



Inspection report

Unity City Academy

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 133768
Area Middlesbrough
Inspection number 274434
Inspection dates 7 and 8 March 2005
Reporting inspector Ms J Joyner HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Age range of pupils	11 to 16 years	Academy address	Ormesby Road Middlesbrough Cleveland TS3 8RE
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll	1,125		
Appropriate authority	The Board of Trustees	Telephone number	01642 326262
		Fax number	01642 300663
		Chair of the Board of Trustees	Mr J McCarthy
		Acting Principal	Miss L Humphries

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 16 years	23 May 2005	274434

Description of the academy

Unity City Academy opened in September 2002. The sponsor of the academy is Amey, a large business support services company. The academy's specialism is information and communication technology (ICT). It was formed from two schools where the pupils' attainment was low. The academy operated across the sites of the previous schools for the first two years and began a staged move to its new building in July 2004, a year later than planned. The new premises are impressive and futuristic but not entirely fit for purpose, lacking a playground, relaxation areas for staff and sufficient space for the pupils to eat in comfort.

There are 1,125 pupils on roll. The pupils enter the academy with low standards of attainment, particularly in literacy and oracy. The community that the academy serves is characterised by high levels of poverty and social deprivation, and a history of low educational aspirations. Half the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well above average. A third of the pupils have special educational needs, which is also well above average. A higher-than-usual proportion of the pupils require Statements of Special Educational Need. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language.

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Overall effectiveness of the academy

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the academy requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

Unity City Academy has faced many problems since it opened. The challenge of uniting the pupils from two schools, the delay in moving to the new building and persistent difficulties in recruiting sufficient staff have resulted in managers spending considerable amounts of time and energy dealing with day-to-day issues. Problems over recruitment and retention continue to affect the academy. A third of the teachers are newly qualified or unqualified graduate trainees. The staff absence rate is high, with as many as a third of the teachers away on any given day. The lack of continuity of teaching has had a detrimental effect on the pupils' learning, attitudes and behaviour and standards. There has also been a lack of continuity in the external support for the academy, the leadership of the board of trustees and, more recently, the leadership of the academy. The principal who led the academy from its opening left at the end of October 2004. Three other senior managers left at the end of last term. The board of trustees, the acting principal and the interim chief executive are beginning to tackle some of the deep-seated problems as well as newly identified ones. Finance is a major difficulty, with the academy heading for a very substantial deficit by the end of the financial year. The board of trustees now has this situation under control. Leadership is unsatisfactory overall, despite the effectiveness of some individuals. Standards are too low and improvement is too slow. The progress that the pupils make in their learning is poor. Attendance continues to be very low and the high absence rate is an impediment to raising standards. Punctuality to school and to lessons is unsatisfactory. The rate of fixed-term exclusions is high. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory and they are given too few opportunities to take responsibility for their learning and environment. The quality of the teaching is poor overall, although there are individual examples of good, very good and excellent teaching. Many of the teachers and other staff are strongly committed to the pupils and they persevere despite, at times, overwhelming pressures.

Capacity to improve

The academy does not currently have the capacity to bring about the necessary improvement, despite the strong contribution of many individuals. The academy's ability to improve could potentially be strengthened by an arrangement such as the proposed federation. The board of trustees are addressing the leadership and finance issues with some success. Morale among staff and pupils is low. The interim chief executive and the acting principal are providing temporary leadership until a new principal can be appointed. Many managers, although promising, hold their posts in an acting capacity or are very new in post, and they require training and support. There is too little good teaching to bring about the necessary improvements in standards. Many new and inexperienced staff have the potential to become good teachers, given sufficient advice and support. The high proportion of such staff, coupled with the high staff absence rate, places additional pressure

on already overstretched managers. Systems and structures are either overly complex, not implemented consistently or too recent to have brought about significant improvement.

What the academy should do to improve further

The academy's development plan recognises the areas where improvement is needed. The key priorities are to:

- secure the permanent leadership of the academy and improve the overall quality of leadership and management at all levels;
- raise standards of attainment and increase the rate of progress that the pupils make in their learning;
- improve the quality of the teaching;
- improve the behaviour and attitudes of the pupils, also addressing their attendance and punctuality;
- continue to improve the finances of the academy.

Achievement and standards

The academy's data indicates that the pupils' attainment on entry is well below average overall. However, the pupils make insufficient progress as they move through the academy. Their results in the end-of-Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE/GNVQ examinations in the first two years, 2003 and 2004, were very low compared with the national figures. Standards have shown no overall improvement when compared with those of the predecessor schools; the pupils' attainment is too low.

The results in the most recent end-of-Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE/GNVQ examinations in 2004 were below the academy's targets and well below those of schools where the pupils' prior attainment was similar. Too few pupils make the expected or accelerated progress in either Key Stage 3 or 4. There is too much underachievement.

