

Unity Academy Blackpool

Warbreck Hill Road, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY2 0TS

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not all teachers are consistently developing pupils' literacy skills in the secondary phases.
- Some pupils in Key Stage 3 are not reaching the standards they are capable of achieving because teachers' expectations are not consistently high enough.
- Not all teachers in the secondary phase use the school's marking policy as effectively as the primary teachers. This is limiting the quality of information some pupils receive about how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Across the school, not all teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation of their work.
- While pupils feel safe at school, some pupils' knowledge of how to stay safe online is limited.
- Some pupils are not able to manage their own behaviour outside the classroom.
- In some cases, the most able pupils do not have opportunities to structure their writing independently, which is limiting their progress to reach higher standards.
- Middle leaders do not check carefully enough to see if actions to drive improvements in pupils' achievement are working as well as possible.
- Some staff do not have the necessary skills to create good-quality learning opportunities within their lessons for the small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language.

The school has the following strengths

- Children have a good start, in the early years because provision is good in all areas of this key stage.
- Good teaching in the primary phase ensures pupils make good progress.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well planned and is having a positive impact on pupils' personal development and well-being.
- Provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is good. As a result, they make good progress.
- Good leadership from the Principal and senior leadership team has already secured significant improvement to some aspects of the school's work. Priorities for further improvement have been identified and well thought-out plans are in place.
- The academy trust provides good support to the school's leaders. Governors are well informed and supportive. They challenge and hold leaders to account well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of lessons across the whole school, including in the early years. Phonics sessions were also observed. Several lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed assemblies, playtimes, the school's breakfast provision and lunchtimes in all phases. Inspectors listened to pupils from all key stages reading.
- A large number of discussions were held with the Principal, those responsible for leading aspects of the school, such as literacy, numeracy, e-safety, safeguarding, and with subject and pastoral leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with representatives from the governing body and the academy trust. A number of documents were scrutinised.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' books in lessons and reviewed a wider sample from all year groups covering the majority of subjects.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from all year groups except Year 11, because these pupils were on examination leave.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including school improvement plans, action plans, information on pupils' progress in all years in English, mathematics and science, and documents linked to behaviour and safety. Records of meetings, reports and policies, including those relating to the leadership and governance of the school, were scrutinised.
- Inspectors took into account the 11 responses to Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire, and a number of phone calls to Ofsted from parents during the inspection.
- The 106 staff questionnaire responses were taken into account, alongside conversations with teaching and support staff across the whole school.

