

Unity College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135003
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	381774
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Linda Tetik HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	975
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Clements
Headteacher	Sally-Jane Cryer
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2009
School address	Towneley Holmes Burnley BB11 3DF
Telephone number	01282 683010
Fax number	01282 683012
Email address	enquiries@unity-college.com

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time visiting 40 lessons, undertaking a learning walk in Year 7 lessons and observing 43 teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of students, and the chair and two members of the governing body. Documentation was scrutinised including: detailed analysis of students' attainment and progress and the tracking of academic and personal progress of students; the college's action plans and self-evaluation; college adviser reports; minutes from meetings of the governing body; and evidence of how the college supports students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Inspectors also examined evaluations undertaken by the college to ensure that it meets statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding. In addition, 155 parent and carer, 155 student and 80 staff questionnaires were scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The attainment and progress of all groups of students, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The effectiveness with which learning activities are well-matched to the needs of all learners and how well students are challenged.
- The effectiveness of the leaders and managers in areas for improvement and in raising standards.

Information about the school

Unity College is an average-sized secondary school that gained Foundation Status when designated as part of the National Challenge Trust in Burnley in September 2009. Over 25% of students are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is low and very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportions of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportions of students with statements are above average and increasing. The college moved to a new building in September 2010 and has been re-designated as a college specialising in English and the Arts.

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: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Unity College is a satisfactory and improving school. Since the last inspection, college leaders and managers, under the effective leadership of the headteacher, have managed a successful move to a new building and established a harmonious college community. A major strength of the college is the outstanding care, guidance and support from committed staff who know individual students well. As a result of this, there have been improvements in many aspects of students' personal well-being. For example, some students have the confidence and skills to play musical instruments and sing for the school every Friday lunchtime in the main dining area. This is enjoyed by staff and students. Students also place high levels of trust in their peers when working on the climbing wall.

In 2011, the college achieved a strong improvement in the percentage of students achieving 5 GCSE A* to C grades and 5 A* to G grades. Standards are broadly average but there is still some variation in levels of attainment across subjects. There is a shared culture of high aspirations and all staff share a clear understanding of the need to further accelerate the percentage of students gaining 5 GCSE passes at A* to C including English and mathematics. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and improving, resulting in most students making at least satisfactory progress. Learning objectives linked to National Curriculum levels are clear in lessons and motivate students to achieve higher levels. Progress is slower in lessons for some students when planning does not take account of individual students' starting points and learning activities are not well-matched to their needs and abilities. Students, parents and carers are very positive about the teaching staff. One parent exemplifies this when commenting, 'They go the extra mile in every aspect.'

The curriculum is good and there is a broad range of options for older students with some having opportunities to study at AS level. Attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now above average. Most students feel safe, enjoy college and behave well. Transition arrangements are very good. Year 6 students from partner primary schools spend two days a week in the college from June helping them to settle in quickly. The 'Treasure Island' room supports younger students very effectively, helping them to adjust to being part of the large college community and giving older students opportunities to take on responsibility as peer mentors and buddies.

The governing body has changed significantly since the last inspection as a result of adopting Foundation Status. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the college

well. The college has a detailed action plan to raise standards further, based on the good use of effective self-evaluation systems. The senior leadership team is aware that there needs to be a renewed focus in lesson observations on learning and on increasing the rigour with which data are used to identify any underperformance to further accelerate the progress of all students. There are not enough opportunities for staff to share their expertise. The improvements in attainment, attendance, behaviour, students' personal development and the very positive relationships in the college indicate that there is a good capacity to improve.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment at Key Stage 4 so that the percentage of students achieving five GCSE passes at A* to C, including English and mathematics, increases rapidly to be at least in line with the national average.
- Accelerate the rate of all students' progress by:
 - sharing best practice within the school so that inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning are addressed
 - maximising opportunities for students to engage in active learning approaches and to reflect on their learning
 - ensuring consistency in the use of data to plan interesting activities, well-matched to students' different starting points
 - developing a systematic approach to developing literacy and oracy skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring leaders and managers have a clear focus on learning in lesson observations
 - increasing the rigour of the analysis and use of student performance data by leaders and managers to identify gaps in performance for groups of students and to target interventions.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When students join the college in Year 7 their attainment is below average. The current quality of work in students' books and most students' progress in lessons observed during the inspection were satisfactory. The percentages of students attaining GCSE grades at A* to C in English and mathematics are improving but are still below average. Progress is satisfactory overall and at Key Stage 3 students are beginning to make more rapid progress. Progress slows in lessons for some students when planning does not take full account of their starting points; some students' learning is not stretched enough and others do not engage as actively as they could. In the best lessons students are fully engaged in their learning and show high levels of enjoyment. This is particularly the case in practical lessons. For example, in a drama lesson students identified their own success criteria which they used to evaluate their drama performances. A structured framework for feedback enabled

them to extend their responses. The teacher provided clear models of the skills and language needed. The attainment of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving and overall they make similar progress to that of their peers. The college is putting in place strategies to address the lower attainment of boys and this is beginning to have an impact. The percentage of boys attaining five GCSE A* to C grades increased in 2011 and college tracking indicates that this will be sustained in 2012.

