

Buckinghamshire UTC

Oxford Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP21 8PB

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Students are not doing well enough in English, mathematics and science at key stage 4. Their overall progress has been well below the national average for the last three years.
- The differences in rates of progress at key stage 4 for students who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged compared with others nationally are too wide.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Expectations of what students can achieve are too low in some subjects, and so students do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders' actions to tackle weaknesses in students' literacy have not been effective. Consequently, students' writing skills in key stage 4 are below those expected for their age.
- Rates of attendance are too low, in particular for disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders' recent actions to improve attendance have not yet had time to bear fruit.
- Although reducing over time, students' rates of exclusion remain above national averages.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed principal has brought a renewed sense of purpose to the school. She has quickly strengthened the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and has improved the school's systems for tracking students' progress.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Students feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe.
- Outcomes in vocational subjects at key stage 4 are consistently strong because the quality of teaching in these subjects is effective.
- Leadership, teaching and outcomes in the sixth form are good. The curriculum provides students with access to high-quality vocational experiences.
- In 2017, all students went on to appropriate education, employment or training.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students in key stage 4 make progress that is at least in line with national averages in English, mathematics and science by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve
 - setting work that is sufficiently challenging and that allows students to make rapid progress in their learning
 - improving students' writing skills in all subjects.
- Improve rates of attendance for students in key stage 4, including for disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Continue to enforce the school's behaviour policy so that fixed-term exclusions fall to national-average levels.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership requires improvement because, over time, leaders and governors have not acted quickly enough to tackle weak outcomes at key stage 4, inconsistent teaching and low rates of attendance. In particular, students continue to make progress in English, mathematics and science that is well below that found nationally.
- On her appointment in September 2017, the principal rightly took the view that improving teaching and learning was her key priority. Following a period of high turnover in staffing, she has succeeded in bringing much-needed stability to the teaching team.
- The principal has been proactive in securing the help of the local teaching school, and also a nearby grammar school, to provide additional training for teachers. Teachers confirm that this support has helped them to gain new skills in the classroom. In the midst of a challenging recruitment climate, the principal has made some key appointments in English and science. As a result, the overall quality of teaching is beginning to improve. However, the quality of teaching across the school remains inconsistent.
- The special educational needs coordinator uses additional funding to provide tailored support for disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Consequently, these students are beginning to make more rapid progress than previously, in particular in Year 10. Overall, however, the differences between the progress made by disadvantaged students compared to other students nationally are diminishing too slowly. In addition, those students who need help to improve their reading and writing skills are not catching up with their peers quickly enough.
- The principal has deservedly won the trust and confidence of staff, governors and parents and carers because of her ambition for the achievement of all students, and her fierce commitment to the values of the university technical college (UTC). Staff morale is high. Staff are proud to work at the UTC and feel that leaders support them well. One member of staff said: 'This is an environment that helps me to grow professionally and personally. You get the support you need.'
- Parents are increasingly supportive of the school. Many value the distinctive vocational curriculum that the UTC offers. One parent, who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, wrote of their child: 'The support has been amazing. He has been made to feel safe and able to learn effectively. The school is well led and I believe he will leave school ready for the workforce and with great skills and opportunities!'
- The well-established vocational curriculum is the most distinctive and successful feature of the school's provision. In keeping with the school's mission, all students engage with employers through their chosen specialism. Strong links with national companies, as well as with businesses and charities locally, give students access to a rich and varied range of work-related learning opportunities, particularly in the sixth form.
- By the time they reach the sixth form, students are able to study for industry-specific

qualifications that are highly valued in the workplace. Consequently, all students who leave in Year 11, as well as those who leave in Year 13, go on to meaningful next steps in education, employment or training.

