

Unity College

150 West Wycombe Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP12 3AE

Inspection dates 3–5 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Leaders and managers set high expectations for the performance of staff and students.
- As a result of good teaching, an effective curriculum and well planned support, students settle well and make good progress.
- Students' behaviour is good. As a result of receiving the support students need, their behaviour improves significantly during their time at the school.
- Students are safe and secure. This is because policies and procedures to ensure their safety and well-being are carried out well.
- The proprietor provides effective governance for the school, actively supporting the headteacher and ensuring all the independent school standards are met.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a small minority of lessons students are not clear about the purpose of their activities.
- Information and communication technology is not used fully to support students' learning.
- Some students do not always arrive at their lessons on time.
- Insufficient emphasis is placed on ensuring that students receive the advice and guidance they need about their future options.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice. The inspector observed eight lessons and visited students whose education was taking place away from the school's main site. Two lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked at students' work and spoke to the students about it. He held meetings with the proprietor, the senior leaders, staff members and students.
- He looked at documentation including policy statements, schemes of work, teachers' planning and records of students' progress and of staff training.
- Too few responses had been received on Ofsted's Parent View on-line questionnaire for results to be published. The inspector met with students' carers and held telephone conversations with representatives of the local authorities who place students at the school. Seven questionnaire responses from members of staff members were taken into consideration.

Inspection team

John Gush, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this 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 those who are accommodated in residential homes operated by the school's proprietor and a small number of day students.
- All students have experienced significant difficulties and disruption to their education.
- The school opened and first admitted students in January 2011. It is located in a large house in High Wycombe.
- It is run by the Keys Childcare Group under a contractual arrangement with the Thames Valley Cross-Regional Project. This is a partnership of six local authorities that places and funds the students at the school.
- The school is led by the headteacher, with oversight from the proprietor's director of education.
- Ten full-time students are on roll aged between 12 and 16 years of age. Five have a statement of special educational needs and seven are in the care of their local authority.
- The school has an arrangement with two local organisations, Wycombe Youth Action and The Round House, to provide additional education and training opportunities that extend the students' curriculum.
- The school was last inspected in October 2011.
- The school's mission statement is 'working in partnership to unlock each individual's true potential'. It aims to build students' self-esteem and independence by 'providing a nurturing learning environment supported by a therapeutic ethos'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that a wider range of school activities, such as tutorial lessons, helps students understand the education and career options open to them
 - ensuring that students receive the support they need to be punctual to their lessons.
- Improve the quality of teaching, to raise students' achievement still further by:
 - ensuring that teachers help students to understand the purpose of their lessons
 - ensuring that the best use is made of information and communication technologies to support learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and his team provide strong leadership for the school. The headteacher communicates the school's ethos well so that it is understood and accepted by the whole staff team.
- High standards are expected for students' behaviour and achievement. As a result, students who come to the school with a disrupted and turbulent experience of education achieve well and make good progress in learning and in their personal development.
- The school works very well with external partners who contribute to students' development and progress. This includes students' parents and carers, the residences where many students live, and the local authorities that place the students at the school. This effective partnership results in coherent support that helps students to overcome their personal and emotional difficulties.
- School leaders respond well to the differing needs of students and make sure that the best possible arrangements are made to help students re-engage with education and extend their learning. This can involve periods of home tuition for some students or the use of other organisations to provide off-site education and training.
- Leaders have established a good curriculum that provides students with valuable opportunities to learn and make progress. This enables them to work towards examinations in a range of subjects and to develop valuable skills in literacy, numeracy and communication. Weekly physical education lessons help students to develop a healthy lifestyle. Students also benefit from off-site education and training that extend their work-related skills and bolster their self-confidence.
- The school places strong emphasis on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Mutual respect, tolerance and fairness are strongly promoted. The course in personal, social and health education is particularly effective in supporting students' personal development. It helps the students to understand and appreciate British values, and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders regularly observe lessons to gauge the effectiveness of teachers' work. This includes lessons involving home tuition and off-site training. As a result, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They manage the performance of teachers and other staff well and provide valuable guidance that results in improved practice and outcomes for students.
- Weekly visits from a careers adviser provide helpful information and guidance about future options for all the students. This helps students to build up an understanding of the possibilities open to them when they leave the school. However, students' understanding about their future options is not reflected well enough in other school activities, such as tutorial lessons.
- An adequate range of facilities and equipment is available and used well to meet students' needs. This includes specialist accommodation for science, design and technology, food technology and information and communication technology.
- Staff recruitment and training are well managed. Good arrangements make sure that all staff are checked for their suitability to work with children. This includes staff in the organisations that provide off-site education and training. As a result, the independent school standards relating to safeguarding and child protection are met.
- All the required information for parents, carers and others is made available on the proprietor's website or in the school's brochure. The school's complaints policy meets requirements and is well publicised.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The proprietor has a good range of procedures to ensure the school complies with the independent school standards.
 - The proprietor's board of directors has recently devised valuable new systems to improve its monitoring of students' achievements.
 - The board receives regular information about teachers' performance and has effective arrangements for rewarding good teaching.
 - The proprietor provides valuable support to the school leaders, helping them to ensure the school continues to develop well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. This is especially the case in view of their disrupted educational

experience. During their time in the school some students continue to have difficulty in managing their behaviour. Overall, nevertheless, students make substantial improvements in their behaviour.

