

City United Academy

Suite 7, Cuckoo Wharf, 435 Lichfield Way, Aston, Birmingham B7 6SS

Inspection dates

28 January 2016

Overall outcome

Independent school standards met

Context of the inspection

- An announced material change inspection visit was made to the school in May 2015 to advise the Department for Education, the registration authority for independent schools, on the school's request to change the age range to 11–16 years, increase the number on roll to 35 pupils, and change its designation to be a special school special school taking pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs as a result of communication and interaction needs (CI). The visit found that a number of the independent school standards were not met.
- The school submitted an action plan to address these shortcomings, which was evaluated by Ofsted in July 2015 and found to require improvement. The school then submitted a revised action plan, which was evaluated and found to require improvement in October 2015.
- This unannounced monitoring inspection visit was made at the request of the Department for Education to check the school's progress in meeting its action plan proposals.

Main findings

Part 1: Curriculum

- The material change inspection visit in May 2015 found that the school had yet to develop its curriculum provision fully, particularly for Key Stage 3 pupils and in science at Key Stage 4. It did not provide for all the required areas of learning; the curriculum policy, schemes and plans were under development but not complete.
- The curriculum policy and overviews for Key Stages 3 and 4 submitted with the original action plan included coverage of the required areas of learning and described how these would be supplemented by other activities to meet the specific needs of the pupils. Detailed schemes of work for physics, chemistry and biology indicated that a broad range of topics were planned and set out expected learning outcomes and opportunities for assessment. However, the documentation sent by the school did not show how this content would be delivered to meet the needs of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs as a result of communication and interaction needs.
- The school's revised action plan included proposals to ensure that teaching plans were relevant to pupils' needs and that suitable provision was made to check pupils' learning and their progress. These proposals were judged likely to meet the independent school standards but the evaluation identified shortcomings in the arrangements for monitoring their implementation. In particular, the role of the newly appointed educational consultant was not made clear.
- This progress monitoring inspection visit found that the school has put in place schemes and plans for Key Stage 3 and science at Key Stage 4. The provision is supported by placements at a number of alternative providers. It was not possible to see the implementation of the science curriculum as the subject was not timetabled on the day of this visit.
- Pupils' timetables seen indicate that all the required areas of learning are likely to be covered through a combination of what the school provides and the bespoke alternative provision it commissions for each pupil. Observations during this visit demonstrate that staff promote a caring and supportive environment that helps to engage them in learning and to work alongside others.
- Evidence provided by the school during this inspection visit indicates that the school's

educational consultant has worked with the Principal to develop staff skills and to establish a systematic programme of monitoring and evaluation. Although still at an early stage of development, this is developing the role of middle managers and others in supporting the Principal. It is also helping the Principal to shape her role in monitoring the delivery of the school's curriculum to ensure continuing compliance with the independent school standards.

- The standards relating to the curriculum have been met within a reasonable timescale.

Part 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- The material change inspection visit found that, while the school had all the information it needed about its pupils to complete an admission register, this was not presented in the required format. The format of the admission register submitted with the original action plan proposals was suitable but was in the name of another school. The copy of the admission register submitted with the documentation for the second action plan evaluation was compliant with requirements. The latest version of the admission register was scrutinised during this inspection visit. The requirements for the admission register are now met; the school has made appropriate progress in implementing its action plan proposals within a reasonable timescale.
- The material change inspection visit found that, while the school conducted regular risk assessments and acted promptly to address any shortcomings, there was no guiding policy to support this process. The risk management policy submitted for evaluation with the original action plan was not written specifically for this school; it contained references to requirements set out by a distant local authority. While the accompanying general risk assessment document was more closely tailored to this school, it suggested that the school may have pupils aged 18+ on roll. The school's response was judged to require improvement.
- In its revised action plan, the school proposed that it would put in place a new risk assessment policy that would refer to the conduct of the comprehensive risk assessments undertaken. In addition, it would fully support the whole process of risk assessment to promptly address any significant shortcomings or hazards. The proposals indicated that detailed guidance would be provided in the new policy, so as to inform and guide all staff and leaders about risk assessment and risk management.
- This progress monitoring inspection visit found that the school has devised and implemented a suitable policy to support its risk assessment practice. It has recently contracted with a specialist provider to undertake all the school's health and safety checks, including those on fire safety, electrical appliances and other equipment. The package includes regular training for staff in health and safety procedures, including for directing fire evacuations. Evidence provided during this inspection visit indicates that the school's educational consultant is supporting the Principal and staff with effective training and support in monitoring the school's work. The standards relating to risk assessments have been met within a reasonable timescale.
- In accordance with reporting requirements, the school's safeguarding policy was checked during this monitoring inspection visit. The policy, which is published in full on the school's website, reflects the latest statutory guidance provided in *Keeping children safe in education (July 2015)*. School leaders are aware of the mandatory reporting requirements that came into force on 31 October 2015.

Part 6: Provision of information

- The material change inspection visit found that the school was in the process of developing its website. This was not active on the day of that inspection visit. The printed information provided for parents and others provided a lot of information about the school and its provision. However, not all the required information about the proprietor or the availability of all the required policies was provided.
- The evaluation of the original action plan found that, while the school website was operational, the proposals and the timescale for their implementation required improvement. This was because not all the required information was made available to parents and others. The evaluation also highlighted omissions in the policies available that were contrary to the requirements of section 10 of the Equalities Act 2010.
- The school's revised action plan included proposals for reviewing its website; ensuring that it

provided details of all the policies and other information required by the independent school standards; ensuring that parents and others had all the required information regarding the proprietor and the availability of all the required policies on its website; and ensuring that the school's safeguarding policy met all requirements and was published on its website. The proposals to meet the independent school standards were evaluated in October 2015 and judged likely to meet requirements. The timescale was also satisfactory. However, the evaluation of the school's proposals identified shortcomings in the procedures for monitoring the implementation of the action plan because the roles of senior leaders and the school's educational consultant were unclear.

