

Unity City Academy

Ormesby Road, Middlesbrough, TS3 8RE,

Inspection dates 14–15 March 2013

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| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Inadequate | 4 |
| | This inspection: | Good | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Unity City Academy is a good school that has improved significantly.
- Ninety eight per cent of students gained five or more passes at GCSE or equivalent at grades A* to C in 2012.
- Students' achievement has improved year on year. The percentage of students gaining five higher passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics, rose by 23% in 2012 and is set to rise even further this year.
- Teaching has improved and is good. Students say that teachers make lessons interesting and encourage them to do as well as they can.
- Students' behaviour is good and this contributes well to their learning.
- Leadership and management, including governance, are good and have been instrumental in the academy's improved success in ensuring that all students achieve well.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is very effective and has helped teachers to improve their practice.
- The academy tracks the progress of its students rigorously and any student in danger of underachieving is helped to catch up.
- Staff are extremely positive about all aspects of the academy. One remarked, 'I love my job, I love my school'.
- Students are very proud of the academy and say that there is nothing about it that they would want to change.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a few lessons, students do not learn as much as they might because the pace of the lesson is too slow.
- Teachers do not always use information about what students can and cannot do to provide work that stretches all students appropriately.
- Students' spelling, grammar and punctuation are not always corrected well enough.
- Not all students read a broad enough range of books.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that all parents send their children to school regularly.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 37 lessons, taught by 37 teachers. Four observations were conducted jointly with four members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, development planning, the monitoring of the quality of teaching and also information about teachers’ professional development.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, the Vice Principals, other members of the academy’s leadership team and two governors: the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body.
- There was a telephone conversation with the Chief Executive Officer of the academy’s sponsor, Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) and also with an education consultant who works with the academy.
- The inspectors spoke to many students in lessons, at breaks and at lunchtimes. They also spoke formally to four groups of students on the first day of the inspection and listened to two groups of students read on the second day of the inspection.
- There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). The inspection team analysed the responses to a questionnaire that the school had carried out during a recent parents’ evening.
- The 42 responses to the staff questionnaire given out during the inspection were analysed.

Inspection team

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Alison Thomson, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Jim Bennetts | Additional Inspector |
| Irene Lavelle | Additional Inspector |
| Nigel Drew | Additional Inspector |

Full report

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.

Information about this school

- Unity City Academy is smaller than the average sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is much higher than average. (This is funding available for students known to be eligible for free school meals, students in local authority care and those whose parents are in the armed forces). The academy contains all three pupil premium groups, but the group known to be eligible for free school meals is by far the largest.
- The proportion of students who are supported at school action, and the proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are much higher than average.
- About 90% of the students are White British and have English as their first language, but the proportion of those from minority ethnic groups and whose first language is not believed to be English, is rising.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- There are no students currently educated off-site.
- The academy enters some students early for some GCSEs.
- The academy has a new sponsor, the Academies Enterprise Trust as of January 2012. This follows a 14 month period in which the academy had no sponsor.
- Since the previous inspection, the academy has undergone a reorganisation in its management structure.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase students' progress further in order to raise their attainment to even higher levels by:
 - ensuring that all lessons have sufficient pace and urgency so that students learn more
 - using information about what students can and cannot do to provide lessons that stretch all students appropriately
 - ensuring all teachers tell students clearly how to improve their spelling, grammar and punctuation
 - encouraging all students to broaden their range of reading material
 - ensuring that all parents send their children to school regularly.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the academy with attainment below and sometimes well below average. Many have low literacy skills. They make good progress and leave at the end of Year 11 with attainment that is broadly in line with that found nationally, including in English and mathematics.
- Students' attainment is rising at a much faster rate than nationally. Ninety eight per cent of students gained five or more passes at GCSE or equivalent at grades A* to C in 2012, an improvement of 10% on the previous year. The percentage of students gaining five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, rose by 23% from 2011 to 2012.
- Students at the academy make good progress in all subjects. This is true for all groups of students, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups, some of whom do not speak English as their first language. Learning support assistants help those students to access their work well.
- Students who are eligible for pupil premium funding also make good progress and the gaps between their attainment and that of their peers are minimal, for example, in both English and mathematics in 2012 there were just two average points difference (equivalent to two terms) in the standards attained by the end of Key Stage 4. The academy's own data indicates that these gaps are set to close even further this year. The academy makes good use of the pupil premium funding to set up one-to-one and small group tuition sessions and to fund educational visits.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to provide underachieving pupils due to enter the academy additional learning experiences during the summer holiday.
- Students are entered early for some examinations. The students say this motivates them to work hard from the beginning of their courses and is leading to improved outcomes, for example, in mathematics and science.
- The academy's data show that the progress of students continues to improve this year and that attainment is set to rise even further.
- Good progress was confirmed by inspection evidence. In most of the lessons observed, the students made good and sometimes outstanding progress. A key feature of these lessons was the way in which the work was tailored well to the needs of each student and the pace of teaching that allowed them to maximise their learning.
- Progress in reading is good and rapidly improving, through strategies such as accelerated reading sessions and a focus on writing. The inspectors saw the impact of this in many lessons, including a Year 7 English lesson, based on the book, *The House with no Name*. Students made outstanding progress as the work was matched particularly well to the needs of each of them. Some students, however, do not read a broad enough range of books.
- Students are increasingly well prepared for their future, as the basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy are embedded into many lessons. Particularly innovative examples of numeracy development were seen in physical education, with students analysing match statistics.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved greatly, through well-focused staff development. It is rarely less than good and sometimes outstanding.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, have high expectations and create a very purposeful learning environment. Students told the inspectors that they like the way that teachers 'push' them to do well. There is a wide range of interesting tasks to engage students and there is good student involvement in most lessons.
- In the best lessons, teachers give the students a series of tasks that makes them think deeply

