

Unity College

Towneley Holmes, Burnley, Lancashire BB11 3DF

Inspection dates

6–7 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and senior leaders are relentless in pursuing a vision of excellence for all. Leaders and governors are ambitious for every pupil.
- The school's ethos of 'Unity, Passion and Respect' can be seen in all aspects of school life. All members of the community build a welcoming environment where positive relationships are evident. Pupils feel safe and enjoy coming to school.
- Attainment and progress of pupils are rising. A greater proportion of pupils now leave the school with strong passes in GCSE mathematics and English. Pupils' progress from their starting points is improving year on year.
- The school's contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Most pupils behave well and are respectful towards others.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Most make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Careers information, advice and guidance are good. A growing number of pupils secure places in further education, employment or training.
- The curriculum, supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, meets the needs of most pupils.
- Middle leaders ensure that the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes in their subject continue to improve.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Some variations exist across subjects. On occasions, pupils' needs are not met sufficiently well.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving but, for some of these pupils, it is not consistently strong.
- Behaviour around school and in lessons is calm and purposeful. Exclusions are reducing rapidly for most pupils. Nevertheless, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND who are excluded is high.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision make good progress emotionally, but their academic progress is poor.
- Attendance is improving and is in line with the national average for all pupils. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains a focus for leaders.
- Leaders are dedicated to improving the quality of education for pupils. Currently, some actions are not sufficiently analysed to check on their impact on pupils' learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently plan and teach lessons which meet the needs of pupils, so that progress is maximised, and pupils' interest is maintained
 - teaching continues to improve so that it matches the best practice seen around the school.
- Improve outcomes for pupils who attend alternative provision.
- Continue to embed support for disadvantaged pupils so that:
 - outcomes for these pupils continue to improve
 - the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school further improves.
- Continue to reduce exclusions, including for pupils who are disadvantaged and those with SEND.
- Continue to improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that leaders evaluate thoroughly the impact of their actions on pupils' achievement and wider quality of education.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have high expectations of pupils and staff. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. As a result, leaders prioritise plans for improvement and carry out their roles with commitment and determination.
- Senior leaders are supported effectively by a body of strong and developing middle leaders. Middle leaders understand their roles and accurately identify areas of good practice and areas in need of development. They are enthusiastic about their subjects and passionate about improving the quality of provision and outcomes in their area of responsibility.
- Positive relationships between staff and pupils are evident throughout the school. Parents and carers are positive about the quality of education that their children receive. They believe that their children make good progress and enjoy their time in school.
- All staff are proud to work at the school. Newly and recently qualified teachers appreciate the support and training they receive. Almost all staff speak positively about their experiences at the school and appreciate the concern that leaders show for their well-being. Staff say that the training put in place by leaders supports their development, for example the recent training on challenging the most able pupils.
- The curriculum meets the needs of most pupils. Leaders review the range of courses on offer and make sure that they are appropriate to the interests and career aspirations of pupils. The curriculum provides a broad academic experience for pupils. The curriculum does not adequately meet the academic needs of pupils who attend alternative provision.
- The curriculum contributes well to the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils. Timetabled lessons, additional visits, visiting speakers and assemblies are carefully planned to help pupils develop into caring and thoughtful members of society. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, music, drama and dance, enrich further the curriculum. Pupils engage in many opportunities that develop their personal responsibility, such as becoming prefects, joining the school council and supporting younger children in literacy and mathematics.
- Links with primary schools are strong. Transition from primary school into Unity College is a strength of the school. Through an in-depth programme of visits to the school, leaders and teachers develop a good knowledge of pupils before they begin Year 7. This means that there is no time wasted at the beginning of Year 7. As a result, pupils understand the expectations staff have and make a good start to their time at secondary school.
- A large team of staff ensure that funding is well spent to support disadvantaged pupils, both academically and emotionally. Leaders review the impact of the strategies used and make changes if they are not successful. Historical information indicates attendance and progress for disadvantaged pupils have been below national averages.

However, improvements can be seen in the attendance and progress of current learners because of early interventions with pupils to ensure that these differences diminish rapidly.

