

Unity College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135003
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	329005
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Patrick Geraghty HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	960
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Murray
Headteacher	Mrs Sally Cryer
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2007
School address	Townley Holmes Burnley Lancashire BB11 3EN
Telephone number	01282 436311
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Unity College is an average size secondary school, situated in Burnley. The school opened in September 2006, following a Building Schools for the Future re-organisation programme. The school serves an area of social and economic disadvantage and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is twice the national figure. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also higher than the national average. Few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school is host to a City Learning Centre and is part of the Behaviour for Improvement programme. The school has specialist performing arts status and has achieved the Investors in People award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

This is now a satisfactory and improving school. At its inception in September 2006 the school faced numerous challenges and not least a degree of staffing turbulence which impacted on the school's focus on improving student achievement and standards. During the first 18 months, 13 middle managers changed responsibilities or left. Astute new appointments to key positions and the successful promotion of a common set of objectives have re-focused the school. With strong leadership from the headteacher and senior leaders many shortcomings have been tackled over the last 12 months. Systematic and focused improvement strategies are now having an impact on achievement and standards. The level of student work examined by inspectors was at least satisfactory and often good. Most recent tests and modular results indicate improvements in performance particularly in English, mathematics and science. The school recognises the imperative to further raise standards in English and mathematics at both key stages.

Students make satisfactory progress in their personal development and enjoy school. Behaviour in lessons and around the site is generally satisfactory. Attendance and punctuality have improved. Through an effective programme of staff development and external consultation teaching has improved. The school recognises that the currently satisfactory teaching needs to become more varied and that teachers need to ensure that work is more closely matched in lessons to the range of students' capabilities. Curriculum initiatives and the strong promotion of the performing arts specialism is establishing a culture of learning and achievement, of raising aspirations, and is beginning to lift standards. The curriculum better matches student needs. Care, guidance and support are good with a strong focus on those most vulnerable and at risk of not achieving to their potential.

The governors, headteacher and senior leaders have made a determined effort over the last 12 months to tackle the areas for improvement cited in the October 2007 inspection report. Senior leaders and middle managers share a strong commitment to continuing improvement. Data is now used effectively to monitor students' progress. Challenging targets are now set. Students are benefiting from the closer monitoring that ensures they make better progress. Self-evaluation is thorough and largely accurate. The school's capacity to make further improvements are good. There is however, insufficient assessment of the effectiveness of initiatives and their impact on standards and achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics at both key stages.
- Ensure that work is more closely matched in lessons to the range of student's capabilities.
- Develop more rigorous approaches to assessing the effectiveness of initiatives and their impact on standards and achievement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The majority of learners enter the school in Year 7 having achieved standards below the national average especially in literacy. Provisional test results for 2008 show that the rate of progress between Years 7 to 9 was below average with underachievement in English and science. However, there is evidence that initiatives to tackle underachievement are having an impact. In lessons visited in Years 7 to 9, inspectors judged that students made at least satisfactory progress. Tracking of students' progress and tests in Year 7, 8 and 9 indicate improvement and inspectors observed good standards of work in mathematics, science, English, modern foreign languages and dance. In GCSE examinations taken in 2008, students achieved significantly below the national averages of five A* to C GCSE including English and mathematics, although the percentage achieving five or more A* to C grades increased by 16%. Progress between Key Stage 3 and 4 for all subjects was significantly positive. There is evidence that initiatives to tackle underachievement are having an impact. The level of student work examined in Year 10 and 11 by inspectors was at least satisfactory. In lessons visited, inspectors judged that learners in Years 10 and 11, made at least satisfactory progress. Modules already taken in Years 10 and 11 indicate a marked increase in performance in mathematics and science. The school's systematic tracking of students' progress particularly in English, mathematics and science indicates they are on course to meet the challenging targets set for 2009. Students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made similarly good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. The majority of students enjoy school life, particularly the increasingly stimulating and relevant curriculum and the wide range of additional activities in performing arts and sport. Attitudes to learning are improving as more students come to appreciate the potential benefits of working as hard as they can. Attendance and punctuality are improving. Whilst levels of persistent absenteeism are still too high, the number of students who have good levels of attendance has increased significantly. Students feel they are able to make informed choices based on the advice they are given about healthy lifestyles. Students report they feel safe from bullying or harassment, instances of which are rare. Behaviour is satisfactory. The great majority of students are compliant in lessons and are increasingly receptive to the college's culture of learning and achievement. The number of exclusions has fallen considerably and disruption of lessons by misbehaviour is the exception. Specialist status has helped to give many students the confidence and motivation to engage with the local community in a range of arts based activities such as the Burnley Brass Explosion Band. Within the college many are active as student councillors, prefects, house captains, peer mentors and charity fundraisers. Whilst standards in key skills are below average, students' aspirations for the future are being raised by a strong focus on the development of work related personal and social skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Since the last inspection the proportion of good teaching has increased with a subsequent decrease in inadequate teaching. Staff are given clear guidance about what is expected and, as a result, there is greater consistency of practice. However, not all staff have adopted the school's approach to teaching and learning to the same degree. A rigorous programme of lesson observations provides useful information about what is going well and where further development is needed. Senior staff have a broad and generally accurate view of what is happening in classrooms. There are good opportunities for professional development. The best lessons have a clear purpose, good pace, and a range of interesting and varied learning activities. In these lessons, students are clear about what it is they are learning and why. Teachers are skilled in their understanding of how students learn, and build effectively on the learning that has gone before. Not all teaching and learning is as successful. Lesson planning follows a common format, but does not always draw on available information about students' current progress to prepare for and meet individual student needs. Too many lessons reflect a 'one size fits all' approach, and work is not tailored precisely enough to fully extend the more able or support those of lower ability. As a result, the level of challenge is not always appropriate for every student in the class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. Imaginative strategies, opportunities provided through the specialist status in performing arts, flexibility, and the ongoing review of provision mean that the school provides courses that cater for a very wide range of students' needs. At Key Stage 3, all requirements for the National Curriculum are covered. The distinctive features of the curriculum at this stage include good opportunities for performing arts including early entry GCSE in drama. Additionally, the school has developed an innovative Year 7 course that fosters the enhancement of students' key skills and personal development. Sensitive provision is also made for a number of vulnerable students for whom transfer to secondary education presents a major challenge. At Key Stage 4 students are able to choose individual programmes that they see as relevant for their current and future needs and ambitions. Strong collaborative arrangements with other local providers have enabled a very wide range of academic and vocational options to be provided with a broad range of accreditation. Work related learning and enterprise experience are provided successfully, and the proportion of students remaining in education and training is rising. Specialist performing arts status has been important in curriculum growth, not least in leading the introduction of the new Creative and Media diploma. As a result of these curriculum initiatives, standards are rising, students' attitudes and confidence are improving, as are their course completion rates.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Provision for care, guidance and support is good. The school has a strong commitment to inclusion. The student support centre provides well for those who have particular learning or social needs which cannot always be met in the classroom. Vulnerable students are given support well matched to their needs, drawing on external agencies as required. All required procedures