- Students behave well in most lessons and conduct themselves well around the school most of the time. Any unsettled behaviour is managed well by the staff team, which is effectively trained and experienced. This ensures that any disruption to other students' learning is kept to a minimum. Students behave well when they attend off-site education or training.
- Incidents of misbehaviour are recorded and analysed carefully. This enables the school leaders to devise effective approaches to enable students to make the progress of which they are capable.
- For almost all students, attendance improves markedly during their time at the school. However, a small number of students struggle to be on time for the start of the school day. Their punctuality is only improving slowly.
- A well thought-out strategy to tackle bullying is implemented successfully across the school so that little bullying occurs. Students show good understanding of bullying and how to avoid it. This includes bullying through the internet and on social media as well, as bullying based on prejudice about people's differences.
- Students take part in a good range of activities that promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They learn with interest about the law and right and wrong action, and about the expectations of modern British society.
- Students learn about, and gain an appreciation of, other cultures through assemblies, through daily readings from the news and in tutorial discussions. They speak thoughtfully about the differences between people, including sexual orientation and gender identity. Students are active fundraisers for a variety of charities. They suggest and vote for the school's charity of the year, and run activities such as the recent fashion show to raise funds. Together with the curriculum, these activities prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- The school has a clear policy that staff members understand and follow, that prohibits the promotion of any partisan political views in any activity associated with the school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students say that members of the school staff are active in promoting their safety in school. They recognise that staff minimise the impact of other students' unsettled behaviour.
- Students benefit from the valuable relationships they build with staff and with the therapists who work with them each week. This helps them to settle and to see their potential for educational success.
- All staff members receive suitable training in child protection and have regular opportunities to refresh and deepen their understanding and knowledge in this area. The headteacher is the designated safeguarding lead person and has received the required advanced level of training. Senior staff are trained in safe recruitment. Checks to make sure that staff members are suitable to work with children are carried out and recorded in a single register, as required.
- Robust policies designed to keep students safe are consistently put into practice. These include policies about fire safety, first aid and the health and safety of students and staff. Very good arrangements are carried out well to make sure that students are safe when they are off site for training or for educational visits.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teachers use assessment well to gain a good understanding of what the students know and can do. They utilise this well in planning lessons and activities that help students to learn and to work towards their examinations.
- The school has an effective process that enables teachers to check that their assessments of students' progress are accurate. This helps them to make sure that they are setting targets that are realistic and that will stretch all students to achieve as well as they can.
- In most lessons teachers make sure students understand the purposes of their work. They help them to recognise what they need to do to increase their understanding and skill. This helps students to learn with more confidence and to make good progress.
- In a small minority of lessons, where there is a lack of clarity about what students are trying to achieve, students do not engage as well as they could and, as a result, learning is slower.
- Teachers emphasise the importance of reading and encourage students to read every day. This might be the newspapers or daily news reports, books or work related to the various subjects studied. All students

have daily opportunities to develop their abilities in writing and mathematics.

- Teachers make good use of the educational support workers who are present in most lessons. They help students to focus well on their tasks and develop their self-confidence, knowing when to offer to help and when to leave students to get on their own.
- The information and communication technology (ICT) equipment available in the school is sometimes used effectively to promote students' learning. However, in some lessons where ICT has potential benefits, students are not encouraged to use it.
- Therapists who visit the school support students' learning effectively. They help students to build the specific skills they need, such as in speech, language and communication. They also help students understand what gets in the way of their learning and their personal development. These therapies enable students to develop self-awareness and confidence, and to become ready for further learning and to extend their achievements.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students have come to the school following extended periods of disrupted education and with very negative feelings about participation in school work. The school enables them to settle and to begin to catch up, sometimes rapidly, so raising their achievement.
- Students' progress is monitored monthly and records show good achievements. Although students' attainment remains well below the national average, the majority make good progress from their starting points at the school.
- All students study English and mathematics and most work towards GCSE examinations in these subjects and in science. GCSE results in recent years show that most students are graded in two or three subjects, with some gaining higher grades.
- Students also gain passes in a range of awards in other subjects, including food technology and art. Some are currently making good progress in their work toward vocational awards in construction or hair and beauty. Students are successful in the music technology and graffiti courses they take in the off-site training centres. All of these successes help students to develop valuable skills as well as gaining a positive approach to learning. This supports them well as they prepare to move on to the local further education colleges or apprenticeships.
- Those students with disabilities and special educational needs make good use of the specialist support provided by the school. They make steady progress, increasing their skills in literacy, communication and mathematics, and achieve well from their starting points.
- The most able achieve very well and make up ground that they had lost during their previous disjointed educational experience. Some are very successful, for example studying law and achieving good GCSE results in science.
- Almost all Year 11 students in recent years have made successful transitions to further education, with a few taking up apprenticeships and employment.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	136373
Inspection number	454300
DfE registration number	825/6043

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Special school for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	12 to 16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	10
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Nicola Coysh, Keys Education
Chair	Heather Laffin
Headteacher	David Stevinson
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£33,800
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