- Leadership of careers information, advice and guidance is strong. Independent careers advice, strong links with local employers and colleges, and many opportunities to meet with future employers provide pupils with individual information and guidance about the choices available to them. Work experience placements, linked to option choices, give pupils an insight into potential future careers. Pupils value highly the support and guidance they receive in this area. As a result, most go on to next steps well suited to their interests and abilities.
- Additional funding for pupils with SEND is used effectively to improve the attendance, progress and attainment of pupils. The careful deployment of additional adults ensures that support is targeted accurately. The impact of a wide range of strategies and interventions is unknown, however, as leaders do not routinely evaluate the effectiveness of their actions. As a result, it is unclear at times which strategies have been the most successful.
- The use of funding for pupils who need additional literacy and numeracy support is effective in helping most of these pupils make up lost ground. Strategies and support in Year 7 build on pupils' primary learning and develop their reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, these pupils enter Year 8 better equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to progress.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision are tracked and monitored carefully for attendance and safeguarding purposes. These pupils attend and behave appropriately on their courses. However, pupils who attend alternative provision make poor academic progress.
- Leaders have introduced a new behaviour system which has reduced exclusions and improved behaviour across the school. While exclusions are falling sharply, evidence shows that exclusions for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND remain high.
- A whole-school focus on improving attendance has indeed improved it, and it is now in line with the national average. However, while improving, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is below that of others nationally and of their non-disadvantaged peers in school.

Governance of the school

- Governors know the school well. They bring a wide range of expertise and skills to their roles. They are committed to improving the life chances of every pupil at Unity College.
- Governors understand their safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding governor regularly checks the school's documentation and safeguarding records to ensure compliance. All governors are trained in safeguarding and ensure that risks to pupils' safety are minimised.
- Governors have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They work with parents and the local community and continually strive to engage parents through coffee mornings, drama performances and meetings such as the recent online safety meeting held for parents.

- Governors hold the headteacher and other leaders to account. They are clear about the spending of the pupil premium funding and challenge leaders to demonstrate the impact of this funding. However, governors do not rigorously challenge leaders about the academic outcomes of pupils who attend alternative provision, which remain well below national averages.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leadership of this area is strong. All staff are well trained and vigilant about pupils' security. They know how to keep pupils safe and what to do if they have concerns about a pupil.
- All safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and reflect the latest guidance. Leaders carry out pre-employment checks and statutory requirements are met.
- Leaders have developed positive relationships with external agencies. They work closely with a range of agencies to ensure that pupils receive timely support to ensure their continued well-being and safety. Leaders are tenacious in following up referrals and make sure that pupils get the help they need.
- Pupils, staff and students say that pupils feel safe in school. Pupils are taught to stay safe through lessons and personal development time with tutors. Pupils learn how to stay safe online, how to make healthy choices, manage their money and understand puberty and relationships. Pupils value these lessons and say that they are useful.
- Leaders, staff, governors and parents work closely together to provide a safe learning environment for pupils. There is a strong culture of safeguarding which runs throughout the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and what they can achieve. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Pupils say that staff help and support them in their learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it to plan activities which capture the interests of pupils. Questioning is effective in targeting pupils to think deeply about their learning, for example in mathematics and English.
- Teachers give pupils opportunities to reflect on their learning. As a result, many pupils can identify their own strengths and weaknesses and know what they need to do to improve. Scrutiny of work in books and folders shows that most work is well presented.
- Additional adults in the classroom know the needs of pupils well. They provide them with good support in lessons and in catch-up sessions.
- Leaders work hard to ensure that literacy skills and pupils' vocabulary are well developed across the curriculum. Clear guidance is often given to pupils to improve this aspect of their work. Early interventions by most teachers help to highlight misspellings or grammatical mistakes in pupils' work before these become learned errors. At times, though, some misconceptions are not identified early enough, and errors are repeated,

sometimes in assessments.

- Homework is set in line with school policy. It is used effectively to support learning and is pitched appropriately to meet the needs of pupils. Homework clubs are held after school so that pupils can access the resources or support needed to help them get the most benefit from their homework.
- While the quality of teaching is good overall, at times, some teaching fails to meet the needs of learners. As a result, some low-level disruption occurs and progress falters.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are articulate, courteous and polite. They enjoy school and wear their uniform smartly. Pupils show respect for each other and listen carefully to others' ideas and opinions.
- Pupils feel safe in school. Staff and parents agree. Pupils are taught well how to keep themselves safe, including in the community and online. Pupils have recently been taught how to keep themselves safe around fireworks and bonfires. Pupils have a clear understanding of what bullying is and state that it occurs only rarely. Pupils told inspectors that any incidents of bullying are usually dealt with effectively by staff.
- Strong systems are in place to support pupils in need. Leaders' watchful and personalised approach means that pupils receive targeted help quickly. Leaders work effectively with a range of outside agencies to ensure the safety of pupils. Pupils say that there is a range of adults to talk to in school if they have any concerns. Pupils value the wide range of support available to them in school.
- Leaders have put in place a variety of opportunities for pupils to develop personal responsibility. Leaders and teachers encourage pupils to apply to be prefects, take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and support younger pupils. Pupils are good ambassadors for the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Leaders, staff and governors have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Most pupils live up to these expectations. As a result, there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school.
- Positive behaviour for learning is demonstrated by most pupils. Pupils are prepared for lessons and generally arrive on time. They move sensibly between lessons and conduct themselves well in lessons and during social times. Pupils, parents and staff say that behaviour is good. Inspection evidence supports their views.
- The behaviour of a small number of younger pupils occasionally does not meet the high standards expected. Younger pupils told inspectors that some lessons are affected by low-level disruption.
- The new behaviour policy is generally applied consistently in lessons. Records of pupils' behaviour show that behaviour is improving over time. The number of fixed-term,

internal and permanent exclusions have decreased due to effective early interventions. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND who are excluded is not falling as rapidly.

