

# Unity City Academy

Ormesby Road, Middlesbrough TS3 8RE

## Inspection dates

2–3 November 2016

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Leaders, including governors and the Academies Enterprise Trust, have been unable to prevent a decline in the school's performance.
- Frequent changes in leadership have undermined efforts to improve standards and have adversely affected staff and pupil morale. Current leaders have, however, done much to restore confidence and there is growing belief that recent improvements can be sustained.
- As a result of poor progress in a broad range of subjects, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 4 is low.
- Teachers have not had the guidance or training they need to address the significant gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Standards of literacy are low on entry. Pupils do not get enough good-quality teaching to help them catch up. Teachers have not done enough to promote reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- Teachers' planning does not pay enough regard to pupils' starting points. As a result, the barriers to pupils' learning are not being systematically addressed.
- Standards of behaviour require improvement. A new policy has had a positive impact, but some lessons continue to be interrupted by disrespectful behaviour.
- Attendance levels remain below the national average, despite some notable improvements over the last year.
- Leaders have not done enough to check on and evaluate the impact of their actions. Leaders have only just begun to understand why significant levels of additional funding have not raised standards for disadvantaged pupils.
- Members of the governing body have been too accepting of reports from senior leaders. They have not had effective mechanisms for checking what leaders tell them or for scrutinising the progress pupils make.

### The school has the following strengths

- The current principal, executive principal and the trust have a realistic grasp of the improvements that need to be made. Their prompt actions have begun to secure improvement.
- Safeguarding practices and arrangements for pupils' welfare ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for.

## Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, in order to secure better progress, by:
  - matching learning activities more precisely to pupils' starting points
  - ensuring that all teachers contribute effectively to addressing gaps in pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills
  - raising teachers' expectations, particularly of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar and the presentation of their work
  - consistently promoting the school's core values of respect, integrity, enthusiasm and curiosity
  - ensuring that ongoing assessments provide accurate information on pupils' progress and identify specific gaps in knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that all leaders rigorously check and evaluate the impact of their actions
  - developing the skills of senior and middle leaders so that they can hold colleagues fully to account within their areas of responsibility
  - focusing relentlessly on improving teaching and learning through providing appropriate professional development and feedback
  - ensuring that governors have the necessary training and skills to evaluate accurately the school's performance and hold leaders to account.
- Improve standards of behaviour so that pupils develop the self-confidence and resilience to sustain their efforts in lessons and consistently show respect for members of staff and one another.
- Continue to employ well-targeted and pre-emptive strategies so that more pupils attend the school regularly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

- A succession of changes and lack of continuity at a senior level led to a breakdown in leadership and management last year. Staff morale and confidence were adversely affected and, as a result, standards were particularly low in 2016. The current principal, ably supported by the executive principal, has not had enough time to reverse this decline, although she has been able to 'steady the ship', improve a number of key aspects and demonstrate the capacity to sustain recent improvements.
- More purposeful recent intervention from the sponsor, Academies Enterprise Trust, has ensured that additional resources have been provided to strengthen leadership capacity. As a result, a new and more effective leadership team is in place. A range of new policies and systems has been introduced that has begun to bring necessary changes. Behaviour has improved considerably and attendance levels are rising. The climate around the school is now calm and more purposeful.
- The curriculum has had significant weaknesses in its promotion of basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, a new, more suitable curriculum has been introduced that takes more account of pupils' different learning needs. In key stage 3, more time has been allocated to English and there are further programmes of individual support for lower attaining pupils and those who speak English as an additional language. In Years 9, 10 and 11, a guided options process now ensures that courses are more closely matched to pupils' level of ability. Lower attainers follow a well-considered programme of academic and vocational courses with an enhanced level of personal, social, health and economic education. The most able now follow a more appropriate academic programme which includes a foreign language. These changes have already contributed towards the sharp improvement in attendance this term.
- The performance of teachers was not managed effectively in the past. In addition, middle leaders were not held sufficiently to account for their areas of responsibility. New policies and procedures have now been established, which have been widely welcomed by the staff. Nevertheless, some middle leaders lack the necessary skills to hold colleagues effectively to account or to contribute to driving improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Performance and assessment information has not been used well. Leaders have been poorly informed about pupils' progress, and predictions for examination outcomes have been unrealistic. Current leaders have prioritised the need to have reliable and informative tracking data. New systems have been introduced that have begun to inform leaders where additional support needs to be targeted more effectively.
- The school's evaluation of the use of additional funding is underdeveloped. Governors know that the Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy and the pupil premium have not been used effectively. A recent external review of the school's use of the pupil premium is now informing a more strategic approach, although the impact of these changes is yet to be seen.

