

The Watford UTC

18 Colonial Way, Watford, Hertfordshire WD24 4PT

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2017

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

- The drive, commitment and passion of the principal, together with the dedication of leaders, staff and governors, have created a UTC where many students with previous poor experiences of education now thrive in a safe and exciting environment.
- Students are known well by staff and leaders. As a result of the high level of care and support that students receive, they make good progress from very low starting points.
- The overall impact of teaching, learning and assessment is very effective because there is a lot of additional support outside normal lesson time.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the UTC is now good. In the early days of operation, leaders took firm action to establish high expectations of acceptable behaviour. This resulted in a very orderly learning environment.
- Many students' attitudes to learning are transformed by the UTC's work. The UTC is a safe, well-ordered, calm environment. Students' well-being and a culture of safeguarding permeate the organisation.
- Students are prepared for future employment or self-employment exceptionally well. In Years 10 and 11 they have many opportunities to develop employability skills through direct contact with employers.
- While the overall impact of teaching, learning and assessment leads to good progress, the effectiveness of direct teaching in lesson time is variable. In some classes, there is a lack of challenge for the most able students. In some vocational lessons, teachers supervise rather than teach. Leaders recognise this and professional development time is being used well to spread best practice.
- Many aspects of personal development are very strong. Students take a real pride in the UTC and are enthusiastic ambassadors for its values.
- Leaders have done a lot of effective work to improve attendance, but it remains below the national average. In some lessons in the 16 to 19 phase, students do not arrive punctually.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance further by:
 - building on the successful work in improving attendance even more rigorously, ensuring that attendance by occasional non-attenders and punctuality to lessons especially in the 16 to 19 study programmes improve
 - ensuring that, especially for 16 to 19 study programmes, students always see the value in attending all lessons.
- Ensure that students of all abilities make even more progress by:
 - setting work that always challenges them and moves their learning forward quickly
 - using teaching time on vocational courses more effectively so that students consistently develop new skills, knowledge or understanding from the presence of a teacher.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal has a clear vision for providing a great education for the school's students. The UTC's leaders have been successful at accepting students who in Year 10 have, in most cases, had poor experiences of school, broadening their horizons and setting their sights high.
- 'This school offers something very different to the run-of-the-mill secondary, and I hope that Ofsted take the time to truly appreciate this offering,' wrote one parent. Inspectors did just that. Inspectors found that with the support of industrial partners, leaders have created a curriculum that is broad and balanced.
- In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum combines the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and a computing qualification. Personal, health, social and economic education are covered alongside religious education and citizenship in tutor time through a subject called 'decision making'. Inspectors saw a list of topics for this subject, but there were no opportunities during the inspection to assess the quality of this provision. Students then choose between vocational courses in information technology, hospitality or travel and tourism and two further choices from history, geography, French, Spanish, business, electronics, media and photography. The take-up of several of these subjects is low, but nevertheless, through the use of part-time staff, leaders believe in the importance of maintaining the breadth of the curriculum.
- Students are prepared exceptionally well for future employment or self-employment. Lesson time runs from 9am to 5pm to emulate a business day. Many students participate in additional learning opportunities before 9am and on Saturdays.
- There are many opportunities for students to engage with employers and businesses. At post-16, this includes work experience. In Years 10 and 11, students have many opportunities to participate in organising events on a commercial basis. They learn to work in teams and communicate with adults developing the skills demanded by employers. The close involvement of employers in the curriculum ensures that it is vocationally relevant.
- Through the decision-making programme, including assemblies, students are made aware of spiritual, moral, social or cultural topics. Various activities and discussions are set to explore religions and beliefs around the world and in the local community. The values of democracy, tolerance and the rule of law are promoted well. This equips students with the skills required for life beyond the UTC and in modern Britain.
- The UTC has a small number of students entitled to the pupil premium. It tailors this additional funding to the individual needs of these students. The UTC keeps track of the impact of how the money is spent. Sometimes the funding is used to enable students to attend and participate in education through supporting transport or technology. The funding is used well and makes a positive difference.
- Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Additional funding is used effectively to ensure that they make progress that is in line with their peers.
- All staff responding to Ofsted's questionnaire said that they are proud to work at the

UTC. Morale is high. Staff feel very well supported by leaders, both in the management of behaviour and in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Staff were keen to tell inspectors about the 'inspirational head and senior leadership team'.

- Leaders are outward looking. The principal has been used by the Department for Education to support another UTC that was without a leader. The UTC has established effective links with the local authority, which is especially helpful in tackling the issue of attendance. The resources of the sponsoring Meller Education Trust are used to help raise the quality of teaching. Reading UTC has helped to improve the UTC's systems. Relationships with local school leaders are improving so that students beginning Year 10 are better suited to being able to benefit from what the UTC offers.