Positive relationships are enabling learning to take place. Most students have good attitudes to their learning and enjoy college, but they are not always given opportunities to discuss what helps them learn and what they enjoy doing, or to take on more responsibility for their own learning. Exclusions and persistent absenteeism have been reduced and this is linked to the excellent care, guidance and support that students receive. Students take advantage of a broad range of extra-curricular sporting opportunities and students' involvement in the college productions is strong. The college's specialism in the arts is adding enjoyment to students' learning experience and supporting the good development of students' confidence and skills. It also contributes strongly to raising standards. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory and they have a good awareness of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, improving steadily and having a positive impact on raising standards. The majority of teaching observed was good and some was outstanding. However, in a very small number of lessons students did not make sufficient progress. When students are provided with learning opportunities that are personalised to their individual starting points, and given opportunities to reflect on their learning, they respond enthusiastically and make good progress. For example, in a mathematics lesson for a small group of students with special educational needs, a teacher and support staff worked together effectively to meet

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

students' individual needs. The teacher generated enthusiasm and individual support staff provided excellent individualised support. The pace of the lesson was good ensuring that all students were fully on task. Learning was well-staged and regular checks on progress motivated each student to improve on their previous performance. Good examples of teachers using challenging questions to engage students and develop their understanding of topics were observed in science. Assessment and peer assessment were used well in physical education to improve students' achievement. These strategies are not used consistently used in all lessons to enable more students to make faster progress.

The curriculum is good and is responsive to students' needs. Cross-curricular learning activities in the Year 7 curriculum are effective in improving students' literacy and scientific skills and in increasing students' enjoyment of their learning. The college is aware that it needs to build on this effective work and further develop literacy and oracy skills across the curriculum in all year groups. The quality of the care, guidance and support provided for students is outstanding. Students report that they feel 'known' by staff, who are concerned about their welfare. The student support team goes to exceptional trouble to meet the needs of students, particularly the young people whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. This excellent care also has a significant impact on students feeling safe and on their personal development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leaders have led the college effectively and many outcomes for students are now generally good: standards are still broadly average but improving at both Key Stages, behaviour is good, attendance is above average and the college community is harmonious with a shared culture of high aspirations. The college is a highly-inclusive learning community; it promotes equal opportunities well and all are encouraged to make the most of the opportunities and facilities available.

The college has ambitious plans to raise attainment further and the governing body is establishing closer links with subject areas to have a deeper understanding of the college. There is a wealth of data being collated in a new accessible online format so that all staff can use it to inform lesson planning and to target interventions to drive up standards further. Leaders currently monitor progress effectively to target interventions for individual students. The performance of groups of students is improving and in 2011 achievement gaps narrowed but the college recognises that additional rigour in the use of data is required to accelerate this improvement.

The college has successfully improved engagement with parents and carers through the Parents' Council and it gathers views through regular surveys. The college's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. It is a very cohesive community but

there are less well-established links at national and international level. This limits the opportunities that students have to develop their awareness of diverse cultures. All safeguarding requirements and duties are met. The college has established effective partnerships which enrich provision in the curriculum and strengthen the care and guidance offered.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The large majority of parents and carers is very supportive of the college and some wrote additional positive comments about the headteacher's leadership. Most are happy with their child's experience at the college, feel that their child is safe, that teaching is good and that their child is well-prepared for the future. A very small minority expressed concerns about behaviour and about communication. Students told inspectors that there are a few students who misbehave but this is managed by college staff well. Inspectors observed good behaviour around the school. A very small number of parents and carers commented that their child's progress reports are not frequent enough and that their concerns are not addressed quickly. Inspectors discussed this with college leaders and they have plans to develop further links with parents and carers and are not complacent about current arrangements.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Unity College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 155 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 975 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	78	50	73	47	3	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	75	48	79	51	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	74	48	67	43	9	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	62	40	82	53	6	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	62	40	85	55	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	53	34	87	56	11	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	30	98	63	5	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well-prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	65	42	81	52	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	61	39	84	54	3	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	79	51	67	43	4	3	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	28	90	58	5	3	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	71	46	79	51	3	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	86	55	65	42	1	1	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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 school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and is 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.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add up exactly to 100. Sixth-form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



7 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Unity College, Burnley, BB11 3DF

Thank you for the very friendly welcome the inspection team received when we inspected your college recently. We would particularly like to thank those of you who spoke to us and to the students who sang on the balcony during Friday lunchtime. The inspectors enjoyed your performances and were impressed by your confidence. We were also impressed by your good behaviour and how well you work together, particularly on the climbing wall.

Our inspection found that yours is a satisfactory and improving college. Your GCSE results are improving but pass rates in GCSE subjects, particularly English and mathematics, need to improve further and more rapidly. You told us that you like your teachers and they are always willing to give their time up for you. The inspectors recognise the commitment and excellent care provided by staff. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. In the good lessons we observed, you made good progress because you were fully engaged in your learning, you were challenged, resources were utilised well and learning activities were well-matched to your needs and abilities. This did not happen consistently enough in all lessons. Your curriculum is good and is contributing effectively to the improvement in your results, but opportunities for you to develop your speaking and literacy skills across your subjects are sometimes missed after Year 7.

The leaders in your college worked with us to decide on some ways in which your provision could be better. We decided that to achieve this, the college should:

- help you make better progress so that you improve your results in GCSE examinations, particularly in English and mathematics
- improve the quality of teaching across all subjects so that your individual needs are met well and you achieve your best
- involve you more in discussions about your own learning, enabling you to take on more responsibility for it.

You are very aware of the importance of attending regularly. The few of you who arrive late for school in the morning can help yourselves and the college to improve further by arriving on time.

The inspection team and I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Linda Tetik
Her Majesty's Inspector

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