

Unity Learning Centre

Forest Road West, Radford, Nottingham, NG7 4ES

Inspection dates 5–6 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students do not all achieve as well as they could.
- A number of students have poor attendance which is not improving fast enough for them to achieve as well as their classmates. These students are sometimes disengaged from learning.
- Although leaders check attendance effectively, the actions they have taken to promote good attendance from all pupils have not worked well enough.
- Teaching does not always provide challenging work to enable all pupils to make as much progress as they should, including that of the most able pupils. At times, teachers do not use pupil progress information well enough to ensure that pupils with different abilities and needs have work that is pitched at the right level of difficulty.
- Teachers and teaching assistants do not always work well enough together to create a positive climate for learning to ensure all students make progress and achieve well.
- Leaders' evaluation and monitoring of the Unit's effectiveness are not rigorous enough. They do not take sufficient account of the achievement and quality of teaching in off-site provision, and do not involve subject leaders or achievement managers enough in monitoring or identifying clear areas for improvement.
- Leaders have not reviewed the impact of the curriculum sufficiently on students' attendance and achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Students with good attendance who arrive at the start of Year 10 make good progress and achieve well.
- Provision in the FUEL site, Notts County Football site and Take One studios is good and sustains students' engagement in learning.
- The majority of students make good progress in their attendance, they stay safe and are mostly well behaved around the Unit.
- Senior leaders are providing clear vision and direction for the Unit and governors have sought external validation of its work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors saw 14 lessons on all sites and observed 11 teachers. Five of these were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors examined samples of students' work jointly with subject leaders and looked at some case studies jointly with achievement managers.
- Informal discussions were held with students and meetings were held with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and two local authority representatives.
- There were no returns to the online survey, Parent View. Inspectors, therefore, took account of 27 returns from the unit's most recent parental survey and held telephone discussions with five parents.
- Inspectors observed the unit's work and looked at a range of documentation including safeguarding policies, records of incidents, attendance figures, self-evaluation and school improvement planning and records of students' progress over time.

Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Glen Goddard

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Unity Learning Centre provides full-time education for students in Key Stage 4 who have been permanently excluded from school. The majority of students attend off-site provision in one of five bases in Nottinghamshire, as part of their education: Cast, FUEL, Notts County Football Club, Take One Studios and The Zone for variety of work-related and other vskills courses, which include communication literacy and numeracy.
- Most students arrive with histories of poor attendance and are disengaged from learning. A high proportion of pupils arrive at times other than the usual times of admission.
- Most students are White British.
- A high proportion of students, just over half, are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional funding given to schools for students known to be eligible for free school meals, in local authority care or from families where a parent is in the armed forces.
- All students are supported at school action plus for their disabilities or special educational needs. Although none has a statement of special educational needs, a few have additional needs such as autistic spectrum disorder, dyslexia or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. The management committee was re-organised as a governing body with full delegated responsibilities for finances and staffing from the local authority in September 2013.
- The Key Stage 2 and 3 provision, which is inspected separately, moved to the same site as the Unity Learning Centre in February 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eliminate the remaining weaknesses in teaching so that it is consistently good and enables all students to make good progress and achieve well by making sure that:
 - teachers use the information about students' progress to set challenging work which is not too easy or too hard, including for the more able pupils and those with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder
 - all teachers and teaching assistants work together to create a positive climate for learning, where students are interested and engaged.
- Increase attendance rates by reducing the rate of pupils' unauthorised absence by the end of this academic year by:
 - reviewing the effectiveness of strategies to promote good attendance, eliminating those which do not work and building on those that do
 - working closely with students, their parents, offsite providers and agencies to make sure challenging targets are set for attendance, a new system of rewards is provided when these are met and students are held to account for failure to meet them.
- Improve leadership and management by making sure that:
 - self-evaluation through monitoring is more rigorous and involves subject leaders and achievement managers
 - plans are accurately focused on improving attendance, raising the achievement of all students and improving the quality of teaching
 - all leaders review the impact of the curriculum on attendance and achievement and make appropriate revisions to improve students' outcomes.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students enter the Unit with attainment which is below average and sometimes well below. Their previous histories of disruption to their education have led to significant gaps in their learning so that they are ill-prepared for academic courses.
- The poor attendance of a significant number of students in the Unit and at some of the off-site provisions has a negative impact on their achievement in academic and work-related subjects. Not enough of the relatively more-able students in the Unit are taking GCSE courses at the higher levels.
- Students who join the Unit later than the start of Year 10 do not make as much progress as their classmates. A few students with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder do not do as well as the few with autistic spectrum disorder.
- The gap between the attainment of students in the Unit and similar students nationally is steadily narrowing over time. Over the last three years, there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of students gaining five A* to G grades or equivalent at GCSE with a corresponding decline in the numbers of students who leave the Unit with no qualifications at all.
- Students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding, who are the majority in the school, do almost as well as their classmates and are less than one term behind them in English and mathematics.
- The school's accurate data and students' books show that students do particularly well in mathematics, where nearly all reach their expected grades at GCSE and the majority exceed this. Almost half of students gained grade C at GCSE in 2013. The data also show that students with autistic spectrum disorder make good progress because effective guidance and support are provided to meet their learning needs.
- Students who attend regularly are well-prepared for the next stage of their lives, leaving school with a range of academic and work-related qualifications and developing good literacy, numeracy and communication skills. As a result, a growing majority of students leave the Unit to enter further education, employment and training.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The school's own checking of teaching shows that not enough is of good quality. Sometimes, the work students are given is not challenging enough to engage them in learning, particularly for the more able.
- For example, in one lesson, the most able students knew how to calculate the circumference of a circle after the teacher rehearsed the formula with the class but were not challenged to apply the formula to consolidate their learning, so lost interest.
- In other lessons which required improvement, teachers are not using the information about the existing attainment of different students to plan work for students of different abilities. This