Governance of the school

- The principal is held to account for her work. Governors have worked with leaders to identify past weaknesses and challenges and, where necessary, they have brokered additional support to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning.
- Governors are reflective about their contribution to the college. The strengths of different governors complement each other well. Governors have high-level experience of education, the information technology, tourism and hospitality industries, law enforcement and public administration. This combination reflects the UTC's specialisms. Governors are realistic about the UTC's strengths and continuing challenges.
- Staff are rewarded appropriately and governors hold leaders to account to ensure that teaching continues to improve.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the UTC. This has ensured that key policies are effective, up-to-date and fully implemented, that students feel safe at the UTC and that they look out for each other. Leaders are diligent in checking on the safety and well-being of students, especially when potentially vulnerable students are absent.
- The pastoral care provided by the UTC is appreciated by students and their parents. It provides a firm foundation for safeguarding as it enables teachers and students to identify issues early that may need subsequent intervention. For example, one parent commented: 'My child experienced low-level bullying which was immediately dealt with robustly and to our satisfaction as soon as it was reported. The pastoral care is outstanding.' Parents, students and staff all agree that bullying is very rare and all are confident that should it occur, it is stamped out speedily.
- Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding. The responsible governor is meticulous in his checking that recruitment of staff meets all requirements and that staff are appropriately trained. Staff have all signed to confirm that they are familiar with the latest government guidance on keeping children safe. Another governor brings expertise in the government's anti-radicalisation 'Prevent' duty and this knowledge is used to enhance staff training.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Students feel valued by their teachers. The productive relationships, both in and out of formal lessons, are key to students' transformed progress. Learning takes place in an environment of mutual respect.
- Assessment is used well to promote students' progress. The care, guidance and support for students make the UTC day highly productive for most students.
- A key characteristic of teaching in the UTC is teachers' strong subject knowledge. This is particularly effective in linking students' learning to the world of work in vocational subjects such as media and travel and tourism. Students are keen to develop new knowledge and skills and quickly apply them. This was seen in an electronics lesson where students were producing transistors that culminated in students playing music on their own electronic instrument.
- Students develop highly effective skills relevant to employment through practical activities such as running events. For example, hospitality students have catered for public events at high-profile locations such as Lord's cricket ground and the House of Commons. Students' learning is enhanced and brought alive by visits to the headquarters of major businesses including Fortnum and Mason, British Airways and Hilton hotels.
- There is effective planning which often takes account of teachers' analysis of students' strengths and weaknesses in practice examination questions. For example, inspectors saw Year 11 students working very hard and productively on English questions following expert guidance on how to improve their responses. Most students say that they are challenged by the work in most lessons, but inspectors found a lack of challenge for the most able students in some classes.
- Students get time to review and reflect on their work at the end of each week. They write evaluations of their successes and what could have been better. These reflections demonstrate students' pride in their achievements, and motivation for the next week. For example, one girl wrote that 'the achievements I am most proud of this week are my science test, getting put into the higher division of my class, knowing what DNA means'.
- The UTC day is structured to reflect an industrial working day. Homework is not a regular feature. Instead, students are given independent learning time that the majority of students use effectively to develop their knowledge and skills against their assessment. Teacher support is available during these sessions, but there are few opportunities for students to learn to work unsupervised.
- Very nearly all parents responding to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) were very happy with the information they receive about their child's progress. Many made highly positive comments about the quality of teaching. Students agreed that they enjoy most of their lessons and that teachers help them to do their best.
- Teachers promote equality of opportunity well. Although there are many more boys than girls, leaders are rightly proud of the successful work by teachers to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects to girls.
- The effectiveness of questioning varies between lessons. In most, it is well targeted to

check understanding and deepen students' thinking. In a few other classes, questioning does not aid learning or challenge students, including the most able.

- In some vocational lessons, time is not used productively enough. In these lessons, students complete assignment tasks with little teacher input. Progress is made because teachers give helpful and development feedback when drafts are complete. The UTC's approach to a heavy reliance on working at the UTC rather than traditional homework restricts opportunities for students to gain skills to work independently in their next stage of education and/or employment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good.
- Many aspects of personal development and welfare are very strong. Students demonstrate real pride in their institution. They are great ambassadors. Visitors and business contacts are impressed by students' maturity. Students talk confidently to adults.
- Students are thoughtful and reflective. This was seen in discussions around whether they would recommend the UTC to other young people. While being fully supportive, they recognise that it is suited to the needs and interests of particular students and so would recommend it for those students.
- Students are given tasks on a particular spiritual, moral, social or cultural topic. Various activities and discussions are set to explore religions and beliefs around the world, thus understanding and promoting tolerance. This equips students with the skills required for life beyond the UTC and in modern British society.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- The vast majority of students conduct themselves well in lessons and around the UTC. They listen to each other and their teachers, respond positively to instructions and engage in discussions in a thoughtful way. Most students attend on time although a few students in the 16 to 19 study programmes were late in several lessons.
- When the UTC opened, many students were provided with a second chance in education having come from schools where they had a history of exclusions or where their behaviour was considered poor. Leaders at the UTC set high expectations of behaviour from the outset. To enforce this, the UTC's number of temporary exclusions in its first years was very high. The approach has proved effective and this year the rate of exclusions has halved. Parents and governors praise the tough approach to behaviour.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 spoken to by inspectors said that behaviour in lessons is good and over two thirds of the 49 students who responded to the inspection questionnaire said that students behave well in most or all of their lessons. Nearly all parents agreed that behaviour was good. A typical parental comment was, 'The

standards expected for behaviour are high; every time you enter the school the students are courteous and polite.'