In around a quarter of the lessons, mostly in upper ability groups or practical subjects, standards were around those expected for pupils of a similar age nationally. The work of the most able pupils was broadly in line with age-related expectations but, in general, standards of work in lessons and in the pupils' books and folders were below or well below average. Written work is too often poorly presented, unfinished and marred by basic errors of spelling and punctuation. Standards of literacy are low, too few pupils read for pleasure and many pupils also have weak speaking and listening skills.

The academy is aware that standards remain too low and suitably ambitious targets have been set for 2005. Some appropriate short-term strategies have been introduced to boost the pupils' attainment. The academy is beginning to make better use of assessment data to

track the pupils' progress, but targeted support and individual mentoring are underdeveloped.

Personal development

Despite the best efforts of the academy to refine and clarify its procedures for managing the pupils' behaviour, it remains, along with the pupils' attitudes to learning, unsatisfactory overall. The behaviour of the majority of pupils in lessons was sound. They were courteous to each other and the teachers, adhered to the sensible classroom rules and routines, and responded well to effective teaching. Nevertheless, in too many lessons a significant minority impeded the progress of others through persistently disruptive behaviour. These pupils commonly called out answers, moved around the classroom without permission and used inappropriate language.

The pupils' attitudes to their learning were unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3 and poor in Key Stage 4. Where the quality of teaching was at least good, the pupils responded with interest and concentrated on their work. They contributed to discussions with enthusiasm and listened well to the ideas of others. Where the teaching was less effective, it was common for the pupils to sit passively and make little if any voluntary contribution to lessons.

The pupils' rate of attendance is very low and is an impediment to raising standards. It was 88 per cent in 2003-04 and has fallen to 85 per cent so far this school year. Unauthorised absence is high at five per cent. The academy endeavours to follow up all absences on the first day. It works with the education welfare service to target those pupils where attendance is particularly low. After some improvement earlier in the year, the pupils' punctuality to school and to lessons has deteriorated. The rate of fixed-term exclusions is too high, at 195 exclusions involving 147 pupils in the first five months of this school year. One pupil has been permanently excluded.

The academy is beginning to involve the pupils more in its day-to-day running; for example, a small number of gifted and talented pupils are planning a newspaper. The academy expects to use this as a means to communicate more effectively with the pupils and to plan for a pupils' council. However, they are given too few opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and the academy's environment. Some aspects of the environment are contributing to the negative attitudes of the pupils, for example the lack of a playground.

The overall provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is unsatisfactory. The academy is correctly considering the introduction of tutors and tutor groups to enhance this aspect of the pupils' development and to increase their sense of belonging. Weekly assemblies for half-year groups make a positive contribution to the pupils' spiritual development. The assembly on the first day of the inspection was good; it was based on an interesting theme and included a prayer that was shown appropriate respect by the pupils, who behaved well throughout. Whole-school assemblies, held once a term, are used to celebrate the pupils' achievements. Limited opportunities are provided for the pupils to play football and a small number participate in rugby. A choir, an art and a

science club are run out-of-hours. The academy recognises that its provision of extracurricular activities is inadequate to broaden the pupils' development.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was poor overall, as too high a proportion was less than satisfactory and too small a proportion was good or better. The teaching was satisfactory or better in 63 per cent of the lessons, including 21 per cent where it was good or better. One lesson was excellent and two were very good. The unsatisfactory lessons included three that were poor. Unsatisfactory lessons were seen in most subjects and were taught by experienced as well as new teachers. The teaching was better in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. There were notable strengths in the teaching; for example, lessons were planned conscientiously, some teaching was lively and enthusiastic, and the imaginative use of ICT involved and interested the pupils. However, in too many lessons, including some that were satisfactory in other respects, the expectations of the pupils were far too low. In such lessons the work set was much too easy, and the pupils' behaviour was not always managed adequately.

The use of assessment to promote the pupils' learning is at a very early stage. In the best cases, the pupils receive constructive feedback that helps them to understand where they have made mistakes or provides guidance on how to improve. At the other extreme, the marking is cursory or infrequent. Some classes are set very little homework and therefore the pupils are not developing good study habits.

An increasing amount of data is being gathered about the pupils' performance but its use in the day-to-day work of the academy is inconsistent and unsatisfactory overall. The pupils in Years 9 and 11 have been set generally appropriate targets as goals for their end-of-key-stage tests and examinations, based on their previous results, but many could not remember what they were. The results of practice tests and examinations have been analysed and groups of pupils at particular levels of performance have now been identified for support and monitoring. However, the delay in providing the pupils with the results of their practice examinations is not helpful. Assessment information has not been used sufficiently to inform planning for improvement.

While some useful first steps have been taken to tackle the weaknesses in the teaching, and to spread the good practice that does exist, the challenging circumstances faced by the academy have hindered its efforts to improve teaching and learning.

