

Inspection of Unity School

Cartwright House, Broad Street, Hanley ST1 4EU

Inspection dates: 8–10 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They say teachers understand them. Pupils feel safe and say that school helps them to make friends. However, expectations of pupils are not high enough. Most pupils do not complete their work.

Pupils do not do as well as they could. Pupils experience a jumbled set of lessons that do not cover learning in enough depth. In some lessons pupils are taught by staff who have limited subject knowledge. This hinders pupils' learning.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are poor. Pupils show little respect. They direct derogatory comments towards female staff. This poor behaviour occurs during lessons, unstructured times, and within the community. Pupils' negative behaviour often disrupts learning. Pupils say bullying does not happen. However, relationships are negative. Most pupils refer to interactions as 'banter'. Pupils say that teachers intervene if this 'goes too far', but inspectors witnessed staff turning a blind eye to this harmful behaviour.

Pupils' attendance is not good enough. This leads to gaps in pupils' learning that staff do not resolve. When pupils do attend, they are often late for lessons. This delay disrupts learning and other pupils who are trying to get on with their work.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Ownership of the school has changed since the last inspection. Several senior staff have left, including the previous proprietor and headteacher. The new proprietor is aspirational and wants the best for pupils. However, leaders have not secured improvements quickly enough. Expectations are too low. Pupils do not engage in learning or behave consistently well.

The curriculum does not meet pupils' needs, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Learning is not adapted effectively to ensure it is suitable for all pupils. Pupils do not receive the additional support they need.

The school offers five GCSEs, including English and mathematics. Pupils join the school at different points in the year with gaps in their learning. Teachers do not sufficiently take account of pupils' different starting points. Pupils find it difficult to access the content of lessons. Learning therefore does not build upon what pupils already know.

In subjects such as history and geography, teachers do not have sufficient subject knowledge to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers do not receive appropriate training to develop their subject knowledge or teaching practice. Staff say that there are limited training opportunities to help improve their practice.

Curriculum planning is poor and disconnected. For example, pupils have learned about Christianity and Buddhism, but they cannot recall this knowledge sufficiently.

This means that pupils are not able to build on what they already know and are not well prepared for their next stage of learning.

Teachers do not check pupils' learning consistently well. In English, teachers identify gaps in learning and use this to inform future lessons. However, in other subjects, teachers do not check pupils' knowledge and understanding well enough to identify those pupils who require additional support. Pupils often arrive as reluctant readers. In English lessons, they access new vocabulary and read a range of texts. This is not consistent across the wider curriculum. Pupils do not read widely and often.

Pupils do not receive effective personal, social and health education (PSHE). The plan of work to be covered that staff use is not sufficiently adapted to meet pupils' needs. Therefore, content is not sufficiently delivered. Pupils do not learn enough about respect and tolerance of people's different views and beliefs. Pupils are aspirational. However, the school does not provide adequate careers information and guidance. They are not supported well enough to make informed decisions about their future.

Pupils do not behave consistently well. Many pupils refuse to complete the work that is set and ignore teachers' instructions. Pupils do not engage consistently well and are easily distracted. Attitudes to learning are poor. This results in disruption and incomplete work. Staff do not consistently apply the behaviour policy.

Some pupils do not attend school regularly. A few pupils do not attend at all. The actions taken by leaders have not secured or sustained improvement quickly enough. Punctuality is poor. Pupils lack motivation to attend on time. They do not catch up on work they have missed, which leads to further gaps in learning.

The proprietor has not ensured that statutory guidance relating to relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) has been followed. The RSHE policy has not been shared with parents, and pupils have not been taught the necessary content of this curriculum.

The proprietor has ensured compliance with the Equality Act 2010, through a detailed accessibility plan. However, several independent school standards are not met. These include standards relating directly to pupils' welfare, health and safety. Safeguarding pupils has not been prioritised. The school is situated in shared premises. However, the proprietor has not completed all the necessary health and safety checks. For example, there are no records to confirm the safety of the water supply. The outdoor area is not suitable. There is no external lighting to ensure safe entry and exit from the building.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

School leaders have not made appropriate checks on pupils who attend alternative provision. Leaders have not completed risk assessments for these pupils. Pupils

often choose to leave the school site without permission. Staff cannot guarantee their safety. The proprietor has not ensured the premises comply with fire safety regulations. Safety checks on the premises have not been completed regularly enough to ensure that pupils are safe.

