

Unity City Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133768
Local authority	Not Applicable
Inspection number	381557
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2012
Lead inspector	Michael Maddison HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	691
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Adam Gaunt
Headteacher	Pat Towey
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector

The inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 30 lessons and 29 teachers. One inspector undertook a number of short visits to lessons to look at the provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs. Discussions were held with groups of students, senior staff, middle leaders, classroom teachers, four members of the governing body, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Academies Enterprise Trust. Inspectors observed the academy's work. They looked at safeguarding arrangements and a variety of documents provided by the academy, including policies, data analyses and the academy's self-evaluation. They also looked at students' books. They analysed 93 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, as well as the questionnaires completed by a sample of students from each year group and by staff.

Information about the school

Unity City Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Following a period in which the student roll declined, the number of students making the academy their first choice secondary school has started to rise. There are more girls than boys. Most students are of White British heritage. There is a small, but increasing, number of students from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds particularly of East European heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportion of students at School Action and the proportion at School Action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are both well above average. Most of these students have moderate learning difficulties or behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. The number of students who start or leave the academy at different times of the school year is particularly high. As of January 2012 the academy has a new sponsor, the Academies Enterprise Trust. This follows a 14 month period in which the academy had no sponsor. The academy does not meet the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to achievement, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Students’ achievement is inadequate because their attainment, particularly in English and mathematics, is well below national averages and they have not made fast enough progress in these subjects since the last inspection.
- Results in examinations have not risen as fast in English and mathematics as they have in other subjects. In 2011, more students than ever left the academy with the equivalent of five subjects at the higher grades. This improvement has much to do with the evolving curriculum which meets students’ needs and interests well.
- Many students arrive at the academy with weak literacy and numeracy skills and this hinders their progress. Much is being done to improve their skills. However, the measures have not yet had a substantial impact on improving literacy and numeracy for all students across the curriculum.
- Although some teaching observed was good and outstanding, too much was satisfactory. As a result, teaching is not yet consistently strong enough to ensure all students make good enough progress.
- Senior leaders have focused on improving behaviour to great effect. They are successfully creating a calm and orderly environment. Students say that behaviour is much better and they feel safe at the academy.
- Although the role of middle leaders is not yet fully developed, the Principal and the senior staff are extremely well focused and are clear about the academy’s strengths and weaknesses. The governing body supports senior leaders well.

- Much has been achieved since the last inspection but work to improve teaching and learning has yet to have a full impact across all areas of the curriculum to ensure sustained improvement in both attainment and achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' attainment and accelerate their progress, especially in English and mathematics, and ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better throughout the academy, by:
 - ensuring students' literacy and numeracy skills are developed more systematically and more consistently across all subjects
 - ensuring that all staff have the highest expectations of what all students can achieve, especially the most able
 - extending the use of dialogue and probing questions in lessons to give students more opportunities to actively participate, develop their ideas fully, deepen their thinking and drive learning forward
 - enabling students to understand precisely what the subject-specific actions for improvement are, and how to achieve them, so that all students are supported to take greater responsibility for managing and developing their own learning.
- Develop the role of middle leaders by ensuring that all their monitoring activities:
 - are undertaken with greater consistency
 - are evaluated more effectively
 - lead to prompt action to improve the quality of teaching and learning and, as a result, drive up attainment and achievement.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment on entry is below average and for some year groups it was well below average. Many students have poor literacy and numeracy skills, especially in relation to speaking and listening and mental mathematics. Such weaknesses slow their progress across all subjects. Although strategies have been introduced to improve basic skills across the curriculum, these are not yet embedded systematically or consistently enough to have a sustained impact on students' learning. Students attain well in some of the vocational courses. However, overall attainment is low, not least because, when results in English and mathematics are considered, the proportion of students gaining five higher grades including these subjects is well below the national average.

The quality of students' learning and progress is variable. It is improving but too much of it is satisfactory. Inspectors observed lessons where good progress was made. In these lessons, students were willingly engaged with their learning because they had been motivated and the activities provided offered challenge and interest for every student. In the lessons where least progress was made, teaching and/or activities failed to engage the students sufficiently and on occasions where this was observed, students' behaviour also started to falter. As a result, progress is not rapid enough, especially for older students, to counteract the effects of poor achievement and slow progress in previous years. In these weaker lessons expectations of what all students can achieve, and especially the most able,

are not high enough. Through the questionnaires most parents and carers noted that their children were making good progress at the academy. Inspectors judge that some students are making good progress and that achievement is improving. However, overall too many students are not yet making sufficient progress.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs make the same progress as their peers. Some make good and outstanding progress. This is because of the good level of support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants and because of the highly effective programme of interventions. The academy is successfully closing the gap between boys' and girls' performance at GCSE. The academy's latest monitoring of performance suggests that students currently in Year 11 are on track to achieve their targets by the end of this academic year. However, there is still too much unevenness in the performance of all students across the curriculum; this is closely aligned to the quality of teaching.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers believe that their children are taught well at the academy. Inspectors observed teaching that was good and outstanding. However, overall it is satisfactory because it is not yet strong enough to ensure that students make consistently good progress. In addition, expectations of what all students can do and achieve are not always high enough and in too many lessons the level of challenge was only satisfactory. Much work has been undertaken to improve teaching since the last inspection. A culture of learning is developing in which students are increasingly motivated to work hard and which is having a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Some particularly effective learning was observed when teachers' expectations were clear and when effective questioning prompted students to think and reflect on what they were learning. However, this is not consistent practice. When students were expected to be passive learners and were not given a variety of activities, which included sufficient opportunities to work independently, their interest soon waned with a corresponding decline in their behaviour.