and learn well. This was exemplified well in a Year 11 physics lesson, where students made outstanding progress in their understanding of the focal length of lenses.

- However, in a few lessons work is not matched well enough to the abilities of all groups of students, with some finding it too easy and others too hard. In addition, the pace of work is occasionally too slow. Where this happens, progress slows.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well in many lessons. Teachers build in time for reflection and discussion of cultural and moral issues. This was exemplified well in Year 10 understanding society lesson about wealth and power.
- Teachers generally mark students' work thoroughly and many instances were seen of good specific comments on how to improve pieces of work. However, there is variability in the marking of spelling, punctuation and grammar across all subjects, so that not all students know clearly how to improve in these areas.
- The responses to the school's questionnaire showed that most parents agree that their children are well taught.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The vast majority of students behave very well around school and in lessons. Inspectors found the students very polite and courteous.
- Students' good behaviour and good relationships with their teachers contribute well to their learning. They rise well to the challenge of assessing their own work and that of their peers. This was seen many times in lessons during the inspection.
- Students shared their views willingly with the inspectors who were very impressed by their confidence and the maturity of some of their answers.
- Most students rated behaviour as eight or nine out of ten. Older students confirmed that behaviour has been good for some time, although they said it is constantly improving. They appreciate the academy's rewards system for especially good or improved behaviour.
- Students have a good understanding of all different types of bullying. They say that hardly any bullying occurs and the little that does occur is dealt with by staff very quickly and effectively.
- Most parental responses to the academy's questionnaire agreed that behaviour is good. Likewise, almost all staff who filled in the questionnaire agreed that behaviour is good.
- Students told the inspectors that their school is very safe. They have a good understanding of safety issues, such as e-safety, and they were observed working safely in practical lessons during the inspection.
- Attendance is improving slowly, although it is still below average. The academy has not persuaded all parents of the importance of their child's regular attendance.
- Students are very proud of the academy and the improvements in their achievement. When asked to describe the academy, one student replied, 'everyone here works as a team, but every student matters.'

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management of the academy have ensured significant improvements have occurred in students' progress and behaviour and in the quality of teaching.
- The Principal leads the academy very effectively and delegates responsibility to other leaders well. Middle leadership, an area identified as needing to improve at the time of the previous inspection, has improved considerably. Those in charge of subjects are much more involved in checking students' progress and the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility.
- Leaders have successfully improved learning by regularly observing the quality of teaching in lessons and by providing staff with training adapted well to their needs. A comprehensive system

of appraisal and performance management has been adopted, which is linked to the pay scales.

- Systems for checking how well students are achieving are very thorough. Any student who is in danger of underachieving is identified early and helped to catch up well. As a result, gaps between the performances of different groups of students are closing. This reflects the inclusiveness of the school and its intolerance of discrimination.
 - Leaders and managers have put in place many successful strategies to improve attendance and it is improving, albeit slowly, and consequently remains below that found nationally. This is a key factor why achievement overall is not higher than it is.
 - Staff are extremely positive about all aspects of the school and many indicated strongly how proud they are to work at the academy and how well they feel supported.
 - The curriculum is skilfully adapted to the needs and interests of all students. There is a vast array of clubs, visits and visitors. Students told the inspectors that they valued the opportunities they were given, such as visits to the theatre and hearing famous scientists speak in person. The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is impressive. Students experience what life is like in Kenya through pen pals and were raising money for Comic Relief on Red Nose Day.
 - All statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met.
 - The academy's sponsor provides very effective support in helping the academy to improve, by acting as a mentor and by providing support in partnership with external consultants.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body works very closely with the school. It has played a key role in the allocation of the budget, including pupil premium funding and this has improved the progress of these students. Governors have a realistic view of the quality of teaching and ensure that the teachers' pay is linked closely to their performance and that any underperformance is tackled swiftly. They undergo training, including training to understand data. The governing body holds the academy to account increasingly well for the performance of its students.
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What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 133768 |
| Local authority | Not applicable |
| Inspection number | 399726 |

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

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| Type of school | Academy sponsor-led |
| School category | Non-maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 711 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Adam Gaunt |
| Principal | Patricia Towey |
| Date of previous school inspection | 24 January 2012 |
| Telephone number | 01642 326262 |
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