

UTC Oxfordshire

Greenwood Way, Harwell, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 6BZ

Inspection dates

22–23 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Strong leadership by the principal and governors has forged excellent business partnerships and a clear vision across the university technical college (UTC).
- Partnerships with innovative employers and industry experts provide a wealth of rich and well-focused learning experiences. These underpin the UTC's engaging curriculum for science and engineering.
- Very positive relationships exist between staff and pupils and they share high aspirations. Leaders do all they can to offer flexible study pathways. Pupils, including some who had previously struggled to engage with education, are inspired by the UTC's ethos.
- The work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pastoral care is a strength of the UTC. A rich range of opportunities prepares pupils very well for the next stages of their education or employment.
- Effective assessment on entry to the school ensures appropriate provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. These pupils are supported very well and make strong progress from their starting points.
- Teachers know their classes very well. Typically, they teach lessons that stimulate pupils' interest and help them to build their understanding, skills and confidence.
- There is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect across the UTC. Pupils' conduct around the school is calm and orderly, and they generally apply themselves very well to their learning.
- Sixth formers typically achieve well in their chosen A-level and vocational courses. Bespoke advice and guidance support them to progress to their chosen university courses or high-level apprenticeships.
- On occasion, where teaching does not capture pupils' interest, their engagement level is not as high. A minority then cause minor disruption and the pace of learning slows.
- Progress in mathematics is very good and there have been recent improvements in teaching and learning in English. Overall progress is now good. However, there have not yet been sufficiently rapid improvements in outcomes for some groups of pupils.
- After a dip last year, overall attendance has improved. However, not all groups of pupils attend in line with the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance teaching and learning, particularly in English, so that pupils can catch up where there are previous gaps in their learning.
- Improve the attendance of pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable.
- Enable pupils and students to make more rapid progress, by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - use skilful questioning to promote deeper thinking, particularly for the most able
 - promote pupils' application of their literacy, communication and mathematical skills across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal's commitment and passion to the UTC's vision are infectious, and his support and enthusiasm are highly valued by pupils, staff, and parents and carers. Together, senior leaders have forged positive working relationships and embedded a strong learning ethos since the UTC was opened in 2015. Many of the pupils gaining places at the UTC in Year 10 have had poor prior experiences of school. The principal and his team successfully broaden pupils' horizons and raise their aspirations. As one parent commented, 'The school is led by an absolutely brilliant principal who is first class and is leading the school in the correct direction.'
- The trust, senior leaders, governors and staff are rightly proud of the excellent facilities and opportunities offered by UTC Oxfordshire, and have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. There is a shared commitment to ensuring that all pupils achieve well from their starting points.
- Senior leaders lead by example and provide highly effective challenge and support for teachers, as well as access to a package of relevant training. Staff morale is high, and they are open to new ideas and engage in opportunities to refine and improve their practice. As one teacher remarked, 'There is a strong team ethic at the UTC.'
- Leaders ensure that students in the sixth form progress well to appropriate university courses or high-level apprenticeships. Learners leave well equipped to pursue successful careers and to contribute to the regional and wider economy. As one parent summed up, 'I highly recommend UTC Oxfordshire – we were there at the first meeting before the first brick was laid and have never looked back. My son has excelled in all aspects.'
- Senior leaders accurately identify any areas of weakness, and act decisively to secure improvements. They have taken determined actions to address weak teaching and effectively support areas of underperformance. Consequently, weaker outcomes in some subjects in 2017, and the quality of teaching, have improved.
- The carefully designed curriculum allows pupils to study a specialist course in either science or engineering, as well as a range of GCSE subjects. Leaders ensure that the UTC provides equal opportunities for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds to follow a pathway to an appropriate destination in training, education or employment.
- Teachers, industry partners and pupils from all year groups regularly work together on 'real' industry projects involving access to high-quality resources and engaging learning contexts. As a result, pupils are captivated and challenged. They get a very good and realistic experience of the world of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). One parent spoke for many when commenting, 'The whole ethos of the school is amazing, preparing pupils for employment and teaching them well with valuable life skills. I feel that my child has had a fantastic opportunity'.
- Leaders ensure that the UTC's wider curriculum and regular assemblies encourage pupils to consider a variety of spiritual, moral, social or cultural topics. Various activities and discussions promote the exploration of different religions and beliefs. The values of democracy, tolerance and the rule of law are promoted across the school.