- On the day of this progress monitoring inspection visit, the school's website was accessible but subject to significant technical problems. These were brought to the attention of the Principal, who took immediate action to suspend public access to the website and have these matters resolved by the website contractor.
- The Principal provided this inspector with a paper-based version of the website which demonstrated that the latest versions of all the required policies and procedures had been specified and confirmed as available. Scrutiny of the school's website later in the inspection period found that the technical issues had been overcome.
- The required information about the school's leaders, together with full copies of the school's curriculum policy and safeguarding procedures, are now available on the website. All of the other policies required are either provided in full or their availability from the school office signposted. In addition, the school has addressed the shortcomings in its policies identified during the first action plan evaluation. Accordingly, the requirements of section 10 of the Equality Act 2010 are now met.
- The requirements for these standards have been met within a reasonable timescale.

Part 8: Leadership and management

- At the time of the material change inspection visit in May 2015, a number of regulations were not likely to be met, as detailed above. In accordance with inspection guidance, the standards relating to leadership and management were judged as not met.
- When evaluated in July 2015, the school's original action plan required improvement. The evaluation of the original action plan found that the proposals and stated timescale were not likely to remedy all the shortfalls against the standards. A number of aspects of documents in the action plan appeared to be written for other schools and not this one. The proposed actions were, therefore, not satisfactory and the timescales were not appropriate.
- The revised action plan, evaluated in October 2015, proposed to review and check all the requirements and national guidance relating to the standards to ensure that the planned actions would successfully remedy the failures. This action plan also required improvement, typically due to the incomplete information provided about the role of senior leaders and the school's educational consultant in monitoring the implementation of the plan's proposals. In addition, the timescales proposed were sometimes too short to achieve the detailed and often long-term actions proposed.
- This progress monitoring inspection visit found that the roles of senior leaders in implementing and monitoring action plan proposals have been addressed, at least in part, by the work being undertaken by the school's consultant. The school has made sufficient progress in implementing its action plan proposals so that the standards identified as failing in Parts 1, 4 and 6 at the time of the material change visit in May 2015 are now met. Accordingly, the standards in Part 8 are now met.
- The Department for Education is recommended to approve the school's application to change the age range to 11–16 years, increase the number on roll to 35 pupils, and change its designation to be a special school special school taking pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs as a result of communication and interaction needs (CI).

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements.

Inspection team

Michael Best, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Information about this school

- CUL Academy opened in January 2012 in canalside premises at Cuckoo Wharf, Aston, Birmingham. The school provided for students who were disaffected and had a history of disrupted schooling; nearly all had emotional and social difficulties. The school had a service-level contract with Birmingham local authority.
- When CUL Academy was inspected by Ofsted in December 2012, it was judged to provide a good quality of education for its students. All but two of the independent school standards were met at that time. The school did not maintain an admission register in the required format and had not followed safer recruitment requirements regarding obtaining written references prior to engaging a new member of staff.
- On 1 September 2014, CUL Academy became a new free school. The existing students and nearly all the staff moved from the Cuckoo Wharf premises to newly refurbished premises nearby.
- At the request of the local authority, the proprietor, City United Limited, was asked to keep the independent school open, initially in order to take 15 students who required placements. A new headteacher and staff were appointed and the school continued to operate from 1 September 2014. The proprietor has latterly changed the school's name to City United Academy to distinguish it from CUL Academy free school.
- City United Academy is currently registered for up to 25 boys and girls, aged between 13 and 16. At the time of this inspection visit, there were 18 students on roll, 17 boys and one girl, in Key Stages 3 and 4. All are registered to receive their full-time education from City United Academy, although the school uses a number of alternative providers. These are:
 - Lighthouse (physical education)
 - The Prince's Trust (apprenticeships)
 - CUL Academy free school (science)
 - Birmingham Metropolitan College (construction)
 - Right Trax (motor vehicle maintenance)
 - Envirohort (horticulture)
 - Flexible Learning Centre (business administration).
- All pupils now placed at the school have social, emotional and mental health needs as well as additional underlying learning needs, in particular communication and interaction difficulties. All students come from the City of Birmingham and are from a range of ethnic backgrounds, although the majority are White British. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan; two are looked after by the local authority.
- Nearly all students have significant gaps in their education. All have been excluded from mainstream education and most have been excluded from one or more pupil referral units or alternative providers prior to joining City United Academy.
- The school's motto is 'engage, inspire, develop, support'. It aims to 'provide a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum that shows progress and continuity so that each child meets their full potential'.

School details

Unique reference number	137819
Inspection number	10010402
DfE registration number	330/6010

This inspection was conducted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

Type of school	Special school for pupils with social, emotional and health difficulties
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	City United Limited
Chair	Janet Plummer
Headteacher	Asha Henry
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£15,800
Telephone number	0121 328 0547
Fax number	N/A
Email address	asha.henry@culacademy.co.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our website for news, information and updates at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/user>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016