- Leaders ensure that students have the opportunity to reflect on topical issues, and learn about the society they live in. Students, in particular those in the sixth form, benefit from a well-planned programme of personal, social, health and economic education that includes input from relevant external speakers. As a result, students are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- Governors used the external review of governance commissioned after the last inspection as a catalyst to sharpen the strategic oversight they bring to their work. The formation of two committees, one focused on teaching and learning and the other on finance, has brought greater precision to governors' work.
- A national leader of governance has helped to improve governors' skills of analysis so that they can hold leaders to account more effectively. Minutes of meetings confirm that governors are now beginning to draw on a wider range of evidence to ask more challenging questions of leaders.
- The governing body has been through a period of turbulence. The new chair of governors was appointed very recently. However, there is a clear unity of purpose in the governing body. Governors are committed to the UTC ethos, and at the same time recognise their responsibility to drive improvement in outcomes for students in key stage 4. They have correctly identified the need to improve literacy as one of the main barriers to students' progress.
- Governors carry out their duties diligently. They keep their own training up to date and take care to ensure that the school's safeguarding policy is followed. Governors have been successful in balancing the school's finances after a troubled period. They ensure that additional funding for disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are spent appropriately.
- Governors are now seeking to secure the long-term future of the school by exploring membership of a multi-academy trust (MAT). Discussions with a potential local MAT are at an advanced stage.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding has a high profile in the school. Relationships between staff and students are warm. Checks on the suitability of all those who work or volunteer in the school meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors have undertaken appropriate training in keeping students safe. Staff are alert to any signs that a student may be at risk of harm. There are clear procedures in place for staff to share any concerns that they may have about a student.
- The designated safeguarding leads are tenacious in ensuring that vulnerable students and their families receive timely and effective support from outside agencies when

required.

- Leaders take their responsibilities for health and safety seriously. Risk assessments for work experience placements and for all activities both in and out of school are up to date and thorough.
- Students say that they feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe, in particular when online. They know whom to speak to if they are worried about themselves or a friend.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent, in particular at key stage 4. Since the previous inspection, there has been a high turnover of staff and, until this year, leaders have struggled to recruit enough specialist teachers in English, mathematics and science. Consequently, many students have significant gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding, and so they do not make the progress of which they are capable by the time they reach the end of Year 11.
- Where teaching is less effective, teachers' expectations are too low, and their planning does not take enough account of students' needs. In addition, teachers' questioning focuses too much on factual recall and not enough on reasoning. Consequently, students do not receive the stretch and challenge that they need to achieve higher grades. Misconceptions are not picked up early enough, and so students do not receive the timely feedback they need to improve their work, in particular their writing.
- Since the beginning of the current school year, there has been more stability in staffing. As a result, the quality of teaching is beginning to improve, in particular in English, mathematics and science. However, despite these green shoots, students in Year 11 are not currently on track to make similar rates of progress to students nationally in these subjects.
- Where teaching is effective, for example in computing, students make rapid progress because the work they are given to do is well matched to their needs. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to challenge students and make them think. Students relish learning new skills and they go about their studies with determination. They welcome feedback from their teachers and their peers, and are keen to learn from their mistakes.
- In English, stronger teaching since September is enabling students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the books they study. For example, as a result of the teacher's skilful questioning, Year 10 students were confidently able to identify aspects of the author's style in the novel 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'.
- Relationships between students and their teachers are generally positive. Students say that their teachers treat them like adults and are always willing to help them if they are stuck. The majority of students work hard and they take increasing care over their work, particularly in Year 10 since the start of this academic year. Occasionally, students lose concentration and distract others from their learning if teaching does not meet their needs closely enough.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good.
- The majority of students are polite and well mannered. They are proud of the UTC and enjoy talking to visitors about their work.
- Leaders provide good opportunities for students to contribute to the wider life of the school, for example in the school council. Leaders take what students have to say seriously. For example, following students' feedback, leaders made well-received changes to the science curriculum in key stage 4.
- Leaders' sharp focus on the world of work means that students learn quickly about the importance of professional appearance and behaviour. Speakers from local and national businesses give regular presentations to students on expectations and opportunities in the workplace. Consequently, the majority of students are self-confident, mature young adults who are ambitious for their own futures.
- Students feel safe in school and are taught how to keep themselves safe from a range of everyday risks, in particular when online. At break and lunchtimes, students in all year groups mix together well, and there is a generally harmonious atmosphere in the school.
- Students do not consider bullying to be an issue in the school. On the rare occasions when bullying does occur, students say that teachers are quick to intervene and resolve it. Leaders' own records demonstrate that incidents of bullying have declined and are now rare.
- Students are taught in form time and in assemblies to respect people who have different cultural backgrounds or religious beliefs to their own. They understand why all forms of discrimination are wrong. As a result, students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement.
- Many students who join the school at the start of Year 10 have a history of poor attendance in their previous schools. Rates of absence in the school have been much higher than those seen nationally for the last three years, in particular for disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Leaders are not complacent about attendance. They emphasise the importance of regular attendance in newsletters and parents' evenings. Teachers speak to students in form time and assemblies about the importance of not taking time off, either from school or work. Leaders also engage productively with the families of students who are persistently absent, seeking to remove any barriers that may prevent students from attending school.
- Rates of attendance for current students since September show a small improvement compared to the same period last year, including for disadvantaged students and those