The progress that the pupils made in their learning was satisfactory or better in 60 per cent of the lessons, including 18 per cent where it was good. In one lesson the pupils made very good progress. When they were well taught and adequately managed, many of the pupils were eager to take part in lessons. They showed enthusiasm for learning, had good work habits, and responded positively to new learning challenges. Overall, however, too few of the pupils worked hard enough and in too many lessons they could not remember what they had learnt in the previous lesson. Longstanding staffing difficulties have resulted in many classes being taught by a succession of temporary teachers and in these classes many

of the pupils have lost confidence. In such classes the pupils' behaviour can deteriorate to the extent that the lesson cannot proceed without the presence of senior staff.

The pupils who have special educational needs, including those who have a Statement of Special Educational Need, made satisfactory or better progress in the lessons where they received additional support and when they were taught in small groups. In the other lessons, the support was inadequate and their progress was unsatisfactory. Similarly, the pupils who received targeted literacy support made reasonable progress, but weaknesses in the teaching of literacy in the other lessons were widespread and not enough has been done to help the pupils improve their basic skills.

The curriculum has a number of distinctive features. It is separated into three phases; in the foundation and extension phases, the pupils are taught the subjects of the National Curriculum, and may choose from a small range of options from Year 9 onwards. In the expansion phase, the pupils select from a limited range of academic, vocational and occupational courses. ICT, the academy's specialism, underpins much of the teaching. The academy is well resourced with modern technology and teachers make regular and mostly effective use of the new technology in lessons. ICT was well used in many lessons to guide and review the pupils' learning. It is exploited imaginatively in several subject areas, including art, media studies and business studies, to enhance and extend the pupils' learning, but its use across the curriculum is underdeveloped. The curriculum that is offered is undermined by weaknesses in its delivery.

In keeping with the intention that academies should share facilities with other schools and the local community, the academy's sports hall facilities are used by the community on a regular basis. The use of other specialist facilities is underdeveloped. Although there are developing links with the local community, including feeder schools, there is little collaboration or liaison with other nearby schools.

Leadership and management

The leadership of the academy is fragile. Following the departure of the principal half way through the last term, the vice-principal became acting principal and an experienced headteacher from a successful school was seconded for four days a week from November as interim chief executive. Three other senior managers left in December 2004. The capacity of the senior leadership team has been enhanced for the last year by an additional vice-principal, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Many of the senior and middle managers are inexperienced and working in an acting capacity or newly appointed. The large proportion of inexperienced teachers and the high staff absence rate place considerable additional burdens on managers. The interim chief executive and the acting principal have restructured the senior management team and are attempting to improve organisational structures. The existing over-elaborate management structure contributes to a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities and complicates communication. Systems and policies are not always implemented consistently. However, senior leaders have accurately identified the academy's main weaknesses and the barriers to more rapid improvement and some individuals are beginning to work effectively to address

some of the shortcomings. They have also ensured that short-term action plans have been produced that rightly focus on raising achievement. Strategic planning has improved in recent months and is now sufficiently detailed to guide improvement in the short term. A simple but effective way of seeing which actions are falling behind schedule has been adopted. Plans now have suitably measurable targets; however, most only cover the period to Easter 2005.

Systems for quality assurance have been unsatisfactory; however, managers have recently begun to monitor and evaluate the quality of the work of the staff for whom they are responsible in order to raise standards. Some of their judgements are over-generous. The academy recognises that further training is necessary in this respect.

There has been a lack of continuity in the leadership of the board of trustees; the present chair, the third since the academy opened, was appointed in September 2004. Under his energetic leadership, trustees are recognising the issues that need to be dealt with and are making rapid progress with the finance and leadership issues. Despite the hard work and commitment of individual trustees, roles and responsibilities have been unclear and communication not always successful.

The academy's financial situation is serious. It has been spending more than its income and the projected deficit is well over a million pounds. The extent of the financial problems only became apparent last term. The academy is also overstaffed. With external support and a new finance manager, the academy now has an accurate picture of its current position and a temporary budget. The financial situation is adversely affecting the ability of the academy to improve the quality of the teaching and learning, as it is not possible to target additional resources at priorities.

The weaknesses in provision, low standards and the fact that the pupils make insufficient progress as they move through the academy mean that overall, leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The academy opened in September 2002.

The academy was visited in October 2004 by four HMI in accordance with a protocol agreed by Ofsted and the DfES.

In March 2005, five HMI inspected the academy for two days, while a sixth HMI registered the academy as an independent school. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Fifty seven part-lessons and one assembly were inspected. Observations were also carried out in the independent learning centre, the support base, the restaurant and the internal exclusion facility. The pupils' conduct was observed around the academy and at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the acting principal, the interim chief executive, the chair of the board of trustees, the principal of the institution with which a federation is proposed, the senior leadership team, most middle managers, a group of new and inexperienced staff and informally with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the academy's documentation and a selection of pupils' work were scrutinised.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the academy has made since it opened.

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