

The Elstree UTC

Studio Way, Elstree, Borehamwood, Hertfordshire WD6 5NN

Inspection dates

24–25 May 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and students

This is a school that requires improvement

- Although improving, teaching, learning and assessment are not yet securely good. Some teachers do not expect enough of students.
- Sixth-form provision requires improvement. The good progress students make in their vocational learning is not yet matched in a range of other academic subjects.
- Progress slows when teachers do not plan work that precisely meets students' needs, or use questioning effectively to check whether students understand the work properly.
- Not all teachers adhere to the school's policy to provide students with useful guidance on how to improve their work.
- A legacy of weaker teaching and assessment in the first term of 2016 has impacted upon students' progress in science and mathematics. Many are unlikely to achieve their target grades.
- Systems for tracking students' progress from entry points are in place, but are not used effectively in some departments, especially core subjects, to maximise students' progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The impressive leadership of the principal, ably supported by his senior team, has led to significant improvements since the previous inspection.
- Leaders and governors have acted promptly to restructure provision, strengthen teaching, improve attendance and raise attainment, particularly at key stage 4.
- Students' behaviour is good. This is an orderly and purposeful school. Students are polite, engaging and respectful.
- Personal development and welfare are good. Students are self-assured and motivated.
- The provision for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving, leading to students making better progress in some subjects.
- The school is inclusive; staff support students with previously negative experiences of education to modify their behaviour and help them to re-engage in learning.
- The school's improving links with industry and sponsors help students to gain suitable employment and sought-after college places.
- Safeguarding is effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the amount of progress students, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, make from their starting points by:
 - ensuring that teachers in all subjects use assessment information to more precisely match learning activities to the needs of students
 - ensuring that staff understand students' starting points and have high expectations of what they can achieve against these
 - making sure that teachers in all subjects explain to students the areas in which they are not achieving well, and provide constructive feedback in line with the school's policy that helps them to improve their work.
- Raise achievement, particularly in A-level courses, mathematics and science by:
 - ensuring that teachers use questioning effectively to test students' knowledge and understanding, and make regular checks on the quality of their work during lessons.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, including governors, are highly ambitious for the future success of the school. They have created a caring and productive ethos in which each member of the school community is valued, respected and happy.
- The highly respected principal has been in post substantively for just over a year. A new leadership team, some in post since September, add strength and capacity. They ably support the principal to focus relentlessly on improvement. Together they have overseen a significant rise in standards across all areas since the previous inspection.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is strong. Throughout changes in staffing, leaders' clear and effective planning has brought about significant positive changes, albeit many of these quite recently. Leaders know where strengths lie, and use training and support effectively to improve the quality of provision.
- Leaders have updated their curriculum offer to reflect better the specialist nature of the school. Alongside the core subjects, a broad range of different fields of performing arts, media and film arts as well as production techniques, stage management, set and costume design, and production makeup for stage and screen now meet the needs and interests of students successfully. Retention has improved because students receive clear advice and guidance that helps them to choose appropriate courses that build on their prior learning.
- Leaders have woven the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students carefully into the curriculum. The impact of this is clear. Students spoke about how learning teaches them the importance of respect, hard work, overcoming any difficulties they face, and making the right choices. As one student said, 'They don't just tell us to do the right thing, they show us, and convince us as to why.'
- A significant number of parents and carers responded to Ofsted's questionnaire during the inspection. The vast majority are happy with the school. As one parent commented about her daughter, 'her Elstree teachers and fellow students have helped her settle into an environment where she now feels happier, more confident and not judged... where people finally "get" her and will go to great lengths to help her reach her potential'.
- Leaders use the college's pupil premium funding effectively to improve both the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged students. There have been demonstrable improvements in both areas. However, leaders are aware that more needs to be done to diminish the differences that still exist between this group and other students nationally.
- The school uses the additional funding for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that entry assessments help to identify students' needs, and inform the provision of appropriate support. These students make far more progress than they previously did, although a few still do not make the progress they could.
- Leaders say marking and feedback are still not consistent with the school's policy in some subject areas. Evidence seen on inspection confirmed this to be the case.