Inspection team

Rebecca Lawton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Mark Wilson	Additional Inspector
Tracey Greenough	Additional Inspector
Hilary Ward	Additional Inspector
Neil Mackenzie	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Unity Academy Blackpool became an academy in September 2013. It is sponsored by the Fylde Coast Academy Trust.
- This is a smaller than average sized school, providing education for children from the early years to the end of Key Stage 4. Children in the early years attend the Reception class full time. The number of pupils on roll is rising quickly.
- There is an on-site nursery as well as a children's centre. These are subject to a separate inspection and the reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is small but rising.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are above average. The number of pupils on the special educational needs register, however, can fluctuate widely during the school year.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is much higher than average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at times other than the start of the Reception Year is much higher than that typically seen. More than 200 pupils moved in or out of the school during the academic year 2013/2014.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 and Year 11.
- No pupils attend any alternative provision.
- The school provides a free breakfast for pupils.
- There have been significant changes in staffing since the academy opened, with a number changing posts or assuming new leadership positions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, so that it is all at least good, and thereby further improve achievement in all key stages, but particularly in Key Stage 3, by:
 - ensuring all staff have consistently high expectations of the standards pupils in Key Stage 3 can achieve in all subjects
 - ensuring all staff are teaching literacy and developing pupils' writing skills
 - raising expectations of pupils' presentation of work in all subjects
 - ensuring secondary phase staff make consistent use of the whole-school marking policy, so that all pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve their work
 - increasing opportunities for the most able pupils, particularly those in Years 5 and 6, to write independently and at length without unnecessary support
 - ensuring all teachers have sufficient skills to prepare good-quality learning opportunities for those pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
 - providing effective support to help pupils manage their own behaviour and develop good relationships outside lessons
 - increasing the effectiveness of practices designed to help pupils to understand how to stay safe online.
- Increase the impact of leadership and management by making sure middle leaders make sufficient checks on the effectiveness of actions to raise standards and improve pupils' behaviour.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The new academy appointed an effective Principal who has successfully secured improvements across the school. A large number of staff, parents and pupils commented on the influential leadership of the Principal that has been instrumental in driving a fast pace of improvement, and bringing together the school community.
- While leaders have demonstrated their ability to drive improvement, there is still more to do. Behaviour outside lessons, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, mainly in Key Stage 3, still require further improvement. Leaders have not yet ensured that all pupils have sufficient support to help them stay safe online, as curriculum coverage is not yet sufficient to meet the needs of pupils who join during the school year.
- Leaders have implemented a well-informed action plan which has secured improvements to pupils' progress, but the legacy of previous weak achievement means that some pupils remain below where they should be in terms of their attainment and too many pupils have gaps in their learning.
- Leaders and governors understand the school's current position and have an accurate view of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. They use good quality information and procedures to check on the impact of teaching and take action to ensure the school continues to improve.
- The academy trust provides some high quality support. While some training needs have yet to be met, many staff have access to a significant number of good training and development opportunities, as well as support for the day-to-day running of the academy. This allows school leaders to focus their attention on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
- Overall, school staff have worked successfully to tackle discrimination and secure equality of opportunity. Much of the variability between the academic performance of different groups of pupils, such as girls, boys, and those supported by the pupil premium, has been successfully reduced. However, the few pupils for whom English is an additional language do not yet receive good enough support and guidance to enable them to learn well in all lessons.
- Leaders have appointed a number of additional staff to work with parents and support pupils' well-being. The work of these staff has strengthened relationships with parents and the community and improved attendance, child protection and safeguarding practices. This is having a significant positive impact on helping those pupils who join school at times other than the normal start times to settle into school life.
- Many middle leaders are relatively new to their posts. They are very enthusiastic and have implemented a number of actions to improve provision, such as introducing an online bank of resources to help staff improve pupils' literacy skills. However, middle leaders do not always check carefully enough on how well these new resources and actions are boosting progress and raising standards.
- The primary physical education and sports funding is being used effectively. Pupils benefit from good quality coaching and resources. Extra-curricular sports opportunities and competitions are attended well by pupils across the school. The pupil premium funds are also put to good use.
- Provision to improve pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well planned and pupils take part in a wide range of worthwhile activities during their time in school. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain through a comprehensive curriculum which helps them to learn about democracy, morality and the wider community. For example, pupils vote for a school council.
- Arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. However, the programme for helping pupils to stay safe on-line is not planned well enough to ensure that the high proportion of pupils who join the school during the school year have access to it. Pupils are given good quality advice, information and guidance on how to choose qualification subjects and how to continue with education or employment. Good-quality work experience opportunities and an on-site careers coach prepare pupils particularly well for their next stage of education.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors monitor very well the large budget for those pupils supported by the pupil premium. They ensure this funding is used to improve not only these pupils' academic achievement but also the quality of pastoral support for them. For example, spare physical education kit is available for all pupils and clothes washing facilities are available within school.
 - Governors are well trained and have robust procedures to support and promote their high expectations. They continue to challenge leaders to improve the school further. They support staff to evaluate their own performance in relation to outstanding trust partner schools, as well as similar four to 16 age-range schools.

- Governors have a good awareness of the quality of teaching across the school and link staff performance to pay increments. The academy council members have a broad balance of skills and understanding of data. Governors have a good understanding of how to monitor pupils' performance data against national comparisons in order to judge the school's effectiveness.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. In classes, behaviour is good and low-level disruption is rare. Outside lessons, behaviour is not so positive.
- Teachers have successfully improved pupils' behaviour in class, and a calm working environment is the norm during most lessons. Pupils are helped to develop into mature, respectful learners and are now making improved rates of progress as a result.
- Attitudes to learning are significantly better now than when the academy first opened. Pupils attend more regularly, are more punctual and work harder.
- Nevertheless, a number of pupils, in Key Stage 3 in particular, do not take care of work in their books in all subjects, and handwriting and presentation is very untidy.
- Behaviour outside lessons, mainly for secondary age pupils, requires improvement. When staff are present and help pupils to manage their relationships and basic routines, such as queuing, behaviour is good. However, when staff are less visible, and pupils are required to manage their own behaviour independently, such as at lunchtimes, pupils are not able to sustain this good standard and some display immature or negative attitudes.
- A very small number of parents and pupils expressed concerns about bullying in school. Logs of incidents show that there have been a few incidents in the past. In conversation, pupils described how to report any bullying if it occurs and were confident staff would address their concerns. The number of recorded incidents of unkind behaviour is low and records show this has decreased over time.
- Behaviour in the primary phase is good. The staff and pupils have very good relationships and lessons are characterised by good humour and a positive working atmosphere.
- At playtimes in the primary phase, pupils play together and make friends easily. Any pupils who are on their own are quickly spotted and staff or pupils engage them in games or conversations, so that no-one is without a friend. Many pupils arrive and leave school during the school year. The established pupils are very accepting of new faces and changes. All appear willing and eager to play with any new pupils and to develop a range of friendship groups.
- Attendance is improving, and is now generally in line with the average at the end of Year 6 and Year 11.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement. Pupils feel safe on the school site and generally know how to keep themselves safe. However, the school's work to ensure that pupils know how to stay safe online requires improvement.
- Too many of the older pupils are not sufficiently aware of the dangers of irresponsible behaviour and the impact of social media. This is in some part due to the high number of pupils who join school at times other than the start of the school year, which means it is possible that these pupils miss some of the lessons on e-safety. The curriculum does not currently re-enforce this aspect enough throughout the school year.
- In all other respects, safety procedures are robust and all staff have had sufficient child protection training and guidance.
- Risk assessments for the large number of trips, excursions, work experience and cultural events that take place are thorough and help to ensure pupils are kept safe at different locations.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching over time has improved but it is not yet good enough to secure consistently good learning and progress for all pupils in all year groups. This is because not all staff consistently follow all the good quality procedures and policies that have been put in place.
- In the primary phase, teaching is good. Teachers have improved pupils' comprehension and literacy skills well. The programme they have created has had a positive impact on pupils' progress and attainment.

