

Unity City Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133768
Local Authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	328758
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Tom Grieveson HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	834
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Halladay
Principal	Miss Pat Towey
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2007
School address	Ormesby Road Middlesbrough Cleveland TS3 8RE
Telephone number	01642 326262
Fax number	01642 300663

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Inspection number	328758

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Unity is an average sized academy located in East Middlesbrough, serving a population where wide scale social deprivation is evident. Free school meal entitlement is very high being three times the national average. Few students are from minority ethnic communities or speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also very high being more than twice that seen nationally. A large reduction in the number of secondary-aged students in the local area has resulted in a declining student roll and this is projected to fall further at the beginning of the new academic year in September 2009. The academy buildings have undergone significant change since opening in 2002. While these changes have improved accommodation overall major problems remain not least with the inadequate ventilation system. A new principal, formerly the Director of Education at the academy, took up her post in February 2009. Sponsorship of the academy will change from the start of the new academic year. The new sponsor is East Middlesbrough Learning Trust (EMLT). The academy has gained a number of nationally accredited awards including the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Inclusion Award, Heartstart, Sportsmark and Streetmark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Unity City Academy provides its students with a satisfactory and improving education. Much has been accomplished to develop the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum since the previous inspection. Consequently, standards are now higher and an increasing proportion of students are making satisfactory progress in their learning. The large majority of parents who submitted the inspection questionnaire are very supportive of the academy and its work.

Despite these gains, the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes remains well below average although most students make satisfactory progress given their starting points when they entered the academy. However, the number of students achieving five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics remains too low regardless of recent improvements.

The principal and senior leaders demonstrate a satisfactory and secure understanding of the academy's performance and where improvement is required. Carefully targeted actions are focused on where improvement is needed the most and this has resulted in a sustained momentum to improve teaching and learning and ensure the curriculum successfully meets the needs of all learners. Teaching and learning are satisfactory although there is more good or better teaching than at the time of the previous inspection. The principal and senior staff have worked hard to develop teachers' skills. They have been successful in a number of important respects including an increase in the number of subject specialist teachers. Nonetheless, insufficient use of assessment information by too many teachers when planning lessons results in activities which do not meet students needs well enough and is a limiting factor in the progress which students make. In addition, the marking of students' work is often inaccurate; it is mostly celebratory and lacking the detail necessary to guide students about how to improve.

The curriculum has been remodelled to better meet the needs of all students and to more accurately cater for their needs and interests. A re-evaluation of literacy provision has resulted in changes which are more precisely targeted at tackling the significant legacy of underachievement. The addition of the East Middlesbrough Enterprise Centre (EMEC) on the academy site offers far greater vocational opportunities for students and has contributed strongly to their improved overall attainment. Provision for those students most at risk of exclusion through the 'springboard' programme is good.

Most students demonstrate satisfactory behaviour and this continues to improve. Most respond positively to the academy's expectations and increasing attendance rates reflect a growing enjoyment of what it offers. Nonetheless, despite the best efforts of the staff, and a marked improvement in attendance compared with the time of the previous inspection, attendance remains well below average. Students say they feel safe and well supported by the academy's good pastoral support and are confident in the level of care exhibited by staff. Monitoring of students' progress is frequent and routine providing detailed evidence of their performance and is used well to target additional help where underachievement is identified.

The academy provides satisfactory value for money and has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise attainment at both key stages and particularly in English.
- Maintain the momentum to improve attendance and punctuality further.

- Ensure that assessment information is used by teachers when planning lessons so that activities match the needs of all learners, in all lessons, all of the time.
- Ensure that the marking of students' work informs them about how well they have done and is clear about what is required to improve.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When students enter the academy, their attainment has been consistently well below average in English, mathematics and science. Their literacy skills are particularly weak. Although improving, results in GCSE examinations at Key Stage 4 remain significantly below average. In 2008, 49% of students attained five or more good passes at GCSE, an increase of 4% compared with 2007 and in line with the national improvement rate. When English and mathematics are included however, only 18% of students attained this level. Despite this figure rising more quickly than seen nationally, it remains well below average. Nonetheless, given their starting points and capabilities most students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress in their learning and particularly at Key Stage 4.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most understand and respect the academy's behaviour policy and this is reflected in their improved conduct and attitudes towards each other and the staff. Students say that incidents of bullying occur less often and are dealt with effectively.

Overall, attendance continues to be well below average but has shown a marked improvement since the previous inspection. Staff continually strive to support students and their families and the strategies used are well intentioned and effective. The academy has also been prepared to support legal sanctions against those families who are most reluctant to ensure regular attendance for their children.

For most students, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, shown in their actions and relationships with their peers. The academy council plays an important and active role and students are proud of their contribution in bringing about improvement and representing the views of other students. They consider their ideas are valued and acted upon. Students are developing an awareness of how to lead a healthy lifestyle with increasing numbers making sensible choices at lunch and break times.

Students have a good understanding of their responsibilities to the academy and the wider community. This is exemplified through regular charity fundraising, by exercising leadership skills through participation in peer mentoring and assisting local primary school pupils in the 'Sports Olympics' programme. During the inspection they were observed ably assisting Year 6 pupils' induction week.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The academy's senior and middle leaders have done much to develop the quality of teaching and learning. The proportion of good or better teaching has increased since the previous inspection although too much remains satisfactory. The academy has developed a significant range of strategies to support teachers to improve including coaching, mentoring and carefully targeted professional development.

Some of these initiatives have resulted in demonstrable gains in the practice of most teachers and in students' learning. Most notably, the use of clear learning objectives to set the context for the lesson provides a secure basis from which learning can proceed. Better questioning techniques by most teachers offer greater challenge to students and are helping to keep them engaged for extended periods. Opportunities to review learning more routinely during lessons are supporting students to reflect on what they have learned and the progress they have made. Furthermore, the good use of subject knowledge by the higher proportion of specialist teachers is helping to motivate and engage students more often in lessons.