who have SEN and/or disabilities. However, the proportion of students who are absent or persistently absent remains much higher than the national average.

- Many students join the school in Year 10 with a history of poor behaviour in their previous schools. For the last three years, exclusion rates for students in key stage 4 have been above national levels. The rate of exclusion was also high in the autumn term of the current school year. The majority of these exclusions were imposed on a small number of students who had been slow to settle into their new environment. Exclusion rates have fallen recently, but remain high.
- The majority of students behave well around the school and in lessons. They are respectful of their teachers and of each other. Students like and respond well to the recently introduced behaviour code. However, when tasks set do not meet students' needs, some students engage in off-task behaviour or produce work that falls short of their best effort.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Students join the school in Year 10, with prior attainment scores based on their performance in primary school that are in line with national averages. However, results of the baseline tests that leaders administer to new students suggest that many arrive in the UTC from key stage 3 with significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- Published outcomes for 2016 and 2017 show that students' overall rates of progress and attainment in a range of subjects at key stage 4 were well below average. Students' progress in English, mathematics and science declined further in 2017 compared to 2016. The progress made by disadvantaged students overall also declined between 2016 and 2017.
- Typically, students' outcomes in computing and construction have been strong, including for disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. A higher proportion of students than seen nationally achieve grades at 'merit' and above in BTEC National Diploma examinations.
- The improved tracking systems that leaders have introduced this year suggest that students in Year 11 with low prior attainment are making strong progress from their starting points. However, overall rates of progress in English, mathematics and science for students currently in Year 11 remain slow.
- In 2017, outcomes in construction were lower than in previous years. However, leaders have taken effective action to reverse this, and students in the current Year 11 are once more making rapid progress in construction as well as in computing.
- Early signs are that students in Year 10 are making better progress than previous cohorts in English, mathematics and science. Workbooks from a range of subjects show that students are completing their work conscientiously and that they are gaining skills, knowledge and understanding at a more rapid pace than in previous years. Students' work in vocational subjects also demonstrates strong progress since the start of the year, particularly in computing.
- Leaders rightly use additional funding for disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities to enable those students with weak literacy skills to catch up.

However, while the quality of teaching in English has improved, students' reading and writing skills remain below those expected for their age.

