

Unity City Academy

Ormesby Road, Middlesbrough TS3 8RE

Inspection dates

11–12 September 2018

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	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- This is an improving school. From low starting points, leaders' actions have enhanced the quality of education pupils currently in the school receive. It is no longer inadequate.
- Current pupils' progress has accelerated, especially in key stage 3. This uplift has not yet translated to improved examination results in 2018 as those pupils were suffering from the legacy of their prior underachievement.
- The impact of teaching on pupils' learning is improving throughout the school, but there are still inconsistencies which need eradicating. For example, a small minority of teachers do not implement fully new assessment policies designed to increase the level of challenge. The quality of teachers' questioning is also variable, with some practices inhibiting development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Occasionally, some teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' resilience or secure and deepen their learning.
- Leaders are not complacent and understand they need to improve their effectiveness. For example, the plans relating to the allocation of additional funding lack precision. Furthermore, leaders do not always review the effect of their actions so that they know which strategies work and those that do not.
- Although it is reducing, the proportion of pupils excluded from the school is above average.
- Leaders recognise that they need to build on the more recent improvements in pupils' attendance, which remains lower than average.
- Leaders' strategies to improve pupils' literacy skills have not been effective enough. Consequently, some pupils find it difficult to articulate their understanding orally and/or in writing.
- The design of the key stage 3 curriculum has reduced the amount of time allocated to some creative and artistic subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The principal, headteacher and other leaders have managed to improve most pupils' attitudes to learning.
- Leaders are steadfast in their determination to help teachers refine their skills. Consequently, the quality of teaching is improving.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding. All staff have a thorough understanding of what to do if they have a concern.
- Staff morale is high. Staff and pupils describe being 'in this together' and wanting the very best for each other.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving pupils' attendance and reducing persistent absence
 - reducing the number of pupils who are excluded permanently or for a fixed period.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that all pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able, make at least good progress and attain the standards of which they ought to be capable by ensuring that teachers:
 - use pupils' prior assessment information accurately to plan work that meets their needs
 - use questioning effectively to probe, challenge and assess pupils' understanding
 - adhere to the school's most recent teaching and learning policies
 - allow pupils more opportunities to consolidate and build on their developing knowledge and skills.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that plans to spend additional funding are precise and evaluated routinely
 - introducing a strategic whole-school approach to the development of pupils' literacy skills
 - reviewing the breadth and balance of the curriculum to consider how the needs of pupils who may have a talent or desire to study creative and artistic subjects can be met.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium 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

- Jointly, the principal (who works between this and another secondary school) and headteacher have worked diligently since the previous inspection to improve the school. Together with a committed group of staff, they have been successful. However, while aspects of the school's provision are improving, such as attendance, behaviour, the quality of teaching and pupils' attainment and progress, overall standards require further improvement.
- The recent restructure of the senior leadership team has brought about a renewed vigour and sense of purpose from the leaders driving school improvement from the top. Although some leaders, including governors, are relatively new or managing unfamiliar roles, they are not daunted by the enormous task that lies ahead. They have introduced new policies or ways of working that are well considered and beginning to have a positive effect on how teachers plan, teach or assess. However, some staff do not apply the new policies consistently.
- Additional funding to support the considerable number of disadvantaged pupils is helping them to make quicker progress. However, the use of additional funding to reduce the absence of this group has not been as effective.
- Funding for Year 7 pupils who need to catch up with their literacy and numeracy skills is not used effectively. In the past, funding has been allocated to areas that have no direct correlation to improving pupils' reading, writing or mathematical skills, knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, leaders do not always review or amend their action plans regularly. Consequently, leaders, including governors, do not have a detailed understanding of the effectiveness of each catch-up strategy.
- Leaders are steadfast in their determination to do what is right for each pupil. As a result, pupils can study a wide range of subjects in key stage 4 that help them to progress to suitable employment, training or further education. Leaders allocate additional curriculum time to English in key stage 3 to support pupils' early literacy development. This is, however, to the detriment of other subjects or courses that develop pupils' creative and artistic skills. A range of extra-curricular opportunities complement the taught curriculum but does not provide a suitable option to pupils who may have a talent or desire to study subjects such as music.
- The school continues to welcome an increasing proportion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language. In addition, leaders are taking steps to become a School of Sanctuary, to provide new pupils with a safe and welcoming place for those who may be seeking sanctuary. Leaders react swiftly to the changing demographics within school and appoint staff who can communicate in the pupils' first language.
- Staff morale is high. Without exception, the staff who spoke to inspectors and/or those who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey said that the school is well led and managed and that leaders do all they can to ensure that the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff.
- School leaders, and leaders from the Academies Enterprise Trust (the trust), provide

staff with an increasing array of professional development opportunities that closely match their needs. More recently, leaders have been encouraging staff to take part in research projects and trial new ideas in the classroom. During the inspection, staff spoke with animation to inspectors when describing how the varied training programme was helping them to become a better teacher or leader.

