

Unity Primary Academy

Hickory Avenue, Greenstead, Colchester, Essex CO4 3QJ

Inspection dates

12–13 July 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a good and improving school as a result of the executive headteacher's outstanding leadership. Her commitment and tenacity have profoundly altered the fortunes of two previously failing schools.
- The executive headteacher is very well supported by both senior leaders and subject leaders. The positive impact of individual leaders' work is clear.
- The governing body is effective in both supporting the school and holding leaders to account. Governors know the school well and have an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
- The sponsoring trust supports the school very well. The wide range of courses and other professional development opportunities it offers have had a clear impact on improving the quality of teaching.
- The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Relationships between pupils and staff are notably strong. Pupils know that they can talk to staff if they are worried about anything, and they know they will be listened to.
- The quality of teaching has improved enormously since the academy opened. As a result of effective and decisive leadership, it is now good throughout the school.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly since the academy opened. Lessons are rarely disturbed by low-level disruption. Pupils' more challenging behaviour is managed well by staff.
- The early years provision gets children's school careers off to a good start. Staff ensure that children are provided with a wide range of suitable activities. Children make good progress in the early years.
- Improvements in outcomes for pupils are lagging behind the improvements in the quality of teaching. Too few pupils make rapid progress for their attainment to reach the national average from their low starting points.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop reasoning in mathematics, nor to use and apply the skills that they are taught.
- Teachers' expectations of how pupils should present their work are not consistently high. Some pupils' handwriting is poorly formed and numbers are incorrectly orientated.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils who make rapid progress, so that attainment rises to at least the national average, by:
 - developing outstanding teaching at key points throughout the school
 - ensuring that pupils are given enough opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics, and to use and apply what they have been taught.
- Improve the quality of the work in pupils' exercise books by ensuring that:
 - staff have consistently high expectations of how pupils should present their work
 - all pupils are taught to form letters correctly in order to develop a neat and efficient handwriting style
 - all pupils are taught to orientate numbers correctly when writing them.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The executive headteacher's leadership has transformed two previously failing schools. Her absolute determination that every pupil, regardless of their circumstances, will have the opportunity to succeed, influences every aspect of this school. The executive headteacher is deeply committed to every one of the school's 400 pupils, each of whom she knows as an individual. Pupils now receive a good and improving education as a direct result of her leadership.
- The inclusion leader supports and complements the executive headteacher's work extremely well. His professional background in education for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs has benefited the school enormously. The inclusion leader has been instrumental in introducing a programme designed to support pupils' mental health needs and this is having a demonstrable impact.
- Leaders' actions have had a dramatic effect on improving pupils' behaviour. Leaders have successfully balanced holding pupils to account, when their behaviour is unacceptable, with putting measures in place to help pupils address the reasons for it. The once unruly school is now a calm and tranquil haven.
- Leaders have also focused well on improving the quality of teaching in the school. Clear systems are now in place that ensure that monitoring activities are not done in isolation but link with each other well. For example, areas for improvement identified during one lesson observation are used as the focus for the next. Leaders are accurate and astute at identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching that they observe. Leaders' observations matched inspectors' very closely throughout the inspection.
- Leaders are totally committed to ensuring that all pupils receive a high-quality education. They are prepared to go above and beyond what could reasonably be expected in order to meet individual pupils' needs. An example of this is the highly effective enhanced provision, Dalai Lama House, created by the school to meet the needs of a small group of pupils.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very well managed. The inclusion leader has ensured that effective systems are in place so that pupils' needs are identified fully and promptly. Individualised programmes are put in place that successfully meet the needs identified. The additional funding that the school receives for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is spent very well and outcomes for this group of pupils are clearly improving.
- Although some are relatively new to their roles, leaders know their subjects well. They have a good understanding of the purpose of their roles, and are increasingly effective in carrying out their duties. Subject leaders focus strongly on improving outcomes for pupils in their subjects and this is beginning to have an impact.
- The pupil premium grant is spent effectively. The funding is used in a range of ways and its impact is monitored closely. For example, some of the funding is used to provide a fully funded breakfast club. This has been highly effective in improving the attendance and punctuality of disadvantaged pupils.

