

# Unity College

Towneley Holmes, Burnley, Lancashire, BB11 3DF

**Inspection dates** 3–4 June 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Standards reached by students are rising and the progress they make is good in both English and mathematics.
- Teaching is good. Students benefit from their teachers' good subject knowledge which develops their interest in learning.
- Attitudes to learning are good. Students are proud of being part of the college community. They dress smartly and come prepared to learn. They work well together and can regularly be found helping each other to learn. Students say they feel very safe in the school.
- The headteacher is driving the ambition and vision for the college to become outstanding. This vision is supported by all members of the college community. Teaching over time is now more effective and standards are rising.
- Governors are committed to making an impact. They have undertaken appropriate training to provide support and challenge to the college leadership. They are aware of the quality of teaching and the progress students are making. They challenge the college to secure further improvements.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement of students is not yet high. This is because teachers do not always use the information available to them to provide work that is challenging enough for students and secure outstanding progress.
- Students' work is marked regularly although they are not always given the time to act on teachers' comments or the guidance they are given.
- While the college has a literacy policy, it is not always applied consistently to help students develop their communication skills.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 part lessons involving 36 teachers, six of which were jointly observed with senior and middle leaders. Two personal development sessions were also observed.
- Meetings were held with a group of eight governors. They included foundation, parent and community governors. A telephone conversation was undertaken with a member of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with various leaders within the college and groups of students formally and informally.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documents including the college self-evaluation, the college improvement plan, data on students' current progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, records of the quality of teaching and student behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the responses of 37 parents to the online questionnaire (Parent view) and an analysis of 167 returns from parents in a survey carried out by the college.

## Inspection team

Pankaj Gulab, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional Inspector
Sophie Gillies	Additional Inspector
Tudor Griffiths	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is an average-sized secondary school.
- There are slightly fewer girls than boys.
- The proportion of students known to be supported through the pupil premium is above the national average. (The pupil premium is additional funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The percentage of students who speak English as an additional language is below the national average, as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is close to the national average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision at Coal Clough High School.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment.
- The college starts its academic year from the beginning of June. It arranges for Year 6 pupils to spend two days each week in the college for the second part of the summer term.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement of all students through improving the quality of teaching so more is outstanding by:
  - ensuring teachers make full use of the information they have on students to provide work that challenges every individual to do their best and make to good or better progress
  - making sure students are given the opportunity to respond to teachers' marking and comments so as to further their learning
  - providing more opportunities for students to develop their spoken and written communication skills, including ensuring all students present their written work to a high standard.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring the college's literacy policy is applied consistently.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students generally enter the college with standards of attainment below average. In 2013, by the end of Year 11, students attained standards that were below average. Students currently in Year 11 have already achieved success in some of their examinations; they are on track to perform much better than last year's cohort and are likely to attain broadly average standards. School data, students' workbooks and inspection evidence suggest that students are achieving well, particularly in English and mathematics. This picture of rapid improvement is evident also in the lower year groups.
- The standards being reached by students supported through the pupil premium funding are rising year-on-year as a result of better teaching. The gap between these students and their peers is reducing. Last year, students eligible for free school meals were close to a GCSE grade below their peers in both English and mathematics; this was similar to the national gap. This year, the college's policy of entering some students early for examinations in English and in mathematics has significantly reduced the gap in attainment.
- The most able students perform as well as their peers nationally. They have opportunities to undertake up to three languages and separate sciences. They are given challenging targets and this has led to many of them exceeding the progress expected of them.
- The college's experience of early entry over the years is that it develops students' confidence and encourages them to strive for higher grades in the following June examinations. This has not limited the progress of the most able students. As a result, the college has continued to use early entry for English and mathematics. Evidence from the early entry results for this year shows that students are securing higher grades. They are making their expected levels of progress and a greater number are making more than expected progress.
- A decreasing number of students now use alternative provision. A handful of students now attend and benefit from the experience. For most of them, it leads to further opportunities of employment, education or training.
- Additional funding to support students who arrive with poor literacy skills is used well and provides extra support for the individuals concerned, resulting in students' improved reading skills. A clearer focus on intervening with students who struggle in mathematics is developing wider mathematical skills for all.
- Boys have performed less well than girls in 2013 but the college's focus on addressing this issue is leading to the gap almost halving for the current cohort of Year 11 students. This attention to closing the gaps between different groups is evidence of the college's good promotion of equal opportunities and effective tackling of discrimination.
- The college closely monitors and targets the support for disabled students and those with special educational needs and this is resulting in them making much better progress than last year.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- Improvements in students' achievement are a direct result of better teaching over time. This involves not only teachers but also teaching assistants and mentors, all of whom work with students to overcome barriers to learning that might prevent progress.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength; this contributes to the effective engagement of students and leads to good progress. Expectations of students are high. During a textile activity, high-quality exemplars were shared with students. Students were inspired and adopted different technical skills in improving their presentation skills.
- Questioning is skilful and helps to drive forward students' learning. During a languages activity, students were expected to use the correct pronunciation to convey an opinion about sports – all as part of an answer to a single question, resulting in students understanding what makes a higher-grade answer.

