

Unity Learning Centre

Forest Road West, Radford, Nottingham NG7 4ES

Inspection dates

17–18 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an a school that requires improvement

- The curriculum offered to most pupils requires improvement. Pupils do not get enough opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the work of Unity Learning Centre staff has enough focus on pupils' learning.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good across the full range of provision. As a result, not all pupils achieve as well as they could.
- The use of assessment to inform the teaching that some pupils receive requires improvement. The staff do not have a secure understanding about the overall progress of pupils.
- Pupils' work is not always set at the correct level, particularly for the most able. As a result, some pupils underachieve.
- Too many pupils do not attend their lessons, either at the Unity Learning Centre or at the alternative providers. This has a negative impact on their achievement.
- Reading is not consistently promoted across the curriculum. Some pupils have limited access to opportunities to develop their reading skills.
- Opportunities for pupils to access teaching aimed at developing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding are not fully developed.

The school has the following strengths

- Unity Learning Centre is improving. The executive headteacher and acting headteacher provide stable and assured leadership.
- The interim executive board provides strong leadership for both Unity Learning Centre and Denewood Learning Centre. The board recognises the weaknesses in the provision at Unity Learning Centre and is tackling them.
- Pupils' conduct at the Unity Learning Centre site and at alternative providers is usually positive.
- The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is rising rapidly.
- Some teaching the pupils receive at Unity Learning Centre and at alternative providers is of good quality.
- The safeguarding of pupils is a high priority and is effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning to raise pupils' achievement in all subjects, by:
 - assessing pupils' work more closely and using this information to inform teaching
 - setting work to match the abilities of all pupils, including the most able
 - promoting reading more widely.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that Unity Learning Centre staff understand the progress pupils should be making in key areas of their learning
 - ensuring that the curriculum offered to pupils allows them sufficient opportunity to be successful in a broad range of courses.

- Improve pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour by:
 - improving the attendance of pupils, to ensure that they achieve as well as they can
 - preparing pupils to become good adult citizens by ensuring that their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is promoted across all aspects of teaching.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders at all levels have not focused enough on the progress made by all pupils. As a result, this means that there are gaps in the information used by staff to improve academic outcomes for pupils.
- Achievement managers and mentors at Unity Learning Centre do not have the necessary understanding about the academic progress pupils should make during their time at the centre or at the alternative providers. As a result, there is a limited amount of challenge to pupils aimed at getting them to improve their potential grades in examinations.
- Leaders have not ensured that alternative providers share sufficiently robust information about pupils' progress with staff. The information currently collected is not easily interpreted and leads to confusion about the progress pupils are making.
- The curriculum offered to most pupils is too narrow in its design. The small range of courses on offer does not allow sufficient opportunity for many pupils to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a wide enough range of subjects such as music and science. Disadvantaged pupils do not gain further access to opportunities to enhance their ability to access the curriculum.
- Leaders have established effective liaison with parents and carers. Feedback received by inspectors during the inspection indicated that parents were happy with the provision offered to their children. One parent described the progress her son had made as 'remarkable'. Most of the feedback offered by parents described improvements in their child's behaviour rather than related to any academic progress.
- The executive headteacher, acting headteacher and chair of the interim executive board all have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They are tackling a range of improvements in a sensible order. The impact of their work is ensuring that the work of the learning centre is improving from a low starting point.
- The local authority is highly supportive of the improvements at Unity Learning Centre. In conjunction with the centre's leaders and local headteachers' groups, it has helped to improve the systems for safeguarding pupils in alternative provision. For example, some of the alternative providers are now applying to become independent schools themselves.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The interim executive board members have been extremely rigorous in their work to improve systems for safeguarding pupils. They have responded well to health and safety audits completed after Denewood Learning Centre was placed in special measures in December 2014. They ensure that senior leaders maintain their focus on the safety of pupils.
 - The interim executive board is very well led by an experienced chair. He is tenacious in his pursuit of better outcomes for pupils. The chair has visited three of the alternative providers to satisfy himself that pupils are safe.
 - The interim executive board is composed of members with suitable professional experience. Their regular meetings ensure that the centre continues to improve from a low starting point. Interim executive board members are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They tackle issues in the right order, for example, ensuring the safety of pupils before developing the quality of teaching.
 - The interim executive board has been working closely and effectively with the Department for Education, the regional schools commissioner and Nottingham local authority to establish a clear plan for the future of both Denewood and Unity Learning Centres. However, the protracted discussions between all parties about the future of the centres are starting to slow the rate of improvement. This is not in the best interests of pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are well trained to spot any signs that pupils are at risk. Achievement mentors and achievement managers act upon concerns and keep detailed records about the actions they have taken. Files related to the safeguarding of pupils are well organised and kept securely. This work helps to keep pupils safe.
- Unity Learning Centre staff have good relationships with leaders at the alternative provisions. Both sets of staff teams work well together to ensure the safety of pupils.
- Unity Learning Centre staff understand the Nottingham local authority systems for child protection and social care referrals. This detailed level of understanding helps them to support pupils at the right time.
- Regular dialogue between the acting headteacher and the three achievement managers ensures that

