

Inspection of VTC Independent School

Unit 2, Century 2000, St. Michaels Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3DZ

Inspection dates:

22 to 24 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils soon get into positive routines in this school. Many have had discouraging experiences at their previous schools. Some do not think that education will make a difference to them and help them to have a successful life. However, the proprietor and staff team do not give up on them. Staff believe in every pupil's potential. They understand how to support them and get them back on track.

The school's aim is to ensure that all pupils will get an apprenticeship or go into employment. The school's specialised focus on motor mechanics and welding gives pupils a realistic goal that they can achieve. In this way, many pupils sustain their motivation and become more resilient.

Pupils clearly feel secure in the calm teaching rooms and workshops. Most meet the school's high expectations of their behaviour. They know that any bad language will get a friendly but firm reminder from staff. If bullying happens, staff get pupils to see that what they see as banter is actually hurtful or potentially threatening.

However, it is still early days for the school. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are not consistently good and some do not attend as often as they should.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The proprietor is determined to make a difference to pupils' lives and get them into employment or further training. The school's vocational programmes are well planned and sequenced. The sixth-form programme, including a specialist welding course, is taught effectively and equips students to get apprenticeships. However, COVID-19 has made recruitment of specialist staff difficult. Some aspects of the school's work require improvement to be good.

Pupils study a broad range of subjects, with most leading towards recognised qualifications. Teachers work hard to prepare materials and get the knowledge they need to teach their subjects. Pupils mostly work with purpose and can remember what they have learned.

Teachers have set up useful routines to check whether pupils are achieving their targets. However, they are less confident about breaking down topics into smaller steps and planning things in the right order. This means that pupils' experiences are too piecemeal and topics do not link together well enough. Sometimes, to keep pupils interested, teachers move them on too quickly from one topic to another. Pupils sometimes embark on activities without doing the important groundwork.

Most pupils are competent but reluctant readers. Daily reading sessions and reading aloud in lessons subtly encourage pupils to take reading seriously. However, leaders have not set up a reading programme designed to help pupils branch out into more challenging genres.

The school is well equipped and welcoming. Workshops are inviting and as professional as any industry-standard environment. Classrooms are nurturing spaces with abundant and helpful resources. Pupils feel valued and have what they need to complete tasks promptly, without any fuss or getting impatient. Through staff's calm, matter-of-fact approach, pupils' conduct improves, and they cooperate well with the adults they know and like. Despite this, leaders acknowledge that this is not always the case, especially when pupils are out and about on visits or in the community. Appropriate behaviour is not yet ingrained in pupils. This limits their potential.

Overall, pupils' attendance is not good enough and for some, persistent absence is a real cause for concern. Leaders have not succeeded in attracting these pupils back to school. It is encouraging that sixth-form students' attendance is much better and in line with national expectations.

Pupils appreciate their mentors' kindness and advice. Sensitive careers guidance gives pupils realistic goals they can aim for. Personal, social and health education, including relationships and sex education, is an important part of the curriculum. However, other aspects of pupils' personal development have not been prioritised enough. There are not enough activities for pupils to get involved in. Pupils do not get to influence the day-to-day life of the school and do not have enough opportunities to look outwards to other cultures or viewpoints.

The leadership team has been through an unsettled time. The associate headteacher has focused on meeting the independent school standards and putting together a programme of staff training. However, his role is not permanent and the school has not yet appointed a substantive headteacher. Other leaders, including the proprietor, are experienced and act with determination and in pupils' best interests. Nevertheless, while protecting staff's well-being, leaders' own workloads are considerable and their roles not always clear. Governance is in its infancy. Members of the board have not had specific training yet and do not know enough about their statutory duties.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders understand their responsibilities and work effectively with other agencies. They have made sure that staff know what signs to report that may indicate pupils are at risk of harm, however small those signs may be. The safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. Checks on staff working in the school meet requirements. Records of concerns about pupils are precise and accurate, providing a useful history that helps to keep pupils safe. The school takes its responsibilities seriously and understand how pupils' behaviour, needs and backgrounds may all have impact on their safety and welfare.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and the proprietor)

- Topics in the academic curriculum are not broken down and sequenced logically enough to add up to a coherent whole for pupils. As a result, pupils miss out on building their knowledge and skills and do not remember enough of what they have learned. Leaders must ensure that subject teachers acquire knowledge of how to break down concepts and put them into a sensible order to help pupils know and remember more.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn about the wider world and develop their character. As a result, their experiences are limited to their immediate environment and their views are potentially narrow. Leaders should provide a wider range of opportunities to develop and extend pupils' interests, talents and their knowledge of the wider world.
- Some pupils do not attend as well as they should. The proprietor spends considerable time trying to get pupils into school. Leaders must establish a more effective strategy and work closely with partners to ensure that the school's provision meets all pupils' needs and assures their better attendance.
- Some pupils do not manage their behaviour well, including when out on trips or travelling to and from school. This limits their opportunities and does not help them to become rounded and responsible citizens. Leaders must ensure that pupils' improved behaviour becomes more habitual and less reliant on their relationships with trusted adults.
- Leaders' roles and responsibilities are not clearly laid out. Some leaders have too many disparate responsibilities. Governors are not experienced and do not know enough about their duties or how to oversee the school effectively. Governors and the proprietor should ensure that leaders' roles are clearly drawn up and that terms of reference are defined and understood by all stakeholders.

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If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	147205
DfE registration number	886/6156
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10202287
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Vocational Training Centre Ltd
Chair	Paul Thompson
Headteacher	Neil Rees-Davie
Annual fees (day pupils)	£14,900
Telephone number	01795 899 240
Website	vtcindependentschool.co.uk
Email address	paul@vtcindependentschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils aged 13 to 18 with social, emotional and mental health needs. Nearly all pupils attending the school have an education, health and care plan.
- At the time of this inspection, 20 pupils were on the school roll. The school is registered to admit up to 32 pupils.
- The school was registered in May 2020. This was the first standard inspection of the school.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspector carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in her evaluation.
- The inspector met with the proprietor, associate headteacher and other staff in the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and art. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to staff and pupils about what they are learning.
- The inspector also considered curriculum planning in science and physical education as part of the wider curriculum. The inspector toured the site to check the premises, including visits to the vocational training sessions. Information on the school's website and in other documents was reviewed regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- The inspector gathered evidence about pupils' behaviour and how staff are supported with their workload.
- Formal meetings were held with two groups of pupils, including students in the sixth form. The inspector also spoke to pupils informally around the site.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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