resulted in all students doing the same level of work. Consequently, some students found this difficult and others too easy as they finished the task quickly. In these lessons teaching assistants mainly sit with one student to support their learning and are not always used well enough as part of a team to create a positive climate for learning where all students can make progress and achieve well.

- Teachers offer positive praise and encouragement to students and give them useful feedback on their progress. This is especially good in mathematics and science, where students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing from one lesson to the next.
- Teaching support for those with autistic spectrum disorder is good and better than for those with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. This is because teachers and support staff use their training effectively to clarify misunderstandings with real-life examples to make sure that students with autistic spectrum disorder access learning at their individual levels of ability.
- The 2013 examination results and the Unit's accurate data show that teaching and support for those students eligible for pupil-premium funding is good.
- Where teaching at off-site providers such as FUEL, Notts County Football Club and Take One Studios is good, staff engage students in learning and they work well together as a team on practically based work-related programmes of the students' choice. As a result, their attendance improves significantly as they engage wholeheartedly in learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Attendance is low and attitudes to learning require improvement because of a minority of students who are not improving their attendance quickly enough to enable them to fully engage in learning and fulfil their potential at the Unit.
- Some approaches for promoting attendance do not work well enough for some students. Students' individual targets for attendance are either not effective enough or not matched well enough to rewards to improve their attendance. Students are not always held to account rigorously enough for poor attendance.
- Where teaching requires improvement, a few students display disaffection with learning, for example, by refusing to do their work. In these lessons, some students find the activities provided by the Unit uninspiring.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around the Unit is usually good and most know how to stay safe. In discussions, they said bullying sometimes occurs but any incidents are dealt with effectively by staff.
- The work of achievement managers in checking students' attendance, mentoring students and working closely with their families and agencies works well for the majority of students, who make good progress. Students make outstanding progress in lessons they really enjoy. Staff have examples of students who were persistently absent making rapid gains in attending nearly all sessions, as a result of choosing activities that interest them, such as motor mechanics.
- Parents, in discussion, said that their children feel safe and are free from bullying. The Unit's recent survey of parents shows that most feel that their children's behaviour and safety are good.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The Unit's evaluation of its work and of its impact on students' learning and well-being is not rigorous enough. Insufficient account has been taken of the impact of the quality of teaching in the classroom on students' attitudes and engagement with learning.
- The Unit's evaluation of teaching is based largely on teaching in the unit and not across the off-site provision. Senior leaders have not involved subject leaders and achievement managers well enough in monitoring and self-evaluation to arrive at a realistic view of the impact of the Unit's work and leadership on students' outcomes.
- Subject leaders and achievement managers have not looked closely enough at the impact of the curriculum on the attendance of all students in order to arrive at a view of their strengths and weaknesses in promoting attendance and raising achievement.
- The senior leadership team have the full confidence of the staff in driving improvements forward. They have increased the range of examination courses in academic and work-related subjects available to students, year on year, resulting in improved achievement. They have successfully adapted the curriculum for all students, by enabling them to choose different courses, ranging from academic to work-related with a mixture in-between. This has helped the majority to transfer successfully to further education, employment and training.
- Achievement mentors and achievement managers are building successful relationships and links with parents to promote attendance. This has not yet had a full impact on overall attendance. Subject leaders are beginning to develop opportunities to promote communication, literacy and numeracy skills across their subjects.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted through subjects such as sports, art and music and through topics such as celebration days where they consider, for example, the celebration of the abolition of slavery. Students actively participate in Black History Month and look at diversity of cultures and religions in Britain and across the world. There are good opportunities for reflection through the systems of mentoring.
- The local authority has provided appropriate support and guidance for the management committee in transferring to a governing body. It has responded positively to the request by the governing body for an external review of the Unit's work which is scheduled for the beginning of next term.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The newly constituted governing body is beginning to hold the Unit to account for its work. Governors have a clear idea of the quality of teaching from a first-hand view and in considering data. They have a clear system for setting the performance objectives for the headteacher and have already made sure that the management of performance is linked to salary progression. They know what the Unit is doing to tackle any underperformance. They have just received the allocation of funding for the pupil premium and are now in a position to hold the Unit to account for its work. Governors ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures, such as the rigorous vetting of staff and visitors to the Unit, are fully in place. They have made sure that all off-site provisions and individual students are assessed for potential risks and that individual students are assessed. They have a good understanding of attendance issues and students' achievements from data and are using this to shape priorities for school improvement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
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

Unique reference number	135767
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	429971

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	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Richards
Headteacher	Wendy Vincent
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2011
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