Governance of the school

- Governance is much improved. Following the last inspection, the trust restructured the governing body and appointed several governors with experience of working in education and as leaders in schools. Governors are far more analytical and less accepting of the information leaders present. They are curious and evaluate the work of the school in different ways.
- Analysis of the minutes from board meetings demonstrates that governors follow up on the agreed actions from previous meetings as a matter of routine. Governors often request that leaders and staff provide an update or present a report. Following this, governors usually ask pertinent questions to probe staff further so that they have a more detailed understanding of how the school is performing.
- The reciprocal agreement within the trust, whereby the headteachers of each school sit on the governing body of another, is helping to provide additional challenge and support during governor evaluation activities.
- Following the previous inspection, governors commissioned an external review of governance. Since then, a further review has taken place. Governors have been quick to act on some of the recommendations, ensuring that they reflect on their own actions and the effect of their own work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are highly regarded by staff and pupils. They have developed thorough systems and procedures to aid with the safeguarding of pupils and child protection. Leaders make appropriate checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils. They also follow up on pupils who are absent or persistently absent from school to ensure that they do not go missing and that they keep in touch with their learning.
- Staff safeguarding training is systematic and of a high standard. All staff can identify a safeguarding leader and they are aware how to log, and follow up on, any safeguarding concern.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are taught about the risks when using the internet and other forms of abuse or harassment. Leaders are agile in their response to the changing risks pupils face nationally and more locally. For example, recently, pupils were taught about how some young people are tricked or lured into child sexual exploitation or forced marriage. Pupils who made their views known say they feel safe and that there are several trusted adults in school they could speak to if they had a concern.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving steadily. Most teachers follow agreed school guidelines in the planning and teaching of their lessons. They ensure that most lessons include a range of different tasks that attempt to match each pupils' stage in their learning. However, the success by which the teachers do this and the quality of teaching across the school is inconsistent.
- Some teachers do not make the most of opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills further. Consequently, a minority of pupils are reluctant to engage in discussions about their learning or share their understanding with others.
- The teaching of numeracy skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to consolidate pupils' understanding and the skills they have been taught in their mathematics lessons.
- For some pupils, weak literacy skills are a barrier to learning. This is the case across all year groups. Some subject leaders have started to address this by developing vocabulary lists or introducing spelling tests. Nevertheless, the absence of a co-ordinated approach across the school means that, in too many instances, pupils' literacy skills continue to be underdeveloped.
- Teachers' questioning is a strength in English, mathematics and science. In these subjects, teachers' questions carefully probe pupils' understanding, allowing the teacher to quickly assess how well pupils understand the main learning points. In some other subjects, questioning is superficial, closed and does little to extend, challenge, or assess pupils' understanding.
- Teachers' use of pupils' prior assessment information when planning their lessons is variable. Some teachers ask pupils, especially the most able, to complete tasks that do not match their ability. This leads to some pupils becoming bored or sitting inactive for extended periods of time while they wait for the teacher to issue more demanding activities. However, this is not always the case. Inspectors did observe teachers using pupils' prior assessment information astutely to ensure that pupils begin challenging learning activities from the start of the lesson.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities receive effective support in the specialist resource base. Teachers and teaching assistants in here have a thorough understanding of pupils' additional needs. They provide stimulating activities, are patient, and listen and communicate with pupils effectively. This puts pupils at ease and allows them to consider and reflect before offering responses to questions from staff.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive additional support in the 'Globe' resource base to help with their understanding and literacy development. Teachers here are determined to make their lessons accessible to all and some have committed to learning a new language, while others create resources using online translation tools. Consequently, pupils who speak English as an additional language access the full school curriculum. They are able to communicate well with staff and peers and play an active role in school life.
- Relationships between most teachers and pupils are positive. Staff know pupils' characters well. This helps to build a sense of belonging and collegiality. Staff are

caring and will often take time to sit beside a pupil to help them overcome a particular problem. Pupils told inspectors that they appreciate this support and encouragement from teachers and that this is one reason why, in their opinion, teaching is improving over time.

- Pupils take pride in their workbooks. They set out work neatly and follow the school's presentation guidelines carefully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- A well-established 'character development' programme underpins the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme in school. Pupils are provided with multiple opportunities to focus on nine specific character traits such as curiosity, empathy, resilience and integrity. As part of the programme, some pupils have met goodwill ambassadors from UNICEF as well as members of the royal family in recognition of their careers work.
- The pupils in the alternative education provision follow suitable courses and spend some time back in school. The provider ensures that all safeguarding policies are adhered to and regular contact is made with leaders, so they are informed about pupils' attendance, behaviour and/or progress.
- Inspection evidence demonstrates that instances of bullying are reducing. Pupils spoke positively about how quickly issues were 'nipped in the bud' by staff once they were alerted to any problems.
- Leaders have developed strong partnerships with a wide range of external agencies, such as the police and Barnardo's, to ensure that pupils who need support at school or at home receive the help they require. The headteacher is fervent in his desire to ensure that all pupils are safe and receive help and support when they need it. He proudly told inspectors that, in this regard, 'we fail no one'.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is strong. They are taught about right and wrong and pupils were able to articulate their reasoning in this regard to inspectors. However, through lack of opportunities over time, many pupils lack confidence to discuss, disagree or debate.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Rates of attendance are improving from very low starting points. This is partly because leaders have allocated additional resources and staffing into improving this aspect of the school's work. Nevertheless, pupils' attendance remains below average, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school also remains above average.
- A small minority of key stage 4 pupils account for a significant proportion of exclusions. Consequently, the number of pupils who are excluded permanently or for a fixed period