- When they reach the end of Year 11, all students progress to meaningful and appropriate next steps, either to the UTC's own sixth form, further education, employment or training. Consequently, despite their below-national-average outcomes in English, mathematics and science, students in key stage 4 are prepared well for their future lives and careers.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The 16 to 19 study programmes are good because students benefit from effective teaching and a stimulating and exciting curriculum offer, which give rise to consistently strong outcomes.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the sixth form. They rightly believe that the curriculum is a particular strength. Students have access to a rich and varied programme of study that includes well-designed work placements, input from national and local businesses and the opportunity to study for well-regarded specialist qualifications in construction or computing.
- Students achieve outcomes in their studies that are in line with national averages for academic courses and above national averages for vocational courses.
- Leaders responded to students' requests for access to a wider range of A-level courses by working with the neighbouring grammar school to offer A-level mathematics last year. All three students who sat the examination passed. Leaders in both schools are keen to offer other A levels as the demand grows.
- Teachers' planning is effective in meeting students' needs and ensuring that they are well prepared for their examination courses. Teachers ensure that the work that students do is challenging. Students respond well. They concentrate in lessons and push themselves to achieve the best they can. For example, students in computing worked at the limits of their knowledge and understanding to produce high-quality computer-aided animations.
- Leaders work productively with partner businesses to ensure that students can access appropriate work placements. In addition, representatives from local and national computing and construction businesses visit the UTC to give students invaluable insights into the world of work.
- Students are encouraged to play a full role in the community. For example, a group of students worked with a local charity to produce a promotional video about the charity's work. Students seized this opportunity to contribute to their community, while at the same time developing their skills in scriptwriting, film-making and editing.
- Students have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities, which help to raise their aspirations. These activities include residential trips and visits to universities and local businesses. Through fundraising and engagement with local charities, students recognise the importance of their role as active citizens.
- Those students who need to retake GCSEs in English or mathematics do well. The

proportion of students who increase their grades in these subjects is higher than the national average.

- Students in the sixth form behave well, and their attendance is above the average for the school. They are smartly turned out and act as good role models for students in key stage 4.
- Leaders ensure that students benefit from impartial careers advice. Students confirm that they receive helpful information which helps them to make considered decisions about their next steps.
- Typically, all students in the sixth form go on to appropriate courses in further or higher education, to employment or to apprenticeships. As a result, students in the sixth form are prepared well for their next steps.

School details

Unique reference number	139434
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10040931

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

Type of school	Secondary technical
School category	University technical college
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	147
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Baljt Dhillon
Principal	Sarah Newall
Telephone number	01296 388459
Website	www.buckinghamshireutc.co.uk
Email address	reception@buckinghamshireutc.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 January 2016

Information about this school

- The UTC opened in September 2013. It has students in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13.
- The new principal took up her post in September 2017. She is supported for the equivalent of one day a week by the executive principal.
- The UTC is smaller than the average secondary school. The sixth form is also smaller than average.
- The UTC's mission is to build productive relationships in the IT and construction industries to create a curriculum which enables students to achieve their full potential and be successful in life, learning and their future careers.

- The UTC is sponsored by Buckinghamshire New University and Aylesbury College.
- A range of business partners from IT and construction support the work of the UTC. These include Taylor Wimpey, Intel Security, Cisco Systems and Esri UK.
- The proportion of girls attending the UTC is much smaller than average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of students who have SEN and/or disabilities is higher than that found nationally.
- The UTC does not make use of alternative provision.
- The UTC does not meet the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 22 lessons to observe learning. All these observations were carried out jointly with a school leader. Inspectors also paid visits to form-time sessions.
- Inspectors held several meetings with school leaders to discuss and evaluate various aspects of the school's work.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and four other members of the governing body, one of whom is an associate governor who provides advice and support.
- Inspectors held meetings with a group of staff members and a group of subject leaders. The views of staff were also taken into account by analysing 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered the views of students by holding meetings with groups from different years and talking to students in lessons and around the school. Inspectors analysed six students' responses to Ofsted's online survey.
- Parents' views were taken into account by evaluating 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, including nine written responses.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings and assessment information.
- Safeguarding procedures at the school were reviewed.

Inspection team

Gary Holden, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Derrick Baughan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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