referrals to different agencies have the impact they should. The efficiency and rigour of their work greatly contributes to the quality of safeguarding across the centre's work.

- Through their contract monitoring arrangements, staff ensure that issues regarding health and safety are acted upon at the alternative providers. Arrangements for checking the identity of visitors to the alternative provider sites are in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Across lessons which take place at the centre, and at some alternative providers, there is too much variation in the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics. Expectations of what pupils could achieve in a lesson or over time are not always high enough. This slows the progress that pupils make.
- Information about pupils' progress from their previous schools is not used consistently well to plan the next steps in their learning. Not enough consideration is given to the progress pupils have made during the earlier years of their education. This means that targets set for pupils are sometimes unreliable.
- Assessments of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding completed on entry to the centre do not always inform the next steps in their learning. As a result, leaders are not always confident that pupils are on the correct courses.
- Where teaching is weakest, pupils' progress is slowed because staff do not plan sessions based on reliable assessment information. Therefore the work is either far too hard or far too easy.
- Some pupils receive their education in buildings which are not conducive to delivering a high-quality education. Teaching, and therefore pupils' learning, is inhibited because classroom environments have only basic equipment in them. Some classrooms have vibrant displays which are supported with prompts for pupils' learning. During a lunchtime in one of the classrooms at the centre a pupil pointed out pieces of work he was proud of on the walls. This pupil demonstrated a good level of understanding about the purpose of his education and was motivated to learn more.
- Pupils benefit from a highly committed workforce. All the staff spoken to during the inspection at either this centre, or at the alternative providers, demonstrate a strong moral commitment to improving outcomes for all pupils. Most staff recognise that the generally narrow curriculum offered to pupils does not prepare them well enough for the next stages of education, employment or training. However, the curriculum offered does start to engage pupils after their previously negative attitudes to education.
- Some staff are highly proficient in their subjects and they ensure that pupils are clear about the expectations of them during the lesson. An example of this was during an art lesson where pupils were engrossed in their learning. The teacher's questioning helped to challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their learning. This was made possible by the excellent rapport between the pupils and adults in the room. As a result pupils made very good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement because the provision does not fully prepare pupils to go into further education, employment or training. Too many pupils fail to continue their studies or get a job once they have completed their work through the centre. Overall, the provision is not strong enough in teaching pupils how to be effective learners.
- Pupils' welfare is taken extremely seriously by staff, resulting in a good level of support for pupils. Achievement mentors try to understand the emotional needs of the pupils they work with. This knowledge sometimes helps to motivate pupils to fulfil the requirements of their courses.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Good systems are in place to ensure that pupils completing vocational courses are kept safe. The centre's contract monitoring process looks closely at these arrangements. Pupils reported that bullying is rare and that they mostly enjoy the time spent at the centre.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because pupils do not attend the centre or the alternative providers as much as they should.

