

Inspection of Unified Academy

Chart Lane South, Dorking RH5 4DB

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Inadequate

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend Unified Academy face significant social, emotional and mental health difficulties. In the past, many have struggled to cope in school. While many pupils settle in quickly and attend more regularly than they did in their previous schools, absence is still too high. As a result, too many pupils do not consistently benefit from what the school has to offer.

Those pupils who attend regularly enjoy school. They develop excellent relationships with staff. Pupils make friends with each other. However, bullying can sometimes be an issue. Staff tackle any issues consistently.

Pupils feel a sense of achievement from learning. One pupil told the lead inspector, 'The staff know how to help me here.' This was a view shared by many. However, while leaders have improved the curriculum significantly, pupils are not always taught the basics that they have missed from primary school before tackling more complex learning.

Many pupils are anxious and worry about what they have going on in their lives. Gordi the Gecko and regular visits from dogs are a welcome distraction for pupils when things become challenging. The support pupils receive helps them to become more confident. They learn to manage their emotions and behaviours more effectively.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The principal and her team, supported effectively by the trust, have made significant and rapid improvements to all areas of the school since they took up their posts following the last inspection. The quality of education at Unified has improved a great deal. Leaders have designed a curriculum that offers pupils a broad range of learning experiences that help pupils academically, as well as socially and emotionally. This curriculum is ambitious for pupils and is now preparing them more effectively for the future.

Staff are knowledgeable about what they teach and why. Lessons are now taught more consistently across the school. As a result, pupils are learning more effectively and are making up lost ground. Importantly though, what they learn does not routinely take account of the significant gaps they have from their primary education. This means that the essential content pupils need to learn is not always identified well enough. Some areas of the curriculum are in the earlier stages of development. Leaders and staff are making tweaks so that the curriculum continues to improve.

Pupils often start at Unified well behind with their reading. This makes it difficult for them to cope with some of what they learn in lessons. Leaders have worked hard to promote a culture of reading and it is now becoming the norm for pupils to read

regularly. A range of books are available so that pupils can select books that interest them. Those who struggle to read receive tailored, well-planned support from staff. Phonics intervention is having a positive impact, although this is still developing. Pupils are now happier to read aloud in front of their peers, and do so confidently and fluently. The improvements leaders have made to the teaching of reading are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning across the curriculum.

Pupils' behaviour can be challenging. Some use poor language and some struggle to meet leaders' high expectations. However, staff are trained well in restorative approaches. Consequently, they know how to respond to different behaviours calmly and swiftly. When these strategies are not working, staff think creatively and find other solutions.

A wide range of trips and visitors to the school helps to develop pupils as rounded individuals. The personal development programme offers an extensive range of experiences for pupils, including boxing, 'eager entrepreneurs', coding, gym and photography. Pupils receive independent careers advice and are well supported when it is time for them to move on.

Highly experienced local governors and trustees provide suitable challenge and support to the school. They know the strengths and areas for improvement. They visit regularly to check for themselves. The chief executive officer, his deputy and central teams support the school effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. Staff have clear roles and responsibilities. The safeguarding team is highly trained and knowledgeable about safeguarding. Leaders regularly discuss pupils to ensure that the right support is in place. Extensive training has led to staff knowing what it is that they need to do if they spot something concerning about a pupil. Leaders take quick, effective action and work closely with other professionals to ensure that concerns are shared with the right people. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through the curriculum.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Too many pupils do not attend school often enough. This means that they do not consistently benefit from the education that the school has to offer. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly.
- Some of the developments in the curriculum are recent and are not fully embedded. In some subjects, leaders have not identified the knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn precisely enough. This means that, in these subjects, the curriculum does not address some of the significant gaps that pupils have

from their primary school education. Leaders need to further refine the curriculum in a small number of subjects to ensure that it is more closely matched to the needs of pupils.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	146527
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10241218
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jay Mercer
Principal	Annabelle Thomas
Website	www.unifiedacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	27 and 28 April 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Unified Academy is part of Orchard Hill College Academies Trust.
- A new principal, deputy principal and two assistant principals have been appointed since the last inspection in April 2019.
- The school provides education for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Some pupils have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- All pupils who attend the school are boys.
- The school currently uses four alternative education providers, all of which are unregistered.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

- This was the third routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the principal, the deputy principal and two assistant principals. They also held discussions with other staff who lead aspects of the school's work.
- The lead inspector held a discussion with representatives of the local governing body and board of trustees, including the chair of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the deputy chief executive officer of Orchard Hill College Academies Trust during the inspection.
- The lead inspector spoke to representatives from some of the alternative provisions used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading and English, personal development, art and photography, and food technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held further discussions about the curriculum and considered curriculum planning in a range of other subjects, including mathematics. They also looked at a range of pupils' work in these subjects.
- Inspectors checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff and pupils throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. Inspectors met with small groups of pupils during the inspection and spoke to pupils informally throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted Parent View. The views of staff were also considered through the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Shaun Jarvis, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alice Roberts

His Majesty's Inspector

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