- The sports premium is used well and the impact of spending is clear. Pupils now have the opportunity to attend a much wider range of sports clubs, both after school and during lunchtime. The school now takes part in more competitive sporting activities, both within the trust and with other local schools. The use of professional sports coaches has both raised the quality of sports teaching and provided professional development opportunities for the school's existing staff.
- The school is supported very well by its sponsoring trust. For example, the trust provides a range of courses and networking meetings that staff find invaluable. Coaching provided by trust colleagues has had a clear impact on improving the quality of teaching so that it is now good. The regional director has a 'hands-on' approach and knows the school and its pupils very well. This enables him both to provide good support to the school's leaders and to hold them to account effectively.
- The school's curriculum has been developed well this year. Leaders introduced a new, project-based approach in September 2016 with the aim of capturing pupils' interest and encouraging better attitudes to learning. Some of the projects in the school's curriculum appeal to many children's love of the baser aspects of life, for example 'burps, bottoms and piles' and 'muck, mess and mixtures'. Leaders have found that this approach has been highly successful in capturing pupils' interest in the subjects that they learn about. The curriculum is supplemented well by visits to places of interest and visiting speakers coming into school.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern British society. Leaders have written a scheme of work to ensure that fundamental British values are taught effectively and in a systematic fashion. The scheme of work also shows clearly the progression, in terms of expected knowledge and understanding, from year to year. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes demonstrate clearly that the messages they receive through assemblies and classroom teaching are having a strong impact.

Governance

- Governors are very effective in their roles. They understand well the need to balance supporting leaders with holding them to account. They do this well and understand fully their duty of care, particularly to the executive headteacher.
- Governors are knowledgeable and well informed. They have a full and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that still need to be improved. Governors are fully committed to the school's vision of 'every child, every chance, every day', and see this as their guiding principle. They track and monitor the school's progress in improving its priority areas closely. Governors use the visits from a local authority adviser to help them to be certain about how good the school is currently and whether it is continuing to improve.
- The local governing body has close links with the sponsoring trust. The chair of the governing body is a member of the regional trust board and, therefore, has a good understanding of the school's position within the trust.
- Governors monitor closely how the school's budget is spent. For example, they receive regular updates on how the pupil premium grant is being used and the impact that the

spending is having. Governors are very clear that there must be a demonstrable impact if the leaders' chosen ways of using the grant are to continue.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's single central record of pre-employment checks meets statutory requirements. The record is thorough and well maintained. Where there were gaps in information about individuals who were employed prior to the academy opening, these have been appropriately assessed to check whether the missing information poses any risk to pupils. The school's work to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with children is thorough.
- All members of staff receive regular safeguarding training. As a result, they know what to do if they are in any way concerned about the welfare of a pupil. The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Staff are highly vigilant and report concerns promptly when necessary.
- The school has a number of senior staff who are trained as designated safeguarding leads, ensuring that there is always someone available for concerns to be reported to. A new full-time designated safeguarding lead, whose remit is solely to lead on this vital aspect of the school's work, has recently taken up her post. This appointment is a clear reflection of the high proportion of pupils at the school who are vulnerable to abuse or neglect.
- Thorough and detailed records are kept about the concerns that are reported about pupils. Records show clearly the action that has been taken in response to concerns. As a result of the school's approach to record-keeping, trends are picked up quickly and action taken in a timely fashion. The school works closely with parents and outside agencies, such as children's social care, where necessary, in order to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- When the academy opened in September 2014, it inherited weak teaching from both of its predecessor schools. Leaders have been highly effective in holding teachers to account for the quality of their work and ensuring that non-negotiable expectations are met. Where teachers' work has fallen short of leaders' expectations, prompt and decisive action has been taken to address this.
- The professional development that has been provided for staff, both within the school and within the broader trust, has had a clear impact on improving the quality of teaching. As a result, for the first time since the academy opened, the quality of teaching is now good throughout the school.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are a particular strength of the school. Pupils know that staff like them. This simple truth has a significant impact both on how well pupils behave and how hard they try. Pupils feel safe to get things wrong in lessons because they know that people learn by making mistakes.