The designated safeguarding lead has completed relevant training. There are processes in place to report concerns. Several staff, however, refreshed their training recently and were unable to demonstrate embedded knowledge. The safeguarding policy is written with due regard to current guidance issued by the Secretary of State. It is published on the school's website but not implemented effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The culture of safeguarding is weak. Pupils' safety is not given a high priority when they are in school, accessing alternative provision, or in the community. The proprietor should urgently ensure that staff complete appropriate training and understand their roles and responsibilities. Leaders must routinely complete health and safety checks on the premises, and appropriate risk assessments to ensure pupils' safety.
- The curriculum is not fit for purpose. It is not adapted to meet pupils' needs, including those with SEND. Consequently, pupils are not doing as well as they could. Leaders should review the curriculum to make sure it builds on what pupils already know and can do, helps pupils to make links to prior learning, and meets pupils' varying and changing needs.
- Staff do not use assessment to plan pupils' next steps effectively. Pupils' mistakes and misconceptions are not identified nor corrected quickly enough. Leaders must make sure that staff assess pupils' work so that mistakes and misunderstandings can be rectified, and the information used to modify and adapt lessons and the curriculum.
- Leaders do not have an accurate view of the quality of the school's curriculum and how well staff implement it. Leaders have not addressed the poor quality of education quickly enough. The proprietor needs to make sure that teachers have the necessary knowledge, understanding and expertise to deliver the curriculum effectively. Leaders need to make sure the quality of the curriculum delivery is routinely monitored, evaluated and reviewed so that rapid and effective improvements can be put in place.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning and to others, including staff, are poor. Teachers' expectations of pupils are too low. Pupils frequently use derogatory, insulting and abusive language, particularly towards female staff. This negative behaviour is often unchallenged by staff. Leaders should ensure that all staff follow the school's behaviour policy and promote a positive climate for learning and respect in all lessons, during breaktimes and during off-site visits. All staff should make sure that pupils behave well and are respectful to each other, to staff and members of the community.

- Attendance is poor, with little sign of improvement. In addition, some pupils do not attend lessons on time. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding persist. Leaders should work with pupils, families and other agencies to make sure that pupils arrive on time and attend school regularly.
- The curriculum does not sufficiently prepare pupils for their next steps in education or employment and training. Careers information, advice and guidance are limited and do not ensure pupils are able to make informed decisions about their future. Leaders need to ensure there is a clear plan for careers education to make sure pupils are receiving the advice and support they need.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	137574
DfE registration number	861/6006
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10212796
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	13
Number of part-time pupils	4
Proprietor	Leo Guy
Chair	Tommy Macdonald-Milner
Headteacher	Leo Guy
Annual fees (day pupils)	£16,150
Telephone number	01782 409508
Website	www.unityschool.co.uk
Email address	schooloffice@unityschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–12 October 2017

Information about this school

- Unity School is an independent day school located in Stoke-on-Trent. It offers places to pupils aged 13 to 16 who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school was last inspected in October 2017, when it was judged good in all areas. Since then, the school has been acquired by Edison Young People. This has resulted in a change of proprietor and headteacher.
- The school is situated inside a theatre, where it has access to three classrooms. Pupils use a nearby leisure centre for physical education.
- The school makes use of three alternative providers, two of which are unregistered.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor, who is also the headteacher and the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to pupils about their work in other subjects.
- The lead inspector met with those responsible for safeguarding and reviewed processes for reporting concerns and record keeping. Inspectors spoke with staff about safeguarding procedures and talked to pupils about safety. The lead inspector visited and contacted a sample of alternative providers used by the school.
- Several key documents were reviewed, including the school's policies on the curriculum, complaints, behaviour, and safeguarding. A sample of risk assessments were scrutinised, and the school's single central record was checked.

Inspection team

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis, lead inspector Ofsted Inspector

Ant Edkins Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are–
 - 2(2)(d) personal, social, health and economic education which–
 - 2(2)(d)(i) reflects the school's aim and ethos; and
 - 2(2)(d)(ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act[9];
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that–
 - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner;
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential;
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress; and
 - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–
 - 2A(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2),
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,
 - 2A(1)(e) makes and keeps up to date a separate written statement of its policy with regard to the provision of education as required by each of paragraphs (a) and (b),
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e), and
 - 2A(1)(g) publishes a copy of the statement on a website and provides a copy of the statement free of charge to anyone who asks for one.
- 2A(2) Arrangements made by the proprietor for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(b) must ensure that where a pupil's parent requests that the pupil is wholly or partly excused from sex education provided as part of relationships and sex education, the pupil is so excused until the request is withdrawn, unless or to the extent that the head teacher considers that the pupil should not be so excused.

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils’ work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;
 - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly;
 - 3(i) does not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor–
 - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which–
 - 5(b)(ii) enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
 - 5(b)(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely;
 - 5(b)(iv) enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
 - 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
 - 5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005[12].
- 14 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that pupils are properly supervised through the appropriate deployment of school staff.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including–
 - 24(1)(a) accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils;
 - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility.
- 24(2) The accommodation provided under sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b) may be used for other purposes (apart from teaching) provided it is always readily available to be used for the purposes set out in sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b).
- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
- 27 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 27(b) external lighting is provided in order to ensure that people can safely enter and leave the school premises.
- 29(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable–
 - 29(1)(a) physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and
 - 29(1)(b) pupils to play outside.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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