remains high. However, a consistent approach to behaviour management and higher expectations of pupils' behaviour are helping to reduce exclusions externally and internally to the isolation room. During the inspection, most pupils behaved in a sensible manner. They were happy to engage with inspectors and explained that the standards of pupils' behaviour were much improved recently.

- The vast majority of pupils are punctual to lessons and arrive ready to learn. The standards of uniform are high. Staff actively challenge any deviation from the uniform or behaviour policy as pupils move between lessons and during social times. There is a high level of staff supervision at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Staff use this time wisely to talk with pupils and help build effective working relationships.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Notwithstanding the weaker rates of pupils' progress in the past, inspection evidence demonstrates that leaders' actions are contributing to current pupils making stronger progress than previously. Leaders acknowledge that, while there is still much work to do, pupils in key stage 3 are making significant gains in their learning.
- At the time of the inspection, the 2018 published data was not yet available to the inspection team. However, the school's own analysis of outcomes highlighted that pupils' attainment had risen in all the main measures. For example, unvalidated data presented by the school shows that the percentage of pupils attaining a grade 4 or higher in English improved by 16 percentage points in 2018. Furthermore, in mathematics, the proportion of pupils attaining a grade 4 or higher improved by 11 percentage points. A considerable number of pupils attained well in English or mathematics but not the other. The proportion of pupils who attained a grade 4 or higher in both English and mathematics improved by 9 percentage points.
- The standards of pupils currently in the school are improving because of stronger teaching and higher expectations of most pupil groups. Inspection evidence highlighted that pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10 made strong progress during the last academic year. Disadvantaged pupils in these year groups attained higher than other pupils in their year group on average. Despite the lack of appropriate challenge for some of the most able pupils, their attainment is rising, and they make more progress than other pupil groups. Leaders agree that, while it is heartening to see improvements in attainment and progress, overall, standards remain some distance away from where they ought to be.
- Work scrutiny in history books revealed that pupils can identify significant events, such as the gunpowder plot, and give an appropriate, but not detailed, account for the reasons for the event and its outcomes. Pupils can reach substantiated conclusions using a range of different sources. In English, pupils' use of sophisticated vocabulary is improving over time. However, issues remain with pupils' spelling and indiscriminate use of capital letters.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who attend the specialist resource base make progress over time that is broadly in line with that of their peers. Improvements in pupils' social, emotional and physical development are more pronounced due to the effective support they receive from staff.
- The progress made by some pupils who speak English as an additional language has

improved recently. This is because they receive individual support in their first language to develop their English speaking and comprehension skills.

- The proportion of pupils who go on to further education, employment or training is improving. Information provided by the school suggests that fewer than 2% of pupils did not find a suitable placement in 2017.

School details

Unique reference number	133768
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	10048249

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	732
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Robert Turner
Principal	Gemma Simon
Headteacher	Andrew Rodgers
Telephone number	01642 326 262
Website	www.unityacademy.org.uk/
Email address	gmsimon@unitycityacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	2–3 November 2016

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium is significantly above the national average.
- Since the previous inspection, in 2016, the principal has taken on responsibility for another local secondary school. A head of school (headteacher) has been appointed from the senior leadership team. The principal spends approximately one day per week at Unity City Academy.
- The school is a member of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) multi-academy trust. Responsibility for the school rests with the board of trustees. The structure of the trust's governance and management can be found on the school's website.

- The school has a specialist resource base for approximately 30 pupils aged 11 to 16 who have moderate learning difficulties.
- Currently, the school uses part-time alternative education provision at Lingfield Countryside Centre, Coulby Newham.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a wide range of lessons across the school. Many of the observations in lessons were carried out with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders, teachers and trustees from the school and trust.
- An inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative from the alternative education provider used by the school.
- Inspectors held informal and formal discussions with pupils and observed tutor groups, an assembly and pupil interactions during social times.
- Inspectors listened to a group of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils read.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and scrutinised a wide range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation, analysis of performance information, action plans and evaluations, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding files, recruitment checks and pupils' work.
- Inspectors took into account the 13 responses from parents and carers who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Fifty-six members of staff and 11 pupils completed Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys. All of these responses were taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Lee Elliott, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dan Murray	Ofsted Inspector
Joan Hewitt	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Campbell	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.

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