- Pupils' conduct is largely positive. Pupils are generally polite to visitors and speak sensibly about their education when asked direct questions about it. Some of the courses offered to pupils are clearly motivating. Pupils report that they enjoy the opportunity to study vocational aspects of the curriculum, and this helps them to attend.
- The use of fixed-term exclusions is variable across the centre and throughout the alternative providers. When a pupil demonstrates extremely negative behaviours, achievement mentors work quickly to find different placements to alleviate some of the difficulties the pupil is facing.
- Staff track the attendance of pupils very carefully. They quickly make contact with families and other agencies if any pupil's absence is a concern. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving rapidly.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- There is a wide variation in the progress made by pupils in English and mathematics, both at the centre and at the alternative providers. Reading is not always promoted as much as it could be. Some pupils get good access to appropriate texts and some do not.
- The information collected by staff about the progress pupils make at the alternative providers is not analysed well enough. During the inspection leaders struggled to articulate the key messages the information tells them.
- There is limited analysis of the progress different groups of pupils make. For example, leaders are unclear about the progress made by girls or pupils looked after by the local authority. This is hampering the decisions leaders take about how best to ensure that pupils are making the very best progress in relation to their starting points.
- The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The most able pupils do not achieve highly enough in a wide range of qualifications. This inhibits their access to the next steps in their education, employment or training.
- The progress made by pupils is too reliant on the leaders of the alternative provisions. Pupils are registered with Unity Learning Centre only, and the systems for assuring leaders about the quality of teaching and learning at the alternative providers is not developed enough.
- Some pupils, including those who have special educational needs or disability, make good progress in a variety of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Some pupils gain useful vocational qualifications while in attendance at some alternative providers. This helps them to establish a career route for life after school.

School details

Unique reference number	135767
Local authority	Nottingham City
Inspection number	10002548

This inspection 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	119
Appropriate authority	Secretary of State's Interim Executive Board
Chair	Dr Christopher Reynolds
Acting Headteacher	Matthew McCluskey
Telephone number	0115 915 1271
Website	www.denewoodunitylc.co.uk
Email address	admin@ulc.nottingham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 December 2013

Information about this school

- Unity Learning Centre provides full-time education for pupils in key stage 4 who have been permanently excluded from school. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 are provided for at Denewood Learning Centre.
- The majority of pupils do not receive their education directly from Unity Learning Centre.
- Most pupils attend one or more of the following alternative providers: Take One Studies, NISAI, Equip, Fresh Start, Stonesoup, Buxton Training, Channelling Positivity, Crisp Vocational Provision, Stonebridge City Farm, Premier Training, Catch 22, NCFC (Football in the community), FUEL (First Universal Enterprise Ltd), RISE, Nottingham Tutorial College.
- Most pupils arrive at Unity Learning Centre with histories of poor attendance.
- Most pupils are White British boys.
- Unity Learning Centre is governed by an interim executive board and shares the same executive headteacher and acting headteacher as Denewood Learning Centre.
- The executive headteacher is a national leader of education (NLE).
- Ofsted placed Denewood Learning Centre into special measures in December 2014. Denewood Learning Centre has been subject to subsequent monitoring by Ofsted and is judged to be taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.
- Following the inspection of Denewood in December 2014 the acting headteacher took up his current post. In January 2015 the executive headteacher started to provide support also for Denewood Learning Centre.
- Nottingham local authority is currently concluding a review of alternative provision across the city.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils during lessons, break and lunchtimes at the Unity Learning Centre site.
- Inspectors visited three of the alternative providers to observe the work of pupils and staff. Inspectors spoke with leaders of the alternative provisions about their work with Unity Learning Centre.
- Discussions were held with pupils throughout the inspection. Several phone calls were made to a selection of parents to talk about the impact of the learning centre's work on their child's progress.
- The lead inspector held separate meetings with a representative from the local authority and the chair of the interim executive board.
- There were two responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- Inspectors evaluated the quality of the centre's work to safeguard pupils. Inspectors scrutinised documentation, including records of incidents, records of staff suitability checks, and pupil attendance patterns.

Inspection team

Phil Harrison, lead inspector

Linda Lyn-Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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