- The school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to explore wide-ranging issues. For example, inspectors observed a sensitively handled lesson in which Year 9 pupils discussed the risks of sexual exploitation. Recent research by the school has identified a number of safeguarding issues prevalent within the community. In response, specific learning has been designed to address these concerns. The school is also explicitly promoting core values of resilience, integrity, enthusiasm and curiosity through its rewards system. This approach has contributed effectively to the improved climate for learning now evident across the school.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors have not provided sufficient challenge or scrutiny of the impact of work of senior leaders and managers. As a result, underperformance went unchecked, turbulence resulted and standards were allowed to decline.
- The governing body did act once a breakdown in leadership and management became apparent. With the support of the sponsor, swift changes to the leadership team were made and greater leadership capacity has been secured.
- Although some new appointments have been made, the governing body still lacks the expertise to evaluate the impact of actions that leaders and managers are taking. Further training and development are required so that governors have the skills to scrutinise data effectively and target their challenge appropriately. The trust has already recommended an external review of governance, which should be undertaken.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- In the light of the high level of child protection concerns, the designated leader for safeguarding and the pastoral team have effective systems in place and a dogged determination to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Secure systems are in place so that all members of staff are trained and know how to make referrals if they have a concern. Such referrals are dealt with promptly.
- Record-keeping is thorough and effective relationships with external agencies ensure that actions are taken to resolve concerns. Thorough checks are made when staff are appointed. Positive relationships ensure that members of staff at all levels care for pupils' welfare effectively.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Inadequate**

- Over time, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in a broad range of subjects has been inadequate because it has not helped pupils to make the progress they should.
- Until recently, the morale of the teaching staff was low. Frequent changes to the school's leadership team meant that checks on teaching were not frequent enough and the guidance teachers received about how to improve their practice was inconsistent.

- Teachers do not make sufficient use of information on pupils' prior attainment or identify the specific gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding well enough. As a result, the tasks they provide do not meet pupils' most pressing needs. Learning activities are often too challenging for the least able and not challenging enough for the most able pupils.
- Teachers do not focus sufficiently on tackling weaknesses in pupils' literacy and mathematical skills because feedback does not routinely identify errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Consequently, basic weaknesses go unchallenged and uncorrected. Some pupils also hold low expectations of themselves, as they too easily accept errors in their work that they are capable of self-correcting when challenged.
- A high proportion of pupils have a reading age below their chronological age. Reading programmes are in place but there has been little evaluation to determine whether these programmes are successful in accelerating pupils' progress in reading. When inspectors listened to pupils read, they found that several pupils were reading library books that did not challenge or interest them enough.
- Where pupils learn well, it is because the work is pitched appropriately, successfully interests and engages them, and forces them to think. In many classes, there are warm and positive relationships between teachers and pupils. Other adults contribute effectively to learning. They know when to intervene and use questioning effectively to ensure that pupils work things out for themselves.
- Although behaviour in lessons is much improved, some lessons continue to be interrupted by occasional low-level disruption or disrespectful behaviour, which prevents learning from taking place. Teachers do use the agreed systems for managing behaviour consistently although the relatively frequent removal of pupils from lessons places considerable demands on senior leaders.
- New assessment systems have been introduced and significant efforts are being made to ensure that assessment information is reliable. Curriculum leaders are now charged with ensuring that assessments are accurate and more rigorously analyse data to identify those pupils that are making slower progress. Pupils are clearer about their targets because of a new system that has recently been introduced. However, many pupils are currently working at levels well below the targets they have been set.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

## **Requires improvement**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Many pupils lack the self-confidence to sustain their effort in lessons. Leaders have recognised this. The reward system they have introduced that targets positive behaviours is beginning to have a positive effect. A school council has been introduced and a series of specially focused days is planned to tackle challenging topics and build pupils' resilience.

- The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to learn about how to stay safe and foster healthy lifestyles. The more vulnerable pupils receive more lessons on topics such as safety, grooming, sexual exploitation and bullying in response to local research. Tutorial time is skilfully used to reinforce these messages.
- Pupils' physical development is catered for well. The teaching of physical education is a strength of the school and there is a good range of extra-curricular sporting opportunities for pupils.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement, although recent changes to the behaviour policy and the management of challenging behaviour have significantly reduced incidents of poor behaviour. Although a small minority of lessons are still interrupted, there has been a significant improvement in the climate for learning.
- The use of fixed-term exclusions has decreased markedly under the school's current leadership. Arrangements to manage pupils at risk of exclusion now work well. The more appropriate curriculum that is now in place for lower attaining pupils is engaging pupils more effectively.
- The tenacious actions of attendance leaders, coupled with positive rewards, have noticeably improved overall attendance, although it continues to remain below the national average for secondary schools. The strengthened attendance team has targeted its efforts well and seen significantly improved attendance from Roma pupils, children looked after by the local authority and disadvantaged pupils.
- Most pupils conduct themselves well, although there are incidents of disrespectful and intolerant behaviour. Inspectors observed incidents of shouting and whistling in corridors, for example. Almost all pupils wear the correct school uniform and keep the school site clean and tidy.
- Punctuality is improving. Good systems ensure that latecomers receive sanctions and pupils' punctuality to lessons during the day is good.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Inadequate

- Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are significantly below the national average. Many pupils have considerable gaps in their knowledge, particularly in literacy and mathematics. Too little is done to help them catch up. They make limited progress in the school and leave with levels of attainment that are well below those seen nationally.
- Standards in the school have declined since the last inspection and have been below the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress for several years.
- In 2016, progress rates across a broad range of subjects placed the school in the bottom 10% of schools nationally. Progress in mathematics was particularly weak, with only around 25% of pupils in Year 11 making the progress that should be expected.

- The progress made by different groups of pupils has been weak. The least able pupils do not receive the specific support they need to address quickly gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils who speak English as an additional language do not receive enough help in lessons to allow them to access the curriculum fully. The progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has also been poor. Recent investment in provision means that the school is now better placed to identify and meet pupils' needs. The impact of this provision, together with more specialist support, is beginning to improve the quality of learning, particularly in English.
- The most able pupils are not stretched or challenged sufficiently and consequently do not make the progress they should. Teachers do not have high enough expectations and their planning does not take sufficient account of pupils' differing starting points.
- Pupils currently in the school are working well below the levels that should be expected. While more pupils are clearly taking pride in their work, too many still do not take sufficient care with their handwriting and presentation and do not do enough to correct errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Too many pupils struggle to apply their mathematical skills effectively across the curriculum.
- The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils are significantly below those of other pupils nationally. As the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is high, leaders know that they need to concentrate on improving the quality of teaching as a whole. They are acutely aware that the pupil premium funding has not had the necessary impact on raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and recently commissioned an external review of the school's use of this funding. The recommendations of this review have begun to positively influence the school's actions. Disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 now receive more targeted additional support.
- The progress and attainment of children who are looked after by the local authority have been variable. These pupils are now receiving good support and regular monitoring to check that they are on course to reach their targets. They are benefiting from the well-targeted use of additional funding.
- Outcomes for pupils that attend alternative provision have also been variable. The current leadership team has significantly reduced the number of pupils placed in alternative provision, so pupils' needs are beginning to be more purposefully met within the school.
- In recent years, the proportion of pupils that were unable to secure a place in further education, employment or training was well above that seen nationally. Figures for 2016 indicate that the proportion was closer to the national average.

## School details

Unique reference number	133768
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	10019379

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	650
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Adam Gaunt
Principal	Gemma Simon
Telephone number	01642 326262
Website	<a href="http://www.unityacademy.org.uk">www.unityacademy.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:gsimon@unitycityacademy.org">gsimon@unitycityacademy.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	14–15 March 2013

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Unity City Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The academy is sponsored by the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language is rising.
- Over three quarters of pupils are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, which is much higher than average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after.



- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is average.
- The school currently has nine pupils attending alternative provision on a part-time or full-time basis at Middlesbrough College, Prior Pursglove College and the Ashdale Hospital Teaching Centre.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at key stage 4.
- The current principal was appointed in February 2016 in an interim capacity until a substantive appointment can be made. The principal is supported by an executive principal. In addition, a number of other new senior leaders have been appointed in the last year.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across all year groups, including a number of observations undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During these observations, inspectors sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils in order to evaluate the quality of their current work. In addition, inspectors scrutinised in detail a sample of work from pupils in both key stages 3 and 4.
- Inspectors also observed the general climate around the school at social times.
- Inspectors visited provision for pupils in the East Middlesbrough Enterprise Centre, located on the school site.
- Meetings were held with the executive principal, the principal and other senior leaders, a group of teachers and middle leaders, and groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4. Further meetings were held with the chair of the governing body and two other members of the governing body, as well as a representative of the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's position statement and improvement plans, policies, assessment information and records of checks on the quality of teaching. Inspectors looked at records of governing body meetings and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors took account of the nine responses to the online survey, Parent View, the 38 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 23 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

## Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Crossley	Ofsted Inspector
Julie McGrane	Ofsted Inspector
Jen Cave	Ofsted Inspector
Darren Stewart	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. [www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings](http://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings).

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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