

UTC Plymouth

Park Avenue, Devonport, Plymouth PL1 4RL

Inspection dates

26–27 April 2016

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Achievement is inadequate and shows little sign of improvement, including in the sixth form.
- Too much teaching does not expect enough from pupils or challenge them to achieve more highly.
- Some pupils have poor attitudes to learning. The quality of their work is too variable, and too often untidy or incomplete.
- Weak leadership in the past and high levels of staff turnover have undermined efforts to raise pupils' achievement. New leaders have not yet had significant impact on the school's most important improvement priorities.
- The school's improvement planning is ineffective. It does not set out clearly how leaders and governors will know that changes are making a difference. The school has had limited external support to help it improve.
- The additional funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils has had too little impact.
- There is too little accountability throughout the school. Leaders have not made sure that actions to bring about improvement are implemented securely and consistently.
- The curriculum has not been effective in developing the skills and understanding that pupils need, including in reading and writing.
- The promotion of British values and provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are poorly planned and lack coherence. Pupils' understanding of wider contemporary issues is weak.
- Pupils have not received good-quality guidance to choose the most appropriate courses. They would like more help to understand the breadth of their options for the future.
- Governors have not challenged school leaders on the most important weaknesses contributing to pupils' poor achievement in the school, particularly the quality of teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- The quality of assessment information has improved. Leaders can now identify pupils who are falling behind.
- Leaders have a broadly accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. They are working to improve the curriculum for September 2016.
- Pupils who completed their courses last year went on to worthwhile destinations, including apprenticeships. Learners in the sixth form who completed vocational courses were usually successful in securing employment or training, or moving on to further education.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that suitable delegation of key tasks and responsibilities, and supporting leaders in developing the skills and confidence to carry out their roles effectively
 - making sure staff at all levels are accountable for the quality and impact of their work
 - putting in place a rigorous and coherent approach to improving the quality of teaching and ensuring a rapid response to weaknesses identified
 - devising and implementing a sharply focused improvement plan, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken
 - ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make more rapid progress
 - making sure that governors play a full and effective part in bringing about improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement, including in the sixth form, by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations, including of how pupils present and complete their work
 - identifying the needs of different groups of pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
 - using assessment information more effectively to identify underachievement and taking swift and effective action in response
 - making sure that work is challenging enough to enable pupils to reach higher standards
 - maintaining a strong focus on the development of pupils' literacy skills.
- Improve the curriculum by:
 - making sure that all pupils are following courses and programmes best suited to their needs and aspirations
 - producing a planned and coherent programme to promote British values and to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development more effectively.
- Improve the quality and breadth of advice, guidance and support so that pupils throughout the school are aware of the range of opportunities available to them.
- Improve behaviour so that pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- The school has been through a period of considerable uncertainty since it first opened. Weak leadership in the past, combined with high levels of staff turnover, have undermined efforts to secure good-quality teaching and outcomes for pupils. Leaders and governors rightly recognise the significant challenges that lie ahead.