However, in Years 5 and 6, the most able pupils are not given enough opportunities to write at length, although they are capable of doing so. This means they are not as well prepared for the next stage of learning as they could be.

- Despite their overall good progress in Key Stages 1 and 2, many pupils start Key Stage 3 at levels below those expected for their age. The teaching they receive across Key Stage 3 does not always give enough attention to the teaching of pupils' literacy skills and this means progress in Key Stage 3 is not fast enough. For example, not all staff ensure pupils answer questions in full sentences, nor consistently correct pupils' punctuation or grammatical errors.
- Mathematics, on the other hand, is taught well across all year groups, and it is important to note that all staff are supporting literacy and numeracy within form-time activities. This is helping pupils to practise and build skills over time.
- There is a small, but increasing, number of pupils for whom English is as an additional language. Most are at an early stage of learning English and need significant support. Currently not all staff have sufficient training or experience to provide these pupils with the additional resources they need to access the curriculum and this holds back their learning and progress.
- Assessment across the whole school is a strength. Pupils' attainment levels are accurate and checked regularly. Predictions at the end of Key Stage 4 were within 1% of the results last year. This was due to a rigorous system of regular monitoring and the effective use of professional advice from across the trust. As a result, teachers have an accurate knowledge of how well pupils are doing in different subjects.
- While assessment is sharp and accurate, teachers in the primary phases are more effective than their secondary colleagues in giving pupils good-quality feedback on how to improve their work. Not all secondary staff consistently follow the agreed school policy, therefore, there is variability in the impact of marking and feedback on pupils' progress and in the level of challenge provided in class. This is most evident in Key Stage 3.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are taught well and their particular needs are met. Their academic progress and pastoral development are both supported well, and they make good progress from their starting points.
- The regular teaching of early reading is having a very good impact on pupils' skills and progress, particularly in the primary phase. Pupils read well and often and most teachers give ample time to reading across the curriculum.
- Many pupils struggle with their handwriting in all phases. The additional support provided has had some success in improving this skill. However, because not all teachers demand that pupils give time and attention to presentation, some writing remains untidy and difficult to read. This limits the ability of teachers to give feedback to pupils on the accuracy or content of their work.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have good relationships with pupils, and there has been a marked improvement in attitudes to learning within the classroom. Engaging lessons and clear policies have increased pupils' motivation and enthusiasm for learning and progress is improving as a result.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children start school with skills and abilities significantly below those expected for their age. Many have poor motor skills, low levels of language and weak social skills. In the Reception class, good quality teaching ensures children make good progress in tackling these issues. In addition, external agencies and specialists are brought in to help to identify and support children's needs quickly. These children achieve well from their starting points.
- In their first year of school, children are supported very well and rapidly improve their literacy skills and ability to read. Pupils who are currently in Years 1 and 2 are significantly ahead of where pupils of their age were at this point last year. This is because of improvements in the quality of teaching and support.
- In the most recent Year 1 national phonics check, the proportion of pupils reaching the standard expected for their age was below the national figure, which is unsurprising given their low abilities on entry to school. Nevertheless, pupils' reading skills in all classes are supported well and improving quickly.
- In Key Stage 1, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their starting points, although progress in writing is not as strong as in the other subjects. Bespoke support for pupils, often provided in small groups, is helping to improve their writing.
- In Key Stage 2, pupils continue to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Although standards in all three subjects at the end of Year 6 remain below average, pupils make good progress from their different starting points. The most able generally make good progress in all key stages although some, particularly in Years 5 and 6, could do better in writing. Currently, they do not have enough

opportunity to write at length or are given too much unnecessary guidance that restricts rather than supports their progress.