Teachers generally possess good subject knowledge. However, it is not always used to best effect to enthuse or challenge students to make good or better progress. Teachers take too few opportunities to listen to students, observe or question them at length so that students can develop their own ideas fully, develop their thinking and drive their own learning forward. Consequently, activities are not always adapted enough to challenge all students of all abilities. Curriculum planning is helping to ensure that students' needs and interests are being met well. However, the promotion of students' literacy and numeracy skills is not yet consistently effective across all subjects.

The quality of marking and written feedback is variable. There are examples of effective marking so students have a good understanding of how well they are doing and how they can improve. Students told inspectors that when they receive feedback of this quality they feel well supported and make good use of subject-specific comments to refine their learning. However, this practice is not consistent across the academy. In too many cases, guidance is of limited value, providing general comments that do not enable students to manage and develop their own learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Work to improve students' behaviour and safety has seen positive outcomes. For example, the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced markedly, though it is still high. Overall, students have engaged positively with the academy's behaviour management procedures which make clear expectations of students' behaviour. However, the procedures are not yet being consistently applied in all classrooms across the academy. Students feel safe at the academy, a view which was echoed by the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, and students. Older students act as prefects and as peer mentors to assist in the smooth running of the academy and to support younger and potentially vulnerable students. These opportunities help to develop students' self-confidence and self-esteem and are much valued by the older students who expressed pride in this work and in the academy itself. Younger students commented positively on the supportive role of student peer mentors and of the assistance older students have given them in resolving issues.

Students report that there is some bullying but that it is dealt with promptly. About three in ten parents and carers expressed concerns, through questionnaires, about students' inappropriate behaviour in lessons. Students also reported that there is some disruption in lessons due to bad behaviour. Inspectors judged that on most occasions inappropriate behaviour is linked directly to the small number of teaching and learning activities which fail to engage the students fully. Senior leaders are well focused on ensuring good behaviour. In turn, parents and carers may be reassured that incidents of misbehaviour are declining and behaviour both in and out of lessons is improving. Students' attendance and punctuality have improved considerably as a result of the academy's determined actions to support students who have difficulty in maintaining regular attendance or in arriving promptly each day. Attendance is now just below the national average and has shown considerable improvement since the last inspection. Effective partnerships with a range of outside agencies ensure that strategies to support vulnerable students, including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, are a strong aspect of the academy's work.

Leadership and management

The Principal has a clear vision and focused agenda for the direction of the academy. With the governing body and other senior leaders, she gives clear strategic direction on the academy's key priorities. Self-evaluation is largely accurate; it highlights strengths and weaknesses and identifies the key priorities for the academy's improvement. Leadership at all levels is being increasingly challenged and held to account. However, work of middle leaders is not as effective as it could be because there is too much variety of practice across the academy. Middle leaders are actively engaged in monitoring activities. However, these are not yet undertaken with sufficient consistency, nor are they evaluated thoroughly enough to lead to action which will directly and swiftly improve the quality of teaching and learning and, in turn, improve attainment and achievement. The work of the leadership team has had a noticeable impact upon the academy. Learning and progress in classrooms, behaviour, the quality of teaching, and results in examinations are all improving. Professional development, which has combined whole-academy training and bespoke coaching designed to meet the needs of each individual teacher, has been an important part of this improvement process. In these ways the leadership team has shown that it has the capacity to improve further.

The curriculum is good and it has continued to evolve so that it more successfully meets students' differing needs and interests. The academy provides students with good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, with sensitive guidance, for example, on how to respond to the various emotions and needs of others. The governing body meets regularly and is very supportive of the academy. It has a secure understanding of the issues facing the academy and it provides effective challenge to senior leaders. Although continuing low levels of functional literacy mean that all learners do not achieve as well as they can, equality of opportunity is promoted well and discrimination tackled competently. Students from different backgrounds are supported and encouraged equally. Safeguarding practices meet statutory requirements and complement the high quality care, guidance and support which are provided in the academy. Every care is taken to ensure that students are safe and that the arrangements for safeguarding are robust and scrupulously maintained.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of ACADEMY	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



27 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Unity City Academy, Middlesbrough TS3 8RE

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome. We greatly appreciated the time you spent talking to us and we found your comments very helpful. As well as coming into lessons and looking at your work, we read the questionnaires completed by you and your parents or carers.

We found that examination results for your academy are too low, especially in English and mathematics, and that you have not been making enough progress over time. This is because teaching is not yet strong enough to enable all of you to catch up and reach the levels and grades of which you are capable. Your progress in the lessons we observed is improving but you could do much better in your work. As a result, we have given your academy a notice to improve. This means that the academy's progress will be closely monitored. Inspectors will return in a few months time to check what progress has been made and the academy will be reinspected in about one year.

There are, however, a number of things that your academy does well. There is a calm and orderly atmosphere and you told us that you feel safe. Your behaviour is improving and so is your attendance.

We have asked the principal, the governors and your teachers to continue the work they are doing to help you achieve as well as you can and gain better examination results. We have also asked them to focus on a number of priorities, which include making sure that:

- you have good reading, writing, speaking and listening skills
- you are given work in your lessons which each of you finds challenging
- you are given more opportunities in lessons to work independently
- your teachers use questions and discussions to check and deepen your understanding and allow you enough time to develop and explain your ideas
- your teachers consistently give you detailed feedback so that you always know how to improve in each subject.

We have also asked the academy to ensure that all middle leaders develop their roles so that they make a stronger contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning and, as a result, drive up your attainment and achievement.

The principal and senior leaders are determined to improve the academy and your teachers are working hard on your behalf. However, you all have your part to play by coming to the academy regularly and working to the best of your ability.

We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector

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