- The adults in classrooms, both teachers and teaching assistants, pick up quickly on pupils' misconceptions. When pupils do not understand what they are taught, or have misunderstood, staff notice this and intervene straightaway.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning well. They ask appropriately chosen questions both to check that pupils have understood and to encourage them to think more deeply. Staff focus on ensuring that pupils understand the vocabulary that they come across while reading so that they have a better understanding of the texts they read.
- Teachers use positive strategies to manage pupils' behaviour. They do this very well by, for example, the appropriate use of praise and humour. Minor behavioural issues are dealt with promptly and this enables lessons to proceed smoothly.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled at managing pupils whose behaviour is challenging. Clear plans are in place for each of this small group of pupils. Staff show a high level of understanding of why pupils behave in the way that they do. This means that they are highly effective in helping pupils to reduce their undesirable behaviours and express their frustrations and distress in more socially acceptable ways.
- The Dalai Lama House was set up by the school to provide suitable enhanced provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This has been highly successful. Staff know the small group of pupils extremely well and are highly effective in meeting their needs. The impact of this enhanced provision on the lives of the pupils that it serves is remarkable.
- The school focuses very well on developing pupils' speech and language skills. Two specially trained members of staff work full time in this area. They are supported by weekly visits from a speech and language therapist, funded by the National Health Service. This provision has a clear impact on improving the communication skills of the pupils whom staff work with.
- Teaching assistants are an asset to the school and make a significant contribution to improving outcomes for pupils. For example, teaching assistants run effective 'catch-up' groups that help pupils to improve their reading and spelling. Teaching assistants are also highly skilled in managing pupils' behaviour, including when it is more challenging.
- The school's approach to assessment has improved this year. Teachers now routinely use a 'cold' task at the beginning of a topic and a 'hot' task at the end. That is, they check how much pupils know before any teaching has taken place and then measure how much more they know afterwards. Pupils understand this process well and it is helping teachers to plan work to meet pupils' needs more closely.
- Teaching in mathematics is not as strong as in other subjects. Calculation skills are taught well. However, pupils are not given enough opportunities to apply their learning. There are also insufficient opportunities for them to develop their reasoning in mathematics and to work at greater depth.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of how pupils should present their work. Handwriting skills have, historically, not been taught well enough and, as a result, many pupils do not form letters correctly or write all their numbers the right way around.

- The quality of teaching is now solidly good throughout the school. However, there is not yet outstanding teaching that can be used to raise standards further throughout the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Teachers and other staff focus very well on promoting pupils' self-esteem and taking care of their mental health. Staff fully appreciate that one of the responsibilities of their roles is that they hold pupils' self-esteem in the palm of their hands. They consciously carry it carefully rather than carelessly crushing it.
- Leaders have introduced a commercially produced programme aimed at protecting and improving pupils' social, emotional and mental health. The inclusion leader is fully trained in the use of the programme and has provided training for other members of staff. The school has found that this approach is having a demonstrable impact on improving many pupils' self-esteem and thus their ability to learn.
- Pupils feel safe from bullying. In a meeting with the lead inspector, pupils said that there is no bullying because pupils 'wouldn't dream of it'. Pupils are taught regularly about the characteristics and the forms that bullying can take. They have been taught to tell an adult if they feel that they are being bullied. Pupils have total faith that staff will sort things out quickly if problems arise.
- The school has a strong safeguarding culture. The very strong relationships between pupils and staff play an important part in keeping pupils safe. Pupils know that staff will listen to them and will help them when they need it.
- Staff focus well on developing pupils' social skills. For example, pupils know that they are expected to listen to each other and to share. Staff model good manners and respect. As a result, pupils are polite, friendly and welcoming.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave very well in lessons because expectations are high and the rules are clear. The school's behaviour policy is applied consistently. As a result, lessons are rarely disturbed by low-level disruption. Parents, staff and pupils all agree that behaviour has improved enormously since the academy opened.
- Incidents of poor and unacceptable behaviour are monitored closely. Leaders track the numbers and types of incidents to look for trends and patterns. They use this analysis to put measures in place to support pupils appropriately, in order to prevent incidents happening again. This is having a very clear impact. There is a declining trend both in the number of incidents and the number of exclusions as a result.

- The school's breakfast club is a very useful asset. It provides a pleasant social experience that is well managed. The calm and orderly environment gets pupils' school day off to a good start where it might otherwise be more challenging and chaotic.
- Attendance remains below the national average. However, it is improving as a result of the prompt and effective action taken by leaders. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in mathematics in the 2016 key stage 2 national tests was well below average and in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally. Pupils' attainment was also well below average. This year, pupils' attainment in mathematics has improved dramatically, from less than a third of pupils to approximately two-thirds reaching the expected standard. However, the proportion reaching the expected standard in mathematics remains below the national average.
- Few pupils make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Given pupils' low starting points, this means that pupils' attainment remains below the national average at the end of key stage 2. The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was well below the national average in 2017.
- The quality of handwriting and presentation in pupils' exercise books is variable. Too often, pupils' handwriting is poorly formed and numbers are written the wrong way around. In many cases, pupils do not take enough care about how they present their work, with frequent scribbling out and careless handwriting.
- Results in the 2017 key stage 2 national tests show clearly that outcomes are improving. The proportion of pupils who reached the expected level in mathematics, and in grammar, spelling and punctuation, increased dramatically this year. This is because of the school's improved teaching. Although improvements in outcomes are lagging behind improvements in the quality of teaching, the upward trend is clear.
- The school's assessment information shows that pupils throughout the school are now making the progress that they should. Scrutiny of the work in pupils' exercise books confirms that pupils are making expected progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Pupils' progress is stronger in writing than in reading. This is the result of historically weak teaching in phonics over time. Although the teaching of phonics has improved, the time lag before this impacts on reading outcomes is evident. However, pupils enjoy reading and show a love of books. Overall, they read with a degree of fluency appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make similar progress to their classmates. In some subjects and year groups, disadvantaged pupils make better progress than their peers. This is because the additional funding is spent effectively to meet the individual needs of this group of pupils, including disadvantaged children in the early years.

- The proportion of most-able pupils in the school is very small. Where pupils have been identified as most-able, the difference in outcomes between them and their classmates is clear in their exercise books. Pupils are given appropriate challenges in lessons to enable them to make the progress that they should.
- An increasing proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making rapid progress from their starting points. The most prevalent area of special educational need is communication and language skills. Leaders monitor pupils' progress in this area closely and the positive impact of the provision that has been put in place is clear.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years provision is well managed because the early years leader has a clear understanding of her role. She has identified appropriate areas for development, based on thorough monitoring and accurate evaluation. As a result, the right actions are being taken and the provision is clearly improving as a result.
- Children enter the Nursery class with skills and abilities that are well below those that are typical of their age. Even now, at the closing stages of the academic year, many children's communication is notably below what is typical for their age. Some children are not yet toilet trained and remain in nappies.
- Children make good progress during their time in the early years and some make outstanding progress. The proportion of pupils who reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has risen steadily over the last three years and is now just above the national average. As a result, children are now better prepared for the more academic demands of Year 1.
- Staff ensure that a wide range of engaging activities are provided to motivate children to learn. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and form a strong team. Adults work with children effectively both in adult-led groups and when supporting children in activities that they have chosen for themselves.
- The quality of teaching of phonics is improving. As a result, children are able to draw on their phonics knowledge to make plausible attempts at spelling unfamiliar words. They also use their phonics knowledge well to help them to read simple words and texts.
- Children behave well and follow the well-established classroom routines. This helps to ensure that children are safe in the early years environment. Children share and cooperate with each other well. Staff encourage children to become more independent, for example by teaching them to put their coats on by themselves.
- Encouraging and promoting the development of children's language and communication skills are not as well developed in Nursery as they are in the Reception classes. For example, opportunities to promote children's talk through the use of well-chosen questioning is less strong in Nursery. The school is aware of this and leaders are already taking steps to address this area for development.

School details

Unique reference number	141113
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10031342

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	407
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Rutson-Edwards
Executive headteacher	Sinead Harper
Telephone number	01206 864 226
Website	www.unityprimaryacademy.com
Email address	admin@unityprimaryacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Unity Primary Academy opened on 1 September 2014, amalgamating separate infant and junior schools that shared the same site. The school is sponsored by the Reach2 Academy Trust.
- Both the predecessor schools were judged to require special measures when they were inspected in January 2012 and May 2013 respectively. Monitoring inspections were carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors. The final monitoring inspections reported that, by September 2013 and June 2014 respectively, neither school was making adequate progress towards the removal of special measures.

- The executive headteacher has led the school since it opened. There have been several leadership changes and numerous staffing changes since the school opened.
- The school met current floor standards in 2016. These are the minimum standards, set by the government, for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has enhanced provision for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs, known as Dalai Lama House. The provision was set up by the school and is funded by the Reach2 Academy Trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. Inspectors observed parts of 36 lessons, some jointly with the executive headteacher or other senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked closely at the work in pupils' exercise books. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of the school's documents including assessment information.
- Inspectors checked the school's single central record of pre-employment checks and other documentation concerned with the safer recruitment of staff and volunteers.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, other leaders, the trust's regional director, governors, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the day and with parents as they brought their children to school.
- Inspectors considered 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 81 additional comments.

Inspection team

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