- Although the new leadership team is enthusiastic and determined to put things right, leaders' actions have had too little impact in tackling the school's most pressing weaknesses. Financial constraints and a series of redundancies have further reduced the capacity of leaders to make and sustain the necessary improvements.
- The principal carries too great a responsibility herself for much of the day-to-day work of the school. This has limited her ability to work strategically and to support other leaders to build their skills and confidence. It also means that the leadership of important aspects, such as safeguarding and provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability, lacks enough oversight or effective line management.
- There is too little accountability at all levels throughout the school. Governors have not challenged senior leaders, who in turn have not made sure that important improvements are put in place securely and consistently. As a result, too much teaching is weak and shows little sign of improvement.
- Expectations across the school are too low and contribute significantly to pupils' underachievement. The targets set for pupils are not challenging enough. This, combined with weak teaching and an ineffective curriculum, reduces ambition and stifles improvement.
- Improvement planning is weak and driven by short-term imperatives, with too little focus on the fundamental actions needed to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement. Plans do not make clear the expected outcomes or how these will be measured. This limits the ability of governors and other partners to check on how well improvements are being implemented.
- Leaders' checks on teaching quality are not having enough impact. Although leaders have a broadly accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, their actions to improve it lack coherence and rigour. Weaknesses are not followed up effectively to ensure that practice is improving.
- The curriculum has not been effective in developing pupils to their full academic potential. It has not been successful in developing the full range of skills and understanding that pupils need. Despite this, supported by employers linked to UTC Plymouth, many have secured worthwhile next steps into further employment and training. Some pupils feel that the experience they receive at school does not differ as much as they had hoped from that in their previous schools, and that the school has not provided what they expected. Leaders have plans for a more distinctive curriculum from September 2016, including in the sixth form. This includes improvements to enrichment opportunities and plans for working in more innovative ways with employers.
- Weaknesses in the quality of advice and guidance have meant that too many pupils are on the wrong courses or programmes. Leaders are taking action to address this issue.
- There are few opportunities for pupils to develop a love of books and an interest in reading for pleasure. There is no library and curriculum time is under-used to promote pupils' speaking, listening and reading skills.
- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils (the pupil premium) is having too little impact. The evaluation of the use of this funding is weak. As a result, leaders are unclear which actions are making the most, or the least, difference in raising achievement for this group of pupils.
- External support for the school has been ineffective. Since it opened, the school has worked largely in isolation from other networks. Newly brokered partnerships with other schools and institutions have not been in place long enough to make a difference.
- The quality of assessment is improving and teachers now have access to more reliable information about pupils' achievement. Although leaders have a better understanding of where pupils are falling behind, staff are not yet sufficiently held to account for improvements in pupils' progress.
- The promotion of British values and provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are poorly planned and lack coherence, including in the sixth form. Although there is a useful programme of assemblies, visits and external speakers, the contribution of tutor time and the curriculum is mostly incidental and lacks enough impact.