are in place to ensure students' welfare, health and safety. Well tried and tested procedures for improving attendance are bringing about improvement. Good links with primary schools and the provision of homebase tutor groups ease the transition from primary schools, of Year 7 students. Students moving into Key Stage 4 or to further education feel they are given helpful advice and guidance which enables them to make informed choices. Students are set challenging targets which are regularly reviewed. A robust system for tracking progress enables staff to identify underachieving individuals or groups and trigger early intervention. Teachers' feedback is specific and targeted at improvement. Consequently, students are well informed, not only about how well they are doing but also about their own potential and their teachers' expectations of them. This work is developing a culture of learning and achievement, raising aspirations and is beginning to lift standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school self evaluation graded leadership and management as good but inspectors found it to be satisfactory. The leadership of the headteacher is good. She provides a clear vision for the school. A strong senior leadership team provide good support. Since the previous inspection effective monitoring and evaluation systems have been put in place and staff at all levels understand their importance. Middle leaders are developing the skills of effective leadership; they understand the importance of being involved in self-evaluation and appreciate the greater degree of accountability. However, these systems and a wide range of improvement strategies have not yet led to continuous year-on-year improvements in students' performance. The school has yet to fully develop more rigorous approaches to assessing the effectiveness of initiatives and their impact on standards and achievement. The governing body is actively involved in monitoring the performance of the school and effectively holds school leadership to account. Governors are clear about its strengths and areas for improvement. The school has a strong commitment to inclusion and involvement with the wider community. Links with external providers are good and they add significantly to the students' learning. Structures are in place to ensure a good capacity to bring about further improvements. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Unity College, Lancashire, BB11 3EN

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed our two days at your school. We particularly enjoyed our discussions with so many of you about your work, interests and your contribution to the school. Your school is now making satisfactory progress. The school is well led. The headteacher, senior staff, staff and governors are working hard because they want you to do the very best you can.

Most importantly your achievement and examination results are beginning to improve. Your school has undergone much change in the last 12 months. This has led to improvements to teaching and learning, curriculum and management that have enabled you to make satisfactory progress. You enjoy many of your lessons, particularly when you know that you are improving and learning. Where the teaching is good you respond well to teachers' high expectations. Your curriculum options are now good. You enjoy an increasingly wide range of extra-curricular activities. The teachers and support staff care for you and give you good guidance.

We have asked your school to make these improvements.

- Raise your standards in English and mathematics at both key stages.
- Ensure that your work is more closely matched in lessons to the range of your capabilities.
- To look further at the effectiveness of initiatives and their impact on your standards and achievement.

We are sure that you will make even better progress in the future.

All the inspection team wish you well for your future education and careers.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty

Her Majesty's Inspector