a wide range of specialist help at their disposal in

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meeting students' needs. Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily through reasonable contributions to the community beyond school while having a positive impact in school on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The response to the questionnaire was low. The parents and carers responding hold positive views about the school and these match the inspection findings.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Unity Learning Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received four completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 106 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	1	25	2	50	1	25	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	50	1	25	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	3	75	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	25	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	3	75	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	1	25	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	2	50	2	50	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	3	75	1	25	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

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.



24 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Unity Learning Centre, Nottingham NG7 4ES

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school, and many thanks to the group of students who met with an inspector for a discussion.

The school provides you with a good education and these are some of the good things about it.

In your short time at school you achieve well and gain good qualifications.

Your attitude to learning improves considerably; you make good efforts with your work and behave well.

Teaching is good at the school and at the off-site centres.

The wide range of work, activities and accreditation you are offered is enjoyable, interesting and relevant to your good preparation for the future.

The staff, and your achievement mentors in particular, look after you well, keep you safe, ensure your needs are met and encourage you to attend the centre every day and be on time.

I have asked the headteacher to:

- improve the overall level of your attendance and punctuality
- ensure all of the teaching at off-site centres is as good as it is in the majority of your lessons
- increase the opportunities for helping you to adopt a healthy lifestyle and
- to contribute to the school and the wider community.

You can all help by attending as regularly as possible, being on time and continuing to make good efforts with your work. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector

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