Consequently, pupils are well equipped with the skills required for life beyond the UTC and in modern Britain.

- Leaders ensure that appropriate use is made of the additional funding for pupil premium and SEN and/or disabilities. Focused support strategies (such as revision and enrichment sessions), specialist support and additional learning in core and option subjects result in these groups making accelerated progress from their starting points.

Governance of the school

- Governance is very effective. The trust and the dedicated team of local governors bring a wealth of skills and educational experience, and undertake regular training and updates. This enables them to provide valuable support and challenge to leaders at all levels.
- Governors are committed to the success of the UTC and carry out their statutory duties diligently. They share the principal's aims and vision for the school and they manage his performance well. Governors ensure the fair and consistent application of systems and policies.
- Governors have a clear insight into the work of the school and its effectiveness. They have successfully challenged leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to improve attendance. Regular reports, visits and meetings enable governors to skilfully evaluate aspects of the school such as safeguarding, the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and the impact of pupil premium funding.
- Governors and leaders are aware that the UTC's website requires updating in order to be fully compliant with requirements. This includes ensuring that sufficient detail of the curriculum and pupil premium strategy is present. In addition, more detail needs to be added to celebrate the impact of the very high-quality work experience and work placements on offer at the UTC.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding leaders ensure that the school's systems are fit for purpose. They have undertaken appropriate training for their roles and ensure that high-quality training for all staff secures the well-being and safety of the pupils and sixth formers.
- Senior leaders who lead this aspect of the school's work are passionate in ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable pupils are met. Referrals are made swiftly where pupils' needs are such that they require assistance from the local authority. Detailed timelines and records are kept, and the impact of external agencies is monitored closely, enabling rapid intervention if there are any delays.
- A nurturing ethos lies at the heart of the school's work to keep pupils safe. Pupils recognise this, as do the parents who responded to Parent View, with many of them referring to the care and attention given to vulnerable pupils as a strength of the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils feel valued by their teachers. As one parent commented, 'the staff all have a very genuine interest in the lives of the young people at UTC and nothing is too much trouble.' These productive relationships underpin the improved progress many pupils make when they come to the UTC. There is a mutual respect between teachers and pupils and a studious working atmosphere across the school.
- Most teachers have a good subject knowledge and keen grasp of the courses that they are delivering. They plan engaging lessons that challenge pupils at an appropriate level. All teachers have access to professional development and many have links with other schools to moderate their work.
- Typically, assessment is used well to promote pupils' progress. Pupils receive regular feedback in line with the school's policy. Most of them use this well to refine and improve their work. In addition, pupils receive valuable advice and guidance on how to succeed in examinations.
- The care, guidance and support on offer ensure that the UTC day is highly productive for most pupils. Pupils are assessed on entry to the UTC and their progress is regularly tracked by teachers and leaders. This enables the use of well-organised interventions, including some creative timetabling and work-experience opportunities, to bridge any gaps in learning and understanding.
- Teachers collaborate with industry partners particularly well. This enables a rich array of high-quality, STEM-focused learning opportunities to be delivered as extended learning projects. Staff, industry partners and pupils recognise the improved confidence, oracy and presentation skills that pupils develop from these opportunities.
- Leaders have driven improvements and the quality of teaching and learning across key stage 4 has improved over the last academic year. Leaders encourage the sharing of ideas and the best teaching. They appreciate that further improvements are still required in some areas and have detailed plans to achieve them.
- The effectiveness of teachers' questioning varies between lessons, particularly in English. In most areas, it is well targeted to check understanding, promote discussion and deepen pupils' thinking. In a minority of classes, questioning does not sufficiently promote learning or challenge pupils, including the most able.
- Pupils' reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills are, in the main, well developed. In the majority of lessons, teachers take account of the need to develop pupils' literacy skills and technical vocabulary. However, in some areas, greater priority needs to be given to ensuring that pupils develop their spelling and extended writing skills and/or accurate use of charts, graphs and diagrams.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.

- There is a very caring and nurturing ethos across the UTC. Since the UTC opened, some pupils have arrived in Year 10 having had negative experiences of schooling. Staff quickly get to know the pupils well, and support and reassure any experiencing stress or anxiety. Pupils gain a sense of community, security and pride during their time at UTC Oxfordshire. This equips them with great confidence and maturity.
- Pupils feel safe and they are safe. Leaders and governors are clear that pupils' welfare has top priority, and well-established systems are in place to offer guidance and support, involving external agencies where appropriate. Parents report that their children are particularly well looked after and happy at the school.
- Pupils show a well-developed understanding and tolerance for others who are different from themselves. Pupils were keen to explain that they find racism and homophobia unacceptable. Tolerance and diversity are promoted effectively at the school.
- Pupils are eager to excel, ambitious for their own future, and value the UTC's support to help them achieve their goals. There are excellent programmes to promote high aspirations. For example, former students come back to support younger ones during extended learning projects. In addition, creative individualised timetables are used to enable pupils to have access to appropriate work-experience placements.
- Through the well-planned curriculum, teachers ensure that pupils understand risk, how to behave responsibly, and how to keep themselves safe, including from cyber bullying and extremism.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. There is a real sense of community as pupils socialise well together at break- and lunchtimes, making the most of the attractive facilities the UTC offers.
- Pupils conduct themselves in a business-like manner and show pride in their work and achievements. They value the unique atmosphere and opportunities provided for them at the UTC. Pupils are polite, keen to learn, and friendly towards each other, staff and visitors.
- Pupils' attendance has improved notably this year following a dip last year. Overall attendance, that of girls, and that of those who have SEN and/or disabilities, have all improved. The small size of the UTC means that the low attendance of some individual pupils has a disproportionate impact on the attendance of some groups. Staff are working closely with these pupils and their families. As a result, their attendance is improving. Although the actions of leaders are beginning to have an impact, they recognise that further work is needed to bring about more rapid improvement.
- Incidents of fixed-term exclusion, which had previously been high, have been reduced over time. Bullying is increasingly rare and, when it does happen, pupils are clear that it is tackled effectively.
- During lessons, pupils' behaviour is typically very good. They listen carefully, actively engage in the tasks set and make a consistently focused effort. Most show pride in their work and their achievement. Occasionally, where teaching in key stage 4 is not as engaging, pupils do not demonstrate the same first-class attitudes, and a few become distracted. As a result, some low-level chatter and disruption occur.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the UTC in Year 10 with prior attainment scores, based on their performance in primary school, that are in line with national averages. However, tests that leaders administer to all new pupils identify that many arrive from key stage 3 with significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Additionally, some pupils have a history of poor attendance at their previous school. As a result of strong teaching in most subjects, and the very effective provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, pupils typically make up lost ground. GCSE results in 2017 indicate that pupils' progress in mathematics was very good, but their progress in English was weak.
- Bespoke careers advice and guidance for pupils ensured that all of Year 11 in 2017 progressed to meaningful and appropriate next steps. Nearly all of them gained access to either the UTC's own sixth form, further education, employment or training. Consequently, despite their below-average outcomes in English, pupils in key stage 4 are prepared well for their future lives and careers.
- Leaders' actions have ensured that current pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, make strong progress across most subjects.
- Effective teaching, coupled with innovative partnership work, ensure that current pupils progress well in the UTC's specialist subjects of engineering and science. Assessments and pupils' work demonstrate that pupils make particularly good progress in mathematics, and their progress in English, languages and geography is improving. Leaders are aware that more challenge is needed to ensure that the most able pupils' learning is stretched across the curriculum.
- Although current pupils are making increasingly good progress, the quality of teaching in English, although improving quickly, is not yet routinely strong enough to ensure sustained and rapid progress. Pupils' grasp and application of spelling and grammar remain a little underdeveloped. In addition, writing skills are not promoted well across all subjects.
- Industry partners were keen to share with inspectors how they particularly value the UTC's focus on developing work-related skills. They recognise how well UTC Oxfordshire pupils and students thrive during their work-experience placements and how well prepared they are for their future apprenticeships.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leaders ensure that the small sixth form provides very well for its students. The curriculum is highly appropriate as it provides a suitable balance of specialist technical and academic study. The employability passport projects undertaken by students enable them to develop a range of independent research and business skills. In addition, students benefit from very high-quality work-experience placements, together with regular visiting speakers and work undertaken with business mentors. This gives them a valuable insight into potential career possibilities and develops their employability and enterprise skills well.
- Teaching in the sixth form contains the same strengths and variations as reported earlier. Students and parents particularly value both the time and effort that most