- In all year groups, many pupils leave and an even more join, during the school year. Consequently, statistical comparisons with national figures are largely unhelpful. Similarly, formal examinations at the end of key stages record the learning of several pupils who have not been taught in this school for most of their education and do not necessarily reflect the work of this school accurately. Because of this, inspectors looked at the school's information about each pupil within the school, in order to judge the progress they had made from their starting points.
- It is clear that pupils' progress slows in Key Stage 3. In this key stage, pupils do not always have their literacy needs met well and some pupils are limited by their weak writing skills. Current progress in mathematics presents a stronger picture and is roughly in line with national expectations.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is spent wisely on improving the literacy and numeracy skills of eligible pupils. The extra support is having some success in closing attainment gaps. However, improvement is not as fast as it might be because middle leaders do not always monitor the effectiveness of the support.
- In Key Stage 4, pupils' progress is improving. In mathematics, pupils' attainment is almost in line with national expectations and in English, attainment has significantly improved. Data for this year indicate that standards are likely to be nearer to the national average. Some pupils' progress and attainment were too low last year, although current progress shows a significant improvement. Even so, over time too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment and do not exceed expectations in science.
- By the end of Year 6 in 2014, disadvantaged pupils' attainment was roughly one national curriculum level behind their peers nationally, in both English and mathematics. Within the school, disadvantaged pupils were ahead of other pupils in mathematics and writing by over a term. In reading they were at the same standard as their classmates. In 2014, the progress made by Year 6 disadvantaged pupils was more rapid than that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. However, in Year 11 disadvantaged pupils' progress was somewhat slower than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.
- By the end of Year 11, disadvantaged pupils were about half a grade behind other students nationally in English, and more than a grade behind in mathematics. Within the school, where the disadvantaged pupils were the majority group, these pupils gained GCSEs that were roughly one grade below other pupils in the year group. However, this is not necessarily reflective of their progress within this school as so many join and leave in all year groups. Progress rates for all disadvantaged pupils are similar to their in-school peers in almost all subjects.
- The proportion of pupils who gained five GCSEs at A* to C grades last year was below the national average. However, this data includes a large proportion of pupils who joined this school very late in their education and is, therefore, only a limited reflection of this academy's impact on their achievement. The school does not enter pupils early for external examinations.
- The achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good. Effective provision ensures all have good support and access to routes to further education or suitable next steps that meet their needs well.
- The progress of the small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is limited. This is because many have only been in school for a very short time and there are some shortcomings in the support provided for this group.

The early years provision

is good

- The early checks made by staff on children's skills and knowledge when they first start school ensure that children have the support they need to make progress from, in many cases, significantly low skills on entry.
- Specialist support assists children's development very well, particularly helping to improve their speech and language. Good quality teaching of letters and the sounds they make serves to improve children's reading ability at a swift pace.
- Children form good relationships with the staff who work with them and their skills in all areas of learning are developed effectively by well-trained staff. Although many children join during the academic year and have only a limited time in the early years, the proportion reaching a good level of development is increasing. This proportion is below the national average but, children make good progress from their starting points. Their achievement is good.
- Teachers' assessments of children's progress are regular and robust. Good-quality work with professionals from across the trust helps to make sure the judgements about children's progress and skills are accurate and staff have access to the latest good ideas and practice.

- Both indoors and outside, children's learning is strong. Children make good use of well-chosen resources that engage their interest and promote learning. Literacy and mark making are continuous features of provision and boys and girls enjoy writing and reading. Interesting topics promote children's investigation and they are able to sustain concentration on tasks without supervision.
- Children play together well and are kind and respectful. Their progress in improving their social skills and communication is clear from their conversations with staff and with one another. During their time in the early years, children develop habits that prepare them well for learning in Year 1.
- Leadership of the early years is good. Leaders have ensured that the early years provision keeps children safe and supports their well-being and health as well as their academic development. Members of staff are all well qualified and several have additional expertise that helps to support children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well.
- Children are happy, behave well and enjoy coming to school.

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

Unique reference number	139675
Local authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	450283

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	815
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Gutteridge
Principal	Christopher Lickiss
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01253 457981
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