However, the training and support that leaders provide is starting to bring about noticeable improvements in teachers' practice.

- New systems for tracking students' progress from their baseline assessments are in place, but not always used effectively across some subject areas. Leaders could not always readily provide information on how students, or groups of students, had progressed since joining the school.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has a wealth of knowledge and experience, especially linked to the school's specialist areas of expertise. Governors support leaders to realise the school's strategic ambitions by building strong partnerships locally.
- Governors provide the strategic direction for the school. They are currently involved in discussing the potential for the school to become part of a multi-academy trust.
- Governors hold the principal to account. They work closely with the education adviser at the Department for Education to seek guidance and provide quality assurance. Governors' minutes show the increasing level of challenge provided by the governing body.
- Governors have a broadly accurate view of the school's strengths. Staff are rewarded appropriately, and performance management is used judiciously to raise standards.
- Governors ensure that statutory duties are met. They ensure that additional funding is used effectively to support both disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff and governors are mindful of their duties and responsibilities regarding safeguarding.
- Governors ensure that all the required pre-employment checks are carried out when recruiting new staff to work at the school.
- Staff training is effective and up to date. Staff are aware of the latest government guidance on keeping children safe. They understand their responsibilities, including the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty and how to spot those at risk of radicalisation or extremism.
- The designated lead has a good understanding of the school's caseload and the actions needed to protect students. Staff notice small changes in students' behaviour and make referrals confidently. These highlight the good level of care and support afforded to students. Child protection records are thorough and well maintained.
- Students feel safe. Staff and visitors to the school are appropriately vetted. Students spoke positively about how the school supports them to understand current issues such as female genital mutilation, gender identity, and how to stay safe online. Students say they feel safe. Staff, parents and carers unanimously agree.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Some teachers do not always give students enough guidance on what they do well, or explain clearly enough to them how they could improve their work. Some teachers accept too little from some less engaged students. When this is the case, students do not make as much progress as they could.
- In some cases, teachers do not ensure that the work they set matches precisely to what students need to learn next. Students find the work either too easy or too difficult, lose interest, and consequently their progress slows.
- Where teachers do not question and challenge students, progress slows. In some lessons, small groups of students tend to dominate discussion work. When this happens, teachers are unable to establish whether all students understand the concepts being discussed which sometimes leads to misconceptions not being addressed.
- Where practice is most effective, teachers plan carefully to ensure that different groups of students are set different tasks. In a Year 13 production technology lesson, the teacher gave students tasks linked to what they would be doing when they left college. Students worked hard and made good progress because the work they were set linked closely to their interests.
- In a Year 13 drama lesson, the teacher's skilful questioning ensured that all students were involved in learning and quickly gained a good understanding of the concepts covered. The teacher recorded which students contributed, so less-willing students were engaged. As a result, all students contributed and articulated their views, making religious, political and cultural references, when comparing themes from Faustus with Hedda Gabler.
- In a number of subjects, teachers use project-based learning well to develop students' collaborative skills and technical expertise. The constant dialogue between teachers and students, often undertaken electronically, helps students to redraft and improve their work. Additionally, the real-life application of the learned theory helps students to understand concepts well.
- Where students are given the opportunity to reflect on their work, outcomes are strong. One teacher used the black walls of a performance studio as a giant chalkboard to record the objectives of the lesson, and for students to use it as a means of recording their thoughts. The opportunity to surround themselves with other students' ideas and thoughts served as powerful stimuli for the practical activities in the lesson.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good.
- Inspectors noted the effective personal development of the vast majority of students; they are happy, and enjoy attending the college. Their conduct around the college is good, and students are developing good social skills that help them to build strong and

productive relationships with adults and their peers.