- Pupils take pride in themselves and their work. Pupils are well-mannered and mix well with each other.
- Attendance of all pupils is rising towards the national average. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is reducing. A whole-school focus on attendance, including a rewards strategy, home visits and inter-form competitions, has proved effective.
- While the attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve, there remain differences to their non-disadvantaged peers and all pupils nationally. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school is too high.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision generally attend and behave well. These placements provide pupils with the opportunity to move forward in a different environment. As a result, some pupils secure places on training courses to continue their education.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress across a range of subjects from their individual starting points that are typically below national averages. Unvalidated examination results for 2018 show that pupils' progress is better than that achieved in 2017 for all pupils and the most able pupils. This year, pupils' progress in mathematics was particularly strong.
- Results from the 2018 public examinations indicate that pupils' attainment is stronger than that achieved in 2017 in a wide range of subjects. The proportion of pupils achieving a strong pass in both English and mathematics has improved from 2017. From their starting points, this indicates good progress and is improving year on year.
- Current pupils make strong progress in a range of subjects and across year groups. The school's current analysis of pupils' attainment and progress is thorough and accurate. This information shows that current pupils are making better progress compared to previous years. Conversations with pupils about their work, work seen during lessons and in books over time support the school's assessment information which shows that currently most pupils make good progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils currently on roll at the school make good progress across year groups and subjects. Any differences to their non-disadvantaged peers are diminishing noticeably. Most disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points. This is a direct result of the impact of the additional funding used to support these pupils.
- Pupils who need to catch up make good gains in developing their reading, writing and mathematics. This is a result of good-quality teaching, effective interventions and the carefully targeted support they receive in Year 7.
- Teachers check regularly on the progress of pupils. Parents receive termly monitoring checks and reports, and opportunities to consult with teachers throughout the year. Parents are happy with the information they receive about their child's progress.

- Leaders actively promote reading. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their vocabulary and love of reading during their time in school.
- Leaders provide high-quality careers advice for pupils. Pupils are effectively supported when making GCSE option choices and when choosing their next steps after Year 11. Leaders work tirelessly to raise the aspirations of pupils through a variety of strategies, including many opportunities to meet local employers and strong links with local colleges. Leaders ensure that all pupils undertake a work experience placement linked to their courses of study and career aspirations.
- The outcomes for pupils with SEND have not been strong in the past. However, the work of the special needs coordinator and the focused support given to these pupils mean that they are now making improved progress in key stages 3 and 4.
- In 2018, disadvantaged pupils achieved less well than do others nationally. The number of disadvantaged pupils who attended alternative provision for most of their Year 11 studies performed particularly poorly. As a result, this affected the overall progress measures for disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils who attended Unity College regularly throughout their time at school made markedly better progress than those who attended alternative provision.
- Pupils who attended alternative provision did not achieve well in 2018. Leaders rightly acknowledge that while alternative provision met the needs of pupils socially and emotionally, it did not adequately meet their academic needs.

School details

Unique reference number	135003
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10053238

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs A Kelly
Headteacher	Mrs S Cryer
Telephone number	01282 683010
Website	www.unity-college.com/
Email address	enquiries@unity.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school for pupils from 11 to 16 years.
- The school is a mixed comprehensive school in the local authority of Lancashire.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Pupils are predominantly of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium is above average. A number of pupils are supported through the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan.
- The school currently uses alternative provision at Coal Clough Academy to contribute to the education of a small number of key stage 4 pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a wide range of subjects in different year groups. Some observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of other short visits to lessons, assemblies and other activities.
- Inspectors met with pupils to listen to their views, both formally and informally.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaktimes, lunchtimes, in assemblies, in lessons and at the end of the school day. Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and looked at a sample of their books jointly with leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, newly and recently qualified teachers and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also met with members of the governing body and spoke with other agencies who work regularly with the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation that covered: information about pupils' attainment and progress; the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan; minutes of meetings of the governing body and records relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour and the safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in the 75 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the comments received via the free-text facility on Parent View. Inspectors also spoke with a parent in school. Inspectors took into account the 38 responses to a questionnaire for pupils and the 44 responses to a questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Helen O'Neill, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Phil Hyman	Ofsted Inspector
Dean Logan	Ofsted Inspector
Colin Bell	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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