- Students benefit from a learning environment that is modern and engaging. In return they respect the building and the equipment. It still looks new.
- The UTC has been successful in improving the attendance of students with a track record of not attending school regularly or sometimes not at all. It has given many students a second chance to be successful in a different type of educational setting from their previous school. Most students have responded well.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Published information on students' achievement shows that on average they make progress between the end of key stages 2 and 4 which is significantly below that of other students nationally. However, the UTC's information demonstrates that arriving with low starting points, due in many instances to poor previous attitudes to education, students make very strong progress in Years 10 and 11.
- Leaders recognise that despite the strong progress from low starting points, the proportion of students gaining a high grade in both GCSE English and mathematics, at under a half, is too low. The proportion of students gaining a high-level pass in mathematics was close to the national average, but English was less successful. The UTC's monitoring information shows students are currently doing better than at this time last year. In vocational subjects such as the UTC's specialisms of travel and tourism and hospitality, pass rates in 2016 were 100% demonstrating progress that is very high. These subjects are less dependent on prior learning than academic subjects and so students' progress in these subjects is clearly the result of learning at the UTC.
- Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to other students because their needs are met well. Students and the parents of students who had previously attended specialist provision for their special need or disability praised the extra opportunities provided at the UTC. For example, one child 'is now finally achieving and succeeding having transferred from an SEN school in September. Her progress and attainment in such a short time has been nothing short of outstanding'.
- A small number of students at the UTC are entitled to the pupil premium. Their individual barriers to learning are assessed and additional funding is used to address their specific needs. As a result, while at the UTC they make progress at least as good as other students nationally.
- Some students have been highly successful in activities ranging from international representation in the sport of judo to a product innovation competition for Fujitsu. As a result of their success, students were flown to Munich to pitch their product to the company's top European executives.
- A very small number of students attend alternative provision. Their well-being and progress are monitored by UTC staff.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Students achieve well on 16 to 19 programmes. Current students are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. They know what it is they need to do to gain higher grades.
- In 2016, progress and attainment were both good for vocational courses. On academic A-level courses pass rates were high, but the proportion of students attaining high grades was low.
- Students are enthusiastic about their experience and value the extra guidance and support they receive from their teachers.
- Students produce written and practical work to a good standard. Teachers apply the UTC's assessment policy consistently. Where students need extra help to improve their work, teachers arrange additional lessons or tutorials for small groups.
- Students receive very effective coaching from their subject teachers to help them complete their assignments and coursework successfully.
- The vast majority of students benefit from relevant, external work experience placements during which they are able to develop their practical skills and employability very well. A minority of students do not benefit from work experience placements until later in their course, which slows their progress in developing their skills for work.
- There are high rates of progression to higher education and apprenticeships. Leaders are rightly proud of their first set of Year 13 students in 2016, many of whom secured places on a range of competitive courses at leading universities.
- Students use their English and mathematics skills well in their vocational and academic courses. They make less secure progress towards achieving GCSE qualifications in these subjects where results reflect the national poor success rates for GCSE retakes.
- Students are taught about British values and the anti-radicalisation 'Prevent' duty. However, they are not given sufficient opportunities to consider their practical application of these values and duties in vocational contexts such as the tourism industry.
- A minority of lessons lack sufficient pace and purpose to enable students, particularly the most able, to make the progress they should. As a result, for a minority of students attendance and punctuality are not a priority.

School details

Unique reference number	141004
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023341

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	169
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	83
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Richard Elms
Principal	Emma Loveland
Telephone number	01923 905240
Website	www.watfordutc.org
Email address	admin@watfordutc.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The UTC meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The UTC complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The UTC opened in September 2014. It has students in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13.
- This UTC's mission is to recruit students within a 15-mile radius of the campus with the aim of educating and training the next generation of computer scientists, event managers and industrial innovators.
- The UTC is sponsored by the MET (Meller Education Trust) and has the support of the

University of Hertfordshire, Twin Technology, Hilton and The Grove. Most recently, it has become a Fujitsu Ambassador.

- The UTC is much smaller than other secondary schools. It has more boys than girls.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is below that found nationally. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well above average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is a little below average.
- The UTC does not meet the current government floor standards. It is not deemed to be 'coasting'.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision, three at a pupil referral unit, one at Building One Zone and one at Forest House.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors over two days.
- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence from: lesson observations, some carried out with the principal or another senior leader; short visits to lessons, again some carried out with senior leaders; discussions with students and staff; meetings with senior leaders, governors and a representative of the Department for Education; reviews of students' work in books and folders; reviews of the UTC's website, documents and assessment information; and general observations of the daily operations of the UTC, including social areas.
- Inspectors analysed the 30 standard responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, alongside the 29 free text responses to the same questionnaire. They also took into account the 14 responses to the staff questionnaire and 49 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Adrian Lyons, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Richard Pemble

Her Majesty's Inspector

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