- Inspectors recommend that the academy does not recruit newly qualified teachers following this inspection.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is ineffective. Governors have lacked the knowledge and expertise to challenge leaders about educational standards and outcomes, or the quality of teaching. They have too readily accepted what they were told by leaders and have not sought an external view of school performance. Governors do not scrutinise the use of pupil premium funding closely enough and are not aware of whether it is used effectively. The poor examination results of pupils in 2015 were a considerable shock to governors, although they were followed by decisive action to address weaknesses in school leadership.
 - More recently, governors have begun to consider how their effectiveness could be improved. The changes made to the composition of the governing body, in response to an audit of governors' skills and experience, are well founded but are too recent to judge their impact. Closer working with the new principal and other school leaders is a positive step in the right direction.
- Safeguarding is effective. The school site is safe and secure. Appropriate checks on staff suitability are made. All staff have completed training in the government's 'Prevent' duty to raise their awareness of radicalisation and extremism. Leaders have ensured that procedures for recording and escalating any concerns about pupils' welfare and child protection are robust. Staff make sure that, where necessary, parents, carers and external agencies are fully involved in safeguarding matters. Inspectors identified a small number of minor weaknesses during the inspection. Although these were resolved satisfactorily, they were indicative of weaknesses in leadership and in the oversight of safeguarding arrangements. Checks on the suitability of work placements, and the links between safeguarding and pupils' attendance, although adequate, could be further improved.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Too much teaching does not expect enough from pupils or challenge them to think deeply or to achieve more highly. A focus on 'getting through the work' is often at the expense of good-quality learning. Sometimes, for example, pupils spend time copying information unnecessarily from the board or screen. There is an inconsistent approach to developing pupils' literacy and presentation skills. As a consequence, in many cases, pupils' work is untidy, lacks care, or is incomplete.
- As a result of disruptions to staffing and weak teaching in the past, many pupils need help to catch up. However, much teaching does not provide them with the necessary support and, as a result, standards across many subjects remain low. Many pupils are not meeting even the minimum target grades they have been set.
- A lack of accountability for pupils' achievement means that teachers are not acting swiftly enough on the evidence from assessments to help pupils make faster progress.
- Teaching does not push all pupils to achieve well. Pupils' learning and the standards they reach are more often than not determined by their willingness to persevere by themselves. In some lessons there are poor work habits, with a few pupils using their mobile phones and earphones, for example.
- Underachievement affects all groups of pupils as teaching does not take enough account of their differing needs. In particular, too little consideration is given to ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- The additional support provided for pupils who have special educational needs or disability helps them to access the curriculum and to attend regularly, although their rates of progress remain slow.
- Teachers' marking and feedback varies too widely in quality. Pupils say that, sometimes, assessed work is not marked or returned. Changes to staffing have had an adverse impact on the continuity of assessment and feedback.
- Where pupils learn well, teachers expect them to try hard and produce their best work. In these instances, the teaching makes sure that all pupils are on track to be successful; relationships are positive, pupils are keen to do well and are interested in their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The guidance pupils receive has not been effective in making sure that they are all on the most appropriate courses for their aims and abilities. Pupils say that they value the advice and guidance they receive during work experience, from employers and through careers events. However, some pupils feel they would like more opportunities to discuss their individual plans and aspirations, particularly if these lie outside engineering.
- Pupils understand the risks associated with the internet and mobile technologies. Some expressed the view that the school could do more to trust them to take greater responsibility in their use of new technologies; however, despite filtering which prevents access to unsuitable content on school computers, a small number of pupils have attempted to get round these safeguards. Staff act quickly to address any instances of concern.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school and that they have confidence in staff to deal with any concerns pupils may have. They know about dangers to health, such as those related to drink or drug abuse, and the importance of physical and mental well-being. Although incidents of bullying are rare, some pupils believe that staff could tackle it more effectively when it occurs.
- Pupils' understanding of different faiths, cultures and wider contemporary issues requires improvement. There are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding through the curriculum, and the use of tutor time is largely incidental and poorly planned.
- Pupils who left the school at the end of their courses in 2015 went on to worthwhile destinations, including apprenticeships or employment. Although many of these pupils had not achieved highly in their academic studies, they benefited from their knowledge and experience of the world of work.
- The school is clean, tidy and well looked after. Most pupils show respect and consideration for their environment, and for other pupils and staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Some pupils have poor attitudes to learning, reflecting teaching that does not interest or involve them; they do not take part effectively in lessons and make only limited efforts to complete their work to a good standard.
- Only recently have teachers been properly held to account for the behaviour of pupils in lessons, and it is taking some staff time to get used to this change. Although lessons are rarely disrupted, teachers are sometimes too tolerant of off-task behaviour or lack of engagement.
- The number of exclusions from school has fallen each year since it opened. There is now a more consistent approach to managing any poor behaviour. Many of the pupils spoken to by inspectors said that they believed behaviour in this school to be better than in the past.
- Attendance is below average overall and for particular groups of pupils. The school admits some pupils who have had very poor attendance records in their previous schools and, in many cases, is successful in improving their attendance. Despite this, overall levels of persistent absence remain above the national average. Weaknesses in the analysis and evaluation of attendance data are hindering attempts to tackle poor attendance strategically.