- Occasionally, assessment information is not used to challenge students to do their best. For some students the challenge is too great, leading to frustration, and at other times, too easy, leading to boredom and slower progress. Some students show their disinterest by being quiet and not engaging fully in what is expected of them.
- Students' work is marked regularly and the advice provided is of a good quality. However, students are not always given the chance to respond to the marking; as a consequence, mistakes are often repeated and an opportunity to progress further is missed.
- The focus on developing literacy is missing from some activities and is not applied across the school consistently. Students are not always given the opportunity to develop their speaking and writing skills across all subjects.
- Teaching assistants are used well. They are careful not to do the work for students but help them to work things out for themselves.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students' behaviour is good. Rarely is there any disruption to their own and others' learning. Their attitudes to learning are positive, being enhanced significantly when expectations are made clear. They work well in groups and are willing to support each other. Students contribute to discussion and feel comfortable enough to make mistakes and learn from them.
- Students' behaviour outside the classroom is sensible and their social skills are well developed. They are courteous and polite to visitors and engage well with adults to convey their opinions. They conduct themselves in an orderly manner in the open atrium and canteen spaces. They leave little litter when they have had their food and treat their environment with respect. Students are proud of their college, dress smartly and come well prepared for learning.
- On a small number of occasions, where work is not pitched at the correct level, students make less of an effort to learn. A small proportion of students do not show pride in the presentation of their written work. Movement between lessons is sometimes more casual than it needs to be but is quickly remedied by staff.
- The college's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. This starts from the transfer arrangements from primary school. Students in all year groups say they feel very safe. They say bullying is rare and that they have every confidence, should any bullying occur, that the adults in the college would deal with it effectively.
- Students are aware of how to stay safe on the internet and when using new technologies. They are made aware of safety issues related to relationships, travel and personal health. A 'treasure island' resource room is equipped and staffed to support vulnerable students and is accessible before school, at breaks and at lunchtimes.
- The college's support services for students have been enhanced by the employment of mentors and a social worker, who liaise with parents through visiting them at home if necessary. This service ensures that the relationship with students and their families is positive. Parents who responded to the online questionnaire confirmed they felt the college keeps their children safe.
- Attendance has improved compared to the same time last year and is now close to the national average. Persistent absence levels have been significantly reduced. A behaviour consequence system is well understood by students and leads to detailed recording and analysis. High expectations have led to fewer incidents of poor behaviour and records show reductions in fixed-term exclusions.
- Students' respect for others and their environment is as a result of the very effective promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which is evident through the inspirational displays around the college.

**The leadership and management are good**

- The headteacher's energy, drive and ambition deliver a clear vision of improvement and community which is shared by governors, staff, parents and students. Staff and governors subscribe to the vision of moving towards outstanding. Effective steps have been taken to improve achievement and the quality of teaching.
- There is a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching. Six college senior and middle leaders who joined inspectors in lesson observations accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of teacher actions on students' learning. This reflects the broad spectrum of leaders who know what needs to be done to promote effective learning. Middle leaders have developed the skills to drive forward the improvement in teaching.
- The college self-review document is accurate. Actions identified for further improvement are built into an online development plan which links clearly to outcomes expected. The plan is reviewed regularly at team and line management meetings and progress towards outcomes evaluated, resulting in timely adjustments being made where needed.
- Robust and effective performance management is accompanied by supportive pathways for individual teachers who may struggle to reach the standards required. The process is open and understood by staff. A number of staff who have been on support programmes were observed to do well in securing students' progress. The performance of teachers is linked clearly to salary progression and promotion.
- Targets for improvement are challenging and involve students in deciding on the outcomes they want to aim for at the end of Key Stage 4. This involvement by students is leading to the ownership of targets and a greater determination by students to achieve them. The college maintains detailed analysis of the progress towards targets for individuals and groups. After each assessment point, arrangements put in place to support anyone who is falling behind have been successful.
- Senior leaders have been accurate in predicting outcomes for the majority of subjects and this suggests that leaders know their students well. Predictions for the current cohort of Year 11 students suggest that there will be a significant improvement in standards across a range of subjects. Improvement in the early entry in mathematics and English confirms this confidence, with more students securing A\*–C grades than in previous years. Rates of progress have also improved significantly.
- The curriculum has been adjusted to meet the needs of students and secure better progress. For example, the current Year 11 students are the first to experience the three-year Key Stage 4 programme and evidence indicates much improved progress.
- The curriculum offers a good range of subjects and is responsive to the needs of individuals. Year 7 students have additional time to support the development of their numeracy and literacy skills. Changes have been made to ensure students have more academic opportunities at Key Stage 4. As a result, a higher proportion of students are on track to secure the English Baccalaureate qualification this academic year. The college's strong advice, guidance and information arrangements result in very few students not going onto further education, employment or training.
- The local authority's involvement with the college is welcomed as part of the support for the leadership team and governors. The college is considered an asset by the local authority and used to deliver training to the wider education community on various topics, including target setting, transition and curriculum design.
- All parents who responded to the online questionnaire say they would recommend the college to others.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are well organised and meet all requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are committed to developing their own practice and have drawn up their own development plan. They have undertaken training in evaluating data, safeguarding and how to monitor, support and challenge the senior leadership team. Governors, among them several parents and community members, share the aspirations of the college to be outstanding. They

keep a good watching brief through their committee structures on the detail of the quality of teaching, progress of students and the whole development of individuals. They request information from the college about specific plans being implemented to evaluate impact, for example, the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up expenditure. They know where the improvements have been made and where there is still more to be done.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135003
<b>Local authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	426199

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	919
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Anne Kelly
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sally-Jane Cryer
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 November 2011
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