

The United Learning Way (Independent Schools)

The Best in Everyone

United Learning independent schools are characterised by the very highest expectations in all areas to bring out the best in everyone. Every child is special and capable of extraordinary things. Their limitless potential flourishes in a culture of hard work and kindness. Every adult working in every United Learning school acts with the utmost respect, care, and professionalism – the highest standards come with the greatest attention to the wellbeing of all.

These expectations are exemplified by calm and purposeful classrooms and a leading-edge extra-curricular programme. A culture of fairness and trust is underpinned by strong and effective school systems. Staff are present and visible, warmly modelling the behaviours we expect, ensuring that there are no hidden corners in our schools: all classrooms and common spaces reflect our shared values.

Mobile phones should not be seen or heard in our schools. Teachers are free to plan, teach and assess, and department time is devoted to curriculum planning and sharing subject knowledge.

We expect pupils to complete homework and independent study throughout their school life. Habits of revision and application are developed throughout the school year, culminating in formal assessments at the end of each year for each subject studied within the curriculum. There is a culture of openness and transparency in group-wide assessments and schools are encouraged to share, learn and 'steal with pride' from the highest performing trust schools. Children's academic progress and achievement is of the highest priority throughout their time in the trust.

We have high expectations of uniform standards and all our schools with Sixth Forms have an appropriate dress code. We are ambitious for all within an inclusive and highly aspirational culture.

We expect our pupils to challenge and support each other to be the best version of themselves.

Our schools are seen as leading providers of outstanding and competitively priced education, both locally and nationally. They have enviable facilities and an extensive and diverse extra-curricular programme. Our schools seek to support opportunities for talented individuals to gain access to our schools. This is done through the award of generous bursaries in carefully considered circumstances. Other areas of school life benefit from a range of scholarships to support recruitment.

Powerful Knowledge

Each school's curriculum empowers pupils to understand and shape the world around them. Whatever their starting point, our schools ensure that every child is taken beyond their immediate experience. They do this by delivering a broad and ambitious curriculum, carefully sequenced and skillfully taught. In each subject the curriculum provides a coherent programme of study which develops knowledge and skills term by term and year by year, from EYFS through to sixth form. The United Learning Curriculum, with associated resources website, is available to all our schools should they choose to adopt it.

Subject specialism is at the heart of our schools' curriculum. As well as visiting schools, supporting Heads of Department/Subject Leads, and producing curriculum resources, our subject advisers are a key part of our school improvement team. We believe that no teacher should teach in isolation, so in subjects not covered by central advisers, such as some Sixth Form subjects, we provide collaboration and support through subject networks.

Each school's curriculum is based on the understanding that 'each subject area has some set of facts that, if committed to long-term memory, aids problem-solving by freeing working memory' (Deans for Impact, 2016). We gradually develop this long-term memory in each subject by building understanding over time and giving frequent opportunities to return to prior knowledge and apply it in new contexts. Barack Rosenshine's principles of instruction provide a shared language around the characteristics of effective teaching. As a result of our Group commitment to Rosenshine's principles our schools generally use the I/we/you model in our lesson planning, so that learning tends to follow a pattern of teacher explanation followed by guided practice and culminating in independent practice. Doug Lemov's 'Teach Like A Champion' (TLAC) techniques take this work even further by providing concrete, specific, actionable advice for teachers to practise over time.

Literacy and the mastery of language is a continuing priority for United Learning. We encourage our schools to create a whole-school reading programme. This exposes all pupils to challenging, thought-provoking books, and to thousands of words a week that they may otherwise not encounter.

Because we want all pupils to access the whole curriculum, we expect all schools to deliver a three-year Key Stage 3. No curriculum narrowing takes place and the National Curriculum is a minimum expectation across years 7-9.

Our standalone prep schools to prepare their pupils for the next stage of their education, ensuring that they are able to access the secondary school of their choice.

Education with Character

We value an education in which development of character is as important as exam success. Our schools, therefore, all have a clear pathway to promote leadership, service to others, working independently and in teams, compassion, and courage. We want pupils to look back on their schooling as a time of enjoyment and happiness which has inspired and challenged them in equal measure and prepared them for the ups and downs of life.

All our schools are expected to have excellent co-curricular programmes which are systematically monitored to ensure equality of education for every child. We emphasise links with the community and opportunities for voluntary and other service activities. Destinations are as much a part of the 'outcomes' we seek for our pupils as exam grades. We expect schools to have clear programmes of careers advice and guidance, with the greatest support going to the pupils with the greatest need.

Sport, Music and the Arts are key components of each school's curriculum and co-curricular programme. We have trust-wide networks in these areas and our subject advisers lead and share best practice throughout the trust. We believe in the transformative power of creativity and want all our students to be exposed to cultural events beyond their immediate experience. Sport, Music and the Arts enable young people to explore other worlds, to test their own physical capacity, resilience, and endurance, to achieve things they did not believe themselves capable of achieving.

Continuous Improvement

Collaboration is at the heart of our work with all our schools. However good we are, we can always be better. We believe United Learning is unique in enabling us to share widely across the whole country, across primary and secondary phases, and across state and independent institutions. This means we are always learning from each other as well as visiting leading-edge schools and trusts from outside the Group. We constantly strive to be better; we steal with pride, and always endeavour to give the children in our schools the best possible opportunities. High levels of attainment and progress are expected in every United Learning school.

We have a team dedicated to continuous professional development who plan and deliver central programmes and conferences, and who quality assure Career Professional Development in all our schools.

Centrally, school improvement is delivered through termly meetings with each Head and Chair of Governors and annual Review and Support days when the Head of Independent Schools or Regional Director – Independent Primary spend time talking to staff and pupils and visiting lessons. The Independent Team work closely with schools to ensure we are constantly improving and evolving. For our highest priority schools, more support and structure are provided to ensure improvement is rapid and sustained.

We provide visits and immersion opportunities for all Heads and senior leaders in Trust schools. Termly network meetings for all Heads of Department are led by subject advisers and provide valuable and timely leadership support. Trust-wide conferences cover a variety of topics such as behaviour, teaching and learning, pupil premium achievement, and financial management. Heads regularly meet their colleagues and there is a collegial culture with everyone happy and willing to support others.

Our annual surveys for pupils, parents and staff provide robust feedback on our progress towards our goals. They enable us to identify schools in need of support, and schools able to provide it.

Leadership in Every Role

Every adult in the school is a leader. In every word, tone, and gesture, they set the direction and expectation. United Learning expect every adult to take responsibility and the initiative to do what is right for the pupils. All those in formal leadership positions create the climate and culture in which others work. They demand the highest standards, build a performance culture, develop their teams, and create the space for others to lead. All leaders listen, grow relationships, act with integrity and care and expect the best from themselves and others in building a successful, happy, and confident school.

Leaders at all levels have access to centrally run leadership programmes. Newly appointed Heads have induction support and a mentor. We draw on expertise in the Group to deliver an annual round of 'Aspiring to Middle Leadership', 'Aspiring to Senior Leadership' and 'Aspiring to Headship' courses. Additionally, we ask our schools to provide leadership opportunities as we believe development within one's own school is the most important and impactful way to sustainably improve.

Student leadership is equally important, and we want students to be given opportunities to take responsibility and initiative. Opportunities to lead in school and across the trust are extensive, with leadership opportunities for every child, every year.

We are United in our drive to be the best place to learn and the best place to teach.