

Inspection of Unified Academy

Chart Lane South, Dorking RH5 4DB

Inspection dates:	8 and 9 July 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Annabelle Thomas. This school is part of Orchard Hill College Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), John Prior, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ray Leclercq.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to be part of the school. They talk positively about the difference that the school has made to their lives. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Many pupils have experienced difficulties in other settings or have not attended regularly. The school works hard to foster a culture of belonging and inclusion. This is helping to develop pupils' self-esteem and confidence.

Behaviour around the school is generally calm and positive. This helps pupils to feel safe. Sometimes pupils can find it difficult to meet the school's high standards for behaviour. When this happens, they are given tailored support to help them. Pupils speak enthusiastically about being given a fresh start and being encouraged to try again when things go wrong. Relationships are fundamental to the school's success. Staff take time to build these with pupils. The school uses different strategies to support pupils to regulate their emotions.

Much work has been done to develop the school's curriculum since the previous inspection. Pupils learn a broad range of subjects and have the opportunity to gain a variety of qualifications, including in boxing and sports leadership, as well as GCSEs. However, many pupils have gaps in their learning. These are further exacerbated by pupils' low attendance. These gaps are not always identified by staff. As a result, pupils do not consistently learn as well as they should.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has developed an ambitious and well-structured curriculum. The curriculum has been carefully designed so that pupils repeatedly encounter key skills throughout their time at the school. The school's personal development programme further enhances the aspirational curriculum. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that the curriculum is consistently implemented in line with leaders' expectations to ensure pupils achieve well. In addition, while staff have a robust understanding of pupils' specific needs, sometimes pupils' individual targets are not precise enough. This means they do not always get the help they need.

The trust provides strong support to the school. Rigorous processes help leaders to accurately identify what help is needed to strengthen the work of the school. As a result, recent changes have been made to the structure of the provision for some pupils. It is too early to see the full impact of these.

Leaders are determined to provide a high-quality education for pupils. They are dedicated to ensuring that pupils leave the school with the qualifications they need to access the next stage of education or employment. Staff understand this vision. Their strong subject knowledge helps them to present key information to pupils in line with the school's planned curriculum. However, staff do not always check that pupils have secured the intended knowledge before learning moves on.

There is a strong focus on reading through the curriculum. A love of reading is promoted and pupils have the opportunity to read and listen to a wide range of texts throughout the school day. Staff check if pupils need more support with understanding what they read. The system for supporting younger pupils to learn to read is developing.

The school has cultivated an environment where safeguarding and behaviour are strongly prioritised. There is a clear vision to ensure pupils feels safe, valued and supported. Staff share this commitment and demonstrate vigilance in their day-to-day interactions. Due to the strong relationships, pupils trust the adults around them. This helps to maintain a calm and productive atmosphere.

This culture of care is reinforced through a well-structured personal, social and health education curriculum, tutor-time activities and assemblies that relate directly to pupils' social and emotional needs. Behavioural incidents are addressed swiftly and sensitively. Suspensions are used as a last resort and for the shortest amount of time possible.

Some pupils' attendance is persistently low. The school works hard to address the barriers which prevent pupils coming to school regularly. This includes adapting timetables, putting support plans in place and allocating time with Maui, the school dog. The attendance of some pupils has improved while there has been less impact for others.

Pupils' personal development is given a high priority. The school makes sure that pupils understand how to be healthy and safe. These themes are woven through the curriculum. There is a strong careers offer which helps pupils to identify their next steps. The school's supportive and aspirational approach supports pupils to know which post-16 options are available.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's work to address poor attendance has not been impactful for some pupils, who continue to be persistently absent. This means they develop gaps in their knowledge. The school should continue to embed strategies to ensure pupils attend regularly.
- Staff do not consistently use the school's assessment systems to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. This means that pupils do not always learn as much as they should. The school should ensure that staff understand how best to identify these gaps and tailor learning to address these effectively.
- Staff are not always clear on the small steps that some pupils need to take to achieve longer term outcomes. This means pupils do not always learn as well as they should.

The school should continue their work to develop the systems in place and ensure all staff know how to precisely identify the support that pupils need.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146527
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10379931
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	83
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ray Leclercq
CEO of the trust	John Prior
Principal	Annabelle Thomas
Website	www.unifiedacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 November 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Unified Academy is part of Orchard Hill College Academies Trust.
- The deputy principal and special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. 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.
- The school currently uses seven unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the principal, deputy principal and special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- The lead inspector met with six trustees and governors, including the chair of trustees.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, and food technology. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the confidential Ofsted staff survey and spoke to a range of staff and pupils about their views of the school.
- The inspectors took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text responses.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school development plan and school self-evaluation.

Inspection team

Sara Staggs, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Helen Middleton

Ofsted Inspector

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