- Some spirited students, with previously negative experiences of education and poor records of attendance, are nurtured carefully so that they re-engage in learning successfully.
- Students are proud of their college. They acknowledge, and are appreciative of, the improvements leaders have made since the previous inspection.
- Students are confident, friendly and courteous. They go out of their way to be helpful when they meet visitors, guiding them around the college and making them feel welcome.
- Students receive good-quality information, guidance and support about their next steps in education, and their future careers. During the inspection, a leading West End actress ran one of the college's regular workshops. This industry presentation was for performing arts students who aspire to perform professionally.
- Students say they feel safe, and they learn about the potential dangers to their safety. Parents agree. As one said, 'The college encourages, supports, listens and cares for their students.'
- A very small number of students attend alternative provision. Staff regularly monitor their attendance, progress and well-being.
- A very small proportion of students do not display the same impressive attitudes to learning as their peers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is characterised by hard work and high-level discussion, developed through the strong, respectful and productive relationships they have built with staff. For example, in a Year 10 film lesson analysing exemplar material, inspectors saw students listening respectfully to each other's opinions and responding in a mature and thoughtful way.
- Students mostly respond to teachers' instructions quickly and move between different learning activities with minimum disruption. Inspectors did not see any negative behaviour during the inspection.
- Students say that leaders' new systems have been highly effective in raising expectations and disruption to learning is now increasingly rare. The school's monitoring information shows that the number of incidents of poor behaviour has halved since this time last year.
- Overwhelmingly, students move quickly and quietly to lessons and arrive ready to learn. They are polite and respectful at break and lunchtimes.
- Leaders say that bullying is extremely rare. All the evidence collected during the inspection confirmed this to be the case. The school's own information, discussions with students, and staff and parent surveys all say that bullying is a highly unusual occurrence. Students also say that were bullying to occur, adults at the college would deal with it quickly and efficiently.

- The attendance of all groups has improved greatly. Leaders' robust monitoring, and increasingly effective follow-up, has led to a rapid and sustained improvement across all year groups. While figures are still below national averages, the gains made to date have been impressive.

Outcomes for students

Requires improvement

- Despite significant improvements, especially at key stage 4, outcomes are still not securely good across all subject areas.
- The school has seen some changes in staffing in some subjects, particularly mathematics and science. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that effective staff are in place. School monitoring information shows that, in these subjects, a higher proportion of current students, across both key stages, are unlikely to achieve their predicted grades.
- Due to legacy issues in the curriculum model that are being addressed, the proportion of students who made good progress at A level was significantly below the national average. In 2016, the school's value-added score shows that students achieved almost half a grade lower than expected. Disadvantaged students' and male students' progress placed them in the bottom 10% of all students nationally. A similar picture emerged with the AS-level results.
- Findings from work scrutiny revealed that some of the students' analytical work is overly descriptive, and lacks deeper critical review or analysis. These students are failing to demonstrate sufficient depth of understanding. As a result, they are not making good progress over time.
- Inspectors observed students at work in lessons, spoke to them about their experiences, scrutinised their work and studied the school's own information. In some A- and AS-level subjects, including art and design, literature and language, graphics, and photography, students are not making the progress that they should.
- Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to other students in many subjects because their needs are met well. However, leaders acknowledge that this is not yet the case in all subjects, particularly mathematics.
- For disadvantaged students entitled to support through the pupil premium, the additional funding is being used to improve their progress well. However, their attainment is still not as good as that of other students nationally.
- Leaders have acted decisively to reorganise provision, strengthen teaching and provide intensive support for students who are at risk of underachieving. Last year, the number of students who attained at least a grade C in their GCSE English and mathematics rose from 38% to 72%. These improvements were mirrored across many other subjects at key stage 4, with drama and performing arts students achieving particularly well.
- Students who studied courses linked to the school's specialist areas of expertise performed well above the national average. Last year's results in BTEC qualifications were high, with the school's average mark being a distinction plus. Students who studied either the BTEC diploma in dance, music or production arts achieved roughly half a grade higher than the national average.

