

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Chris Mitchell
Principal
The Elstree UTC
Studio Way
Elstree
Borehamwood
Hertfordshire
WD6 5NN

Dear Mr Mitchell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Elstree UTC

Following my visit to your school on 9 July 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that teachers make consistent use of assessment data to inform their planning so that the needs of different groups of pupils are met in lessons
- ensure that pupils' rates of progress continue to improve more rapidly in key stage 4, particularly in English.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, the chair and three other members of the governing body, pupils from Year 10 and students from Year 12, the executive headteacher of the Danes Educational Trust (DET), and the regional director of the Herts and Bucks Teaching School Alliance to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and other school improvement documentation relating to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' outcomes.

With your vice-principal, I visited a number of lessons across Years 10 and 12 to observe pupils' learning and progress.

I reviewed the 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

I also scrutinised your single central record of recruitment checks of staff.

Context

A new assistant principal has been appointed for September 2018 who will have oversight of English, mathematics and science in key stage 4. You have appointed a permanent head of science, a teacher of science and a science technician. Following the resignation of the head of English, you have appointed a replacement to start in September 2018. You have also employed a coordinator for pupils' social, emotional and mental health.

The GCSE Progress 8 measure fell again, following the results received in the summer of 2017.

Discussions are underway for the school to become part of a multi-academy trust, the Danes Educational Trust, at some time during the next academic year.

Main findings

Your school development plan correctly includes actions which aim to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. The plan makes clear how you will measure the success of your actions and how often the progress you are making against these actions is to be checked. Over the course of this academic year, you have evaluated the impact of actions taken. Most of your intended actions for this year have been achieved. However, you rightly acknowledge the need to continue to build on the actions taken so far, so that the school's overall effectiveness improves in time for your next section 5 inspection.

The previous section 5 inspection took place during the public examination period in May 2017. Pupils' outcomes in 2017 were disappointingly poor, with many pupils not making the progress of which they were capable. While you are aware that

many of your pupils join the school in Year 10 having had breaks in their education, and/or very low attendance, you appreciate the importance of ensuring that they make better progress from the time they join the UTC until the time they leave. The situation has been exacerbated by the challenges of recruiting permanent teaching staff. However, the staffing situation now looks more positive with the appointment of skilled and experienced staff, the remainder of whom are to start work in September 2018.

As a large proportion of your pupils join the school with little or no information on their prior attainment, including from national tests, you establish a baseline by requiring them to sit past GCSE examination papers. This enables you to measure the progress they make while they study at your school. You have introduced a sophisticated online classroom management tool. This is a helpful tool which includes key information about individual pupils in the class, seating plans for each lesson and useful details about their attendance, prior attainment, targets and progress. This tool is accessible to teachers and helps to inform their planning so that the needs of particular groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, are more appropriately met. Your monitoring procedures, which include learning walks, show that while many teachers are skilfully using this information, others are not yet making full use of it. This means that some pupils are not sufficiently challenged by the work set, and others are not able to access the work because it is too difficult. Where teachers use the information well, they carefully consider how they seat pupils in the classroom. For example, pupils told me in our discussions, that more-able pupils are often seated next to those who find the work more challenging. They support one another well and consequently make good progress. I observed pupils being given extension tasks to provide greater challenge and also witnessed learning support assistants working well with pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The learning support assistants confirmed that they liaise with the teachers in advance of the lesson so that they arrive well prepared and ready to help pupils learn.

The previous inspection identified that not all teachers were consistently implementing your school's assessment policy which required them to explain to pupils the areas in which they were not achieving well, and to provide constructive feedback. You have successfully addressed this matter through your online dialogue sheets. Pupils showed me examples of these in various lessons I visited. These sheets allow teachers to inform pupils about what they have done well, and what they need to do to improve. Pupils typically respond to these comments online and, if requested, attempt additional recommended tasks or redraft their work. Pupils also told me that they are expected to record for themselves any verbal feedback that has been provided to them by their teacher. This two-way dialogue encourages pupils to reflect on their learning, and also helps to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Although pupils have not fared well in GCSE English, mathematics and science and

in A-level courses in the past, they have typically achieved better in vocational courses. Your regular assessments over the course of this academic year, as well as scrutiny of pupils' and students' work, indicate that pupils' progress is steadily improving, apart from in English. This is partly due to the lack of consistency in the teaching of this subject, as pupils have been taught by a number of agency staff due to challenges in recruiting permanent and experienced teachers. Additionally, pupils told me that relationships between teachers of English and pupils are sometimes strained. Pupils who follow some of the UTC's specialist courses are exceeding their targets, including, for example, in Media Studies, Film, Performing Arts, Production Technology and Art and Design. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged are improving on the progress they make, but not yet at a rapid enough rate. The picture in Year 13 is a more positive one, where more students than previously are on track to achieve their targets.

You have provided effective training to teachers as a result of your learning walks. Bespoke training on the use of questioning and on checking the quality of work during lessons has taken place when this has been identified as an area for development. I observed some use of effective questioning in lessons during this inspection, which tested pupils' understanding and made them think more for themselves.

My scrutiny of your single central record of recruitment checks of staff identified some flaws. However, these were swiftly rectified before I left the school site.

Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Ninety-six per cent of those who responded would recommend the school to another parent. Pupils and students with whom I spoke were also positive about the school. They recognise the improvements that have taken place in the quality of mathematics and science teaching. They particularly appreciate the partnership work that takes place with local industry and businesses and say this gives them a purpose to come to school.

The governing body has adopted a realistic view as to the school's current position and the challenges that remain. Governors regularly visit the school to test out for themselves what they are told by the senior leaders. They have welcomed the training they have received, particularly on how to interpret and understand achievement data.

External support

You sought external support through your regional teaching school alliance and the DET (via a national leader in education) has been providing school improvement support since February 2018 at the request of the regional schools commissioner.

However, the executive headteacher of St Clement Danes has been working effectively with you in a mentoring role since June 2017. The trust believe that you

have been receptive to their guidance and support. The teaching school alliance has provided valuable support by helping to moderate your assessments of pupils' attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science. Teachers new to the school have been well supported by the teaching school alliance, particularly in the mathematics department. Middle leaders received training and support through the teaching school alliance and this is due to continue in the new academic year.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector