

Inspection of Unity College

Townley Holmes, Burnley, Lancashire BB11 3DF

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Unity College is warm and welcoming. Most pupils enjoy the friendships that they forge in school. Pupils know that they have adults to talk to if they need support. This helps them to feel safe.

The school has raised its expectations of pupils' behaviour. Nonetheless, some staff do not apply the behaviour systems consistently well. Most pupils behave well, however a minority do not. As such, some pupils do not enjoy school due to the poor behaviour of their peers.

The school is ambitious for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). That said, in many subjects, the curriculum is not designed well. This hampers how well teachers can deliver the curriculum. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Many pupils appreciate the opportunities to expand their experiences beyond the curriculum. They enjoy a range of sporting opportunities such as rock climbing, football, cricket and cross country running. Pupils value taking part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. They relish the experiences of working with different people and competing with their peers.

Some pupils benefit from a range of trips which broaden their knowledge beyond the classroom. For instance, they enjoyed visiting Italy to learn about olive gardens and how spices are made. Other pupils appreciated the opportunity to practise their French and skiing skills in France.

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

The curriculum is suitably ambitious for most pupils, including those with SEND. Many pupils complete the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects, which sits at the heart of the curriculum. In the main, the school ensures that pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum.

In many subjects, the curriculum is at an early stage of development. The key knowledge that pupils need to learn is not identified. Consequently, teachers are not clear enough about the knowledge that needs to be taught. In some subjects the order in which topics are organised does not help pupils to build on their knowledge successfully over time.

Most teachers have strong subject knowledge. Nevertheless, some teachers do not have the guidance that they need to design effective learning activities. In some subjects, pupils are not supported well to connect their prior learning to new content. This affects how well they remember what has been taught. Some teachers do not check if pupils have understood earlier content carefully enough. This hinders how well pupils, including those with SEND, achieve.

Until recently, reading has not been prioritised. The work to identify and support pupils who struggle to read is in its infancy. The school has put systems into place to check pupils' reading knowledge gaps in Year 7 and Year 8. Specialist staff support some pupils to read with greater fluency and competency. However, this work is at the early stages of development. Many pupils, especially those in key stage 4, are not supported or encouraged to read. The school's strategy to promote reading is underdeveloped. As such, many pupils do not read widely or often.

The needs of pupils with SEND are identified swiftly and accurately. The school liaises with specialist agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are understood well by staff. That said, there is variation in how well staff are equipped to adapt their learning activities to support pupils with SEND. Some staff do not use effective strategies to help these pupils to access the same curriculum as their peers. This hinders the learning of some pupils with SEND.

The school has introduced new systems to improve pupils' conduct. Many pupils respect and appreciate the improvements made to the behaviour policy. However, on occasion, poor behaviour is not sufficiently addressed by some staff. As a result, some pupils continue to misbehave and disrupt the learning of their peers. The actions taken to remove the barriers that are preventing some pupils from attending school regularly are not effective. Too many pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, continue to have high rates of absences. This means that they miss out on vital learning. Many pupils do not achieve well as a result.

The school has recently introduced a new personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. Pupils have begun to benefit from this curriculum. They are increasingly confident about how to look after their physical and mental health. Nevertheless, some pupils do not understand the negative impact of discriminatory language. The school is in the process of reviewing the PSHE curriculum to improve how pupils learn about religious and cultural differences. This is securing some improvements in pupils' understanding about life in modern Britain.

Pupils benefit from a comprehensive careers programme. The school invites a range of colleges and organisations to inform pupils about different career pathways. Pupils are supported well to make informed choices about their next stage in education, employment and training.

In recent times, the governing body has developed a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have begun to challenge and support the school more effectively than they did previously. The school works closely with staff when introducing changes. This helps most staff to understand the rationale for the developments in policies and practices. Many staff are better able to manage their workload and contribute positively to pupils' learning. Nonetheless, the governing body and the school do not evaluate the intended impact of their improvement strategies as well as they should. This means that they are not aware if recent changes are having the desired effect. At times, this has delayed their actions to bring about further improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In many subjects the curriculum is underdeveloped. This means that teachers do not have the clarity of what content needs to be taught and when this learning should take place. As such, some pupils do not learn new content well. The school should ensure that the curriculum makes it clear what pupils should learn and when this will happen.
- In some subjects, teachers do not use assessment strategies well enough to identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge. Consequently, some pupils do not have the knowledge that they need to learn new content securely. The school should equip teachers to use effective assessment strategies to remedy any gaps in pupils' learning.
- Some staff do not use effective strategies to support the learning of pupils with SEND. This means that some pupils with SEND are not able to access some aspects of the curriculum. This hampers their achievement. The school should ensure that staff are trained to adapt the delivery of the curriculum to help pupils to access their learning better.
- Until recently, the school has not given reading enough priority. This means that the strategies designed to support pupils to read confidently and frequently are not implemented effectively across school. As such, many pupils, especially those in key stage 4, do not read often or widely. The school should promote reading and support pupils who struggle to read so that they can access the curriculum successfully.
- Many pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, do not attend school regularly enough. This means that they miss valuable learning, which in turn limits their achievement. The school should put the right support into place for pupils and their families to help reduce the rate of absences.
- Some staff do not apply the new systems to manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. As a result, some pupils do not behave well. This has a negative impact on the learning of other pupils. It also spoils their enjoyment of school. The school should ensure that staff use the systems to manage pupils' behaviour as intended so that pupils' learning is not disrupted.
- The governing body and the school do not evaluate the impact of their actions to secure improvement well enough. This means that they do not have the clarity that they need to ensure that their improvement strategies are making a difference. The school should monitor and review its improvement work carefully to ensure that it has the intended positive impact.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

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

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	135003
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10294351
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1436
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Anne Kelly
Headteacher	Jane Richardson
Website	www.unity-college.com
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 November 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The current headteacher was appointed in September 2022.
- The school uses four registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders. Inspectors met with a range of other staff and leaders during the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority and the alternative providers.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during social times and during movement around the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, English, art and design, modern foreign languages and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed samples of pupils' work and spoke with some pupils.
- Inspectors also met with leaders to review other areas of the curriculum.
- Inspectors spoke with the leaders responsible for personal development, pupil premium, behaviour and attendance, alternative provision, early careers teachers, careers, SEND and reading.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including leaders' self-evaluation, attendance and behaviour records.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

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