- Leaders highlighted the need to introduce more challenge into lessons, and made this a constant theme in staff training. The impact of their actions is already being seen and most-able students are making increased levels of progress in both core and foundation subjects at key stage 4.
- Students who arrive with very low reading ages are supported well. In a relatively short space of time, the vast majority of these students make rapid progress and are able to make up lost ground.
- In 2016, around 43% of students went to university; most of the others progressed on to a range of relevant next steps including further education, apprenticeships, gap years or work. In 2017, based on the intended destinations, an increased proportion are expecting to progress to university, with a relatively large number also expecting to progress onto high-profile courses at dance and drama schools, including Urdang, RADA, Central School of Drama, Guildford School of Acting, and Millennium Dance.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Last year, owing to the pre-existing curriculum model, about two thirds of all examinations taken at key stage 5 were at A level. On average, students attained D grades. The proportion who gained A* to B grades was below the national average. Too many students failed to get an E grade or better.
- Leaders acknowledge that the previous curriculum model did not offer sufficient courses to provide students with appropriate study options for A-level studies or vocational awards. Too many students changed courses mid-year or failed to achieve their target grades. Consequently, their achievement at A level was low.
- While some students resitting GCSE English and mathematics last year achieved passes, most did not achieve well enough. Value-added figures show that they achieved two fifths of a grade lower in English, and half a grade lower in mathematics than their target grade. The school's current information suggests that a significant number of students are not on track to achieve their projected grades this year.
- In the sixth form, the quality of teaching varies and this leads to a mixed picture of progress. A number of students, particularly in AS- and A-level courses, do not routinely demonstrate the level of insight, depth of research, or technical skills that would indicate the likelihood of them achieving high grades.
- Students benefit from a useful induction programme that enables them to learn about the school's expectations of them. Owing to the improved information and guidance students receive, most now follow appropriate courses. Retention rates have improved considerably.
- Students behave well around the college. They are courteous, and respectful of each other and of staff. Students say they feel very safe, and that they are not aware of any bullying taking place. Additionally, they know what to do should they have any concerns around their own health, welfare or safeguarding.
- Students who study vocational qualifications make very good progress, especially in production technology, theatrical and media makeup, dance and costume design. Teachers possess a high level of vocational insight into their respective areas of industry, meaning students receive well-planned and relevant work-related learning

opportunities. Last year, students averaged half a grade higher than the national figure, with many achieving a distinction plus.

- Leaders have placed a growing emphasis on creating opportunities for students to undertake live project briefs, delivered by external employers. Students benefit from increasingly strong employer links. Together, this helps students to secure valuable apprenticeship placements in large commercial lighting companies for theatre, television and film and at the Fashion Retail Academy. Of those who went on to employment, approximately one third secured employment in an area directly related to their programme of study and interest.
- On completion of their studies in Year 13, a significant number of dance students gain places at prestigious universities, training schools or conservatoires, such as Italia Conti and the Urdang school.
- Most students who are applying to university are successfully being offered places on a wide range of courses such as film production, acting, musical theatre, stage management, media and photography and screenwriting. A small but significant proportion of students who are applying to university are also successful in gaining places in subjects outside the direct specialism of the school. For example, students have been offered places to study law, psychology, mathematics and economics and Japanese.

School details

Unique reference number	139416
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10031391

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 students	14 to 19
Gender of students	Mixed
Gender of students in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	332
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Morris
Principal	Chris Mitchell
Telephone number	020 8386 6220
Website	www.elstreeutc.co.uk/
Email address	admin@elstreeutc.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The Elstree University Technical College opened in September 2013. It has students in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13.
- The college's lead sponsor is the University of Hertfordshire; other sponsors are the Meller Educational Trust and Elstree Studios.

- The school is smaller than average. It has more girls than boys.
- The majority of students are White British. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly below average.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is broadly average.
- The UTC uses alternative provision. Currently, a small number of students attend either ESTMA, The Links PRU in St Albans, Building 1 Zone (Chessbrook Education Support Centre) or The Berries in Watford.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Ofsted Inspector over two days.
- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders, during which they reviewed students' work in books and folders, and spoke to students about their learning.
- Inspectors also gathered a range of evidence from meetings with senior leaders, staff, students and governors; from telephone conversations with a representative of the Department for Education and those responsible for alternative provision; from reviews of the UTC's website, documents and assessment information and from general observations of the daily operations of the UTC, including in social areas.
- Inspectors took account of the 54 responses by parents and carers to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 29 questionnaires returned by staff. They also considered the 55 parental responses on free text, and the 81 questionnaires completed by students.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Nelson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anne Pepper	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged students' refers to those students who attract government student premium funding: students claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and students in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/student-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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