Outcomes for pupils are inadequate

- Pupils' achievement is inadequate and shows little sign of significant improvement, including in the sixth form. In the GCSE examinations in 2015, less than one quarter of pupils achieved the benchmark of five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. Many pupils joined the school with lower-than-average levels of attainment and few made the rapid progress needed to catch up on their peers nationally. As a result, the school was well below the government's minimum floor standards.
- The achievement of pupils currently in the school remains too low. This is true for all groups of pupils and across most subjects. There is very little difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers, with both groups of pupils underachieving.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability also make slow progress. Although the teaching they receive is supportive, it is not effective in helping them to catch up quickly.

- Pupils' skills in writing vary widely, with too many lacking the skills they need to succeed in their studies. Although many are articulate and can explain their work well, written work is often incomplete or untidy. Teaching pays too little attention to pupils' handwriting and presentation. There is not a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy skills, including reading.
- Although the school is well equipped with a wide range of machines and technical equipment, pupils say they would like more opportunities to use these to support their learning. They say they do not always understand the link between their learning in practical and theory lessons.
- Pupils who completed their courses in 2015 took up apprenticeships, employment or further training or education successfully despite weak examination results. They were helped by links with local employers and the employability skills they had gained such as their knowledge and experience of the world of work.

16 to 19 study programmes

are inadequate

- Too many learners in the sixth form, especially those following A-level courses, are making slow progress because they are not being challenged and stretched sufficiently. Only a minority of learners would recommend the college to a friend as a good place to study. They say that, in some cases, staff turnover has led to significant disruption to their programmes.
- Learners' skills in engineering are broadly at the expected level. They are introduced to a wide range of different machines, although learners say that they do not have enough opportunities in workshops to develop their practical skills.
- Learners' skills in literacy and numeracy are not assessed well enough when they join the sixth form and they are not being provided with effective support to help them to improve. Skills in writing vary widely and some struggle to write clearly and well. There is little stimulus for learners to read more extensively, for study or for pleasure. Although their mathematical skills are often better, there is no systematic and consistent approach to helping learners to develop these skills further.
- Standards of teaching and learning vary greatly. Too little teaching provides work which helps learners to develop the understanding and technical skills they will need in the workplace. The learners themselves are not developing effective study skills to help them in the future. In too many lessons, learners spend time catching up with their assignment or project work, or completing work that they should have finished outside lesson time.
- The quality and impact of teachers' feedback varies considerably. Often, errors in spelling and grammar are not picked up.
- Learners say that they feel unsure of whom to go to if they need personal and academic support and counselling. Teachers do their best to meet learners and offer them advice and guidance, but provision is not yet systematically embedded in the sixth-form curriculum.
- While there are some good enrichment activities, such as membership of the Combined Cadet Force, there are few wider opportunities to engage in sports, debates, music or other social activities.
- Leaders and managers in the sixth form are inexperienced and their work has yet to show demonstrable impact. Many of the weaknesses of accountability and oversight found in the rest of the school also apply in the sixth form. For example, leaders do not routinely evaluate all examination results to inform improvement planning. Records are kept of learners' achievements and destinations and the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes are met.
- Attendance data is collected in a way that makes it difficult for leaders to analyse trends over time or variations between courses and groups of learners.
- Too many learners do not complete the courses they start. However, many of those who do leave early move on to other worthwhile programmes. Learners who complete vocational courses typically progress to apprenticeships or further study.

School details

Unique reference number	139432
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10008181

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	University technical college
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Weaver
Principal	Polly Lovell
Telephone number	01752 284250
Website	http://utcplymouth.org/
Email address	info@utcplymouth.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The University Technical College (UTC) Plymouth opened in September 2013. The UTC aims to provide technical education and the skills and knowledge required for employment.
- The UTC serves pupils aged 14 to 19 and is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It is located on the site of the former Parkside Community College. Considerable refurbishment and development took place before the school was opened.
- The majority of pupils currently on roll are male. The vast majority of pupils speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average. (The pupil premium provides additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children in the care of the local authority.)
- The UTC's main sponsor is Plymouth University. The UTC also has links with the Royal Navy and partnerships with a wide range of employers in the local area. The school does not use alternative provision.
- The principal took up her post on 1 March 2016, having previously been acting principal from December 2015. Significant changes to leadership roles were made from January 2016.
- The school website does not currently meet requirements on the publication of information about the curriculum, school performance and the evaluation of the impact of funding for disadvantaged pupils. Some policy documents are difficult to locate or have not been reviewed.

- The school did not meet the government's floor standards in 2015. The floor standards are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress at the end of key stage 4.
- The school receives advisory support from the Baker Dearing Educational Trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a wide range of lessons and other activities. They talked to many pupils about their experiences of school. In visits to lessons, inspectors looked at the quality of pupils' work and the accuracy of the school's assessment information. Many lessons were observed jointly with members of the school's leadership team.
- Discussions took place with the principal, with other leaders and with various members of staff. The lead inspector also met with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. He also met with an adviser from the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, which is supporting the school.
- Inspectors considered the school's self-evaluation and looked closely at records of the checks on teaching quality, assessment information and minutes of meetings of the governing body. Safeguarding records and documentation were also examined.
- At the time of the inspection, there were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to take account of parental views. The views of 10 staff and 24 pupils who responded to online surveys were considered.

Inspection team

Lee Northern, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Wilf Hudson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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