Despite these gains, too many teachers do not make enough use of assessment information when planning lessons. The quality of assessment evidence has become increasingly detailed. It offers teachers insightful details of students' performance to support their lesson planning. During the inspection however, it was evident that this information was not being used consistently to ensure that lesson activities matched the full range of learning needs in each class. In several instances, the same task was offered to all students irrespective of their ability, providing insufficient challenge for those of higher ability and causing frustration for the less able, particularly when the task placed too many demands on their weak literacy skills. This was a limiting factor in the progress which these students made.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality and range of curricular provision are good. The curriculum at both key stages continues to improve as senior leaders focus on providing opportunities to meet the needs of all students as closely as possible. An amended curriculum for Year 7 students is planned for September 2009, with a stronger focus on improving standards of literacy by establishing a 'learning skills-based' approach. The development of the Applied Enterprise Centre has increased vocational provision to meet the different abilities and interests of students. This extended curriculum is helping to raise attainment and lift aspirations and has been significant in raising the proportion of students now attaining five or more good GCSE grades. However, while the changes made to the curriculum have increased students' enjoyment of what the academy offers and is reflected in improved attendance rates, the full impact of these changes in raising standards in English is yet to be seen.

The academy's additional provision for those students in danger of exclusion is well considered and is proving successful in maintaining low levels of permanent exclusions and ensuring that these students experience success by leaving the academy with accredited qualifications. The personal, social and health education programme makes an important contribution to students' ability to manage risk in their own lives and take more responsibility for making suitable choices

about their behaviour and lifestyle. The curriculum is enriched and enhanced by a wide range of after-school activities, both sporting and cultural, which are well supported.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for students is satisfactory with some good features. Child protection procedures and arrangements for safeguarding students are in place and regularly monitored. Risk assessment procedures, including those for out of school visits, are thorough and well managed. The academy works effectively with a range of external agencies offering carefully targeted help to those students and families who are most in need. Well established links with primary schools ensures a smooth and successful transition for Year 7 students while older students receive effective guidance about subject choices and career opportunities.

The academy collates detailed performance information about students' progress in relation to their targets. Where underachievement is identified it provides the basis for effective intervention work to tackle weaknesses in students' learning and helps them progress. However, this information is not routinely used by teachers when planning lessons and is a limiting factor in the progress made by some groups of students. On the evidence seen, teachers' marking although positive and celebratory, is frequently inaccurate giving students little clear guidance on how they can improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The principal has successfully established a secure focus on improving the quality of provision as the basis for raising standards further and securing improved student achievement. Collectively, the academy's senior leadership demonstrates an accurate understanding of where this provision needs to improve; development plan priorities and challenging targets reflect this and the academy's strategy for improvement is well promoted through the role of the 'Directors of Learning.' This work is successfully aligned to the academy's performance management structure and is linked directly to training for individual staff. These factors have contributed strongly to the improvement made since the last inspection and the higher standards being attained.

Good governance has maintained a strong and secure focus on raising standards and governors have been prepared to take important strategic decisions to promote improvement and secure a viable future for the academy. They receive timely reports based upon evaluations of key indicators of performance which provide them with the level of detail required to make well informed decisions. The significant fall in the student roll has necessitated a reduction in staffing. This process has been well managed by governors and the principal. It has been accomplished at a time when the governing body has also been required to reduce the size of the academy's budget deficit to a sustainable level.

Senior leaders have evaluated how well they promote community cohesion and what further actions they can take and has resulted in satisfactory provision. There is a clear analysis of the contextual issues faced by both the academy and the local community and this has been used well to adapt the curriculum to meet local need and to ensure all are treated fairly, equally and given similar life opportunities.

The building continues to present significant difficulties due to its design. During the inspection for example, it was noted that classrooms on the highest floor in particular had inadequate ventilation and became excessively warm during lessons. This greatly affected students' capacity to concentrate and sustain commitment to their studies.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

2 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Unity City Academy, Middlesbrough, TS3 8RE

Thank you for your support when we inspected Unity recently, particularly to those students who met with us and shared their views of the academy and what it offers. The report is now complete and I would like to share our findings with you.

We have concluded that Unity is now offering a satisfactory and improving education to the students. Standards are rising and although they remain well below average, most students are making satisfactory progress from their starting points on entering the academy. Miss Towe and the staff have worked hard to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning and there is much to celebrate. The curriculum is good and the acquisition of the EMEC centre is now offering a broad range of vocational courses which we know are popular and are helping more students to gain qualifications. We consider that most teaching is satisfactory but there is now more good or outstanding teaching than when inspectors last visited the academy. This is ensuring that your needs are increasingly met more successfully and is helping more of you make progress in line with your abilities. We can see that behaviour has improved and that more of you are enjoying your lessons. While we recognise that much more is needed to help all students to behave well and to attend more regularly, matters have improved. You told us that staff take good care of you and we agree.

Although the academy is improving we have identified four areas where further developments are necessary. We have asked the staff and governors to concentrate in particular on making the following changes.

- To raise standards further in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and to concentrate on English in particular because this will help you all to learn more effectively across all subjects.
- To maintain the efforts which are being made to improve the attendance and punctuality of all students.
- To make sure that all teachers make the best use possible of the assessment information which they have so that in all lessons your needs are met all of the time so that you can all make the progress of which you are capable.
- To make sure that when your work is marked you are always told how well you have done but also how you can improve further.

The inspection team are sure that through the work of your academy council representatives you can think of ways to support the staff and governors to address these matters.

Please accept our best wishes for the future in all that you do.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson HMI

Her Majesty's Inspector