teachers take to make lessons motivating, and the support offered by leaders. Students commented that in their view, the facilities are fantastic and the standard of teaching is mainly strong. However, they felt that teaching in a few lessons was not very motivating.

- Achievement of the first cohort to complete the sixth form was typically high. In 2017, most students who entered for a level 3 technical qualification achieved a distinction. Outcomes in A levels were also very high, and students made good progress from their starting points.
- There are very high rates of progression to higher education and apprenticeships. Leaders are rightly proud of their first set of Year 13 students in 2017, some of whom secured places on a range of competitive courses at leading universities or gained access to high-level apprenticeships.
- Leaders are aware that current students are not achieving so strongly and have put clear systems in place to address this. The highly motivated leader of the sixth form routinely monitors attendance and tracks individual students' progress. She ensures that teachers and the timetable respond flexibly to meet individual students' needs very well.
- Students receive very effective coaching from their subject teachers to help them complete their assignments and coursework successfully.
- Pastoral care and careers advice and guidance are strengths in the sixth form, as they are in key stage 4. Leaders ensure that weekly professional and personal development sessions deepen students' awareness about keeping safe, the challenges of living away from home, British values, e-safety and the risks of radicalisation and extremism. As a result, sixth formers are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

School details

Unique reference number	141111
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10040910

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

Type of school	Other secondary
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	298
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	94
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Bodeka
Principal	Owain Johns
Telephone number	01235 391587
Website	www.utcoxfordshire.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@utcoxfordshire.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The university technical college (UTC) opened in September 2015. In line with all UTCs, it is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. UTC Oxfordshire has space for 600 pupils.
- UTC Oxfordshire is sponsored by Activate Learning Education Trust, University of Reading, Royal Holloway University of London and a range of industry partners including UK Atomic Energy Authority, RM Education and Mini Plant Oxford.
- As a UTC, the school caters for pupils from the age of 14 to age 19. It specialises in science and engineering. The school day is longer than the usual school day, and pupils start at 8.30am and leave at 5pm.

- Most pupils and students are of White British heritage. The proportion from a minority ethnic background is below average, as is the proportion of pupils and students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- A high proportion of pupils are identified as having SEN and/or disabilities.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish on its website. It does not publish the required detail about the curriculum for each academic year or sufficient detail of the school's pupil premium strategy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a total of 30 lessons, including a whole-school extended learning project, in order to contribute to their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also visited tutor time and observed pupils' conduct around the site at break- and lunchtime.
- Meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders, the chair and members of the local governing body, middle leaders, teachers, and the chief executive officer of the Activate Learning Education Trust.
- Pupils' and students' views were gathered from formal meetings with groups of them and conversations around the school site.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation. This included leaders' self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, information about pupils' progress and standards, the school's website, minutes of governors' meetings, records of behaviour, attendance information, and a selection of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 101 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 86 free-text responses, surveys returned by 130 pupils, and 41 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Matthew Newberry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anne Turner	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Pemble	Her Majesty's Inspector

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