

Inspection of a good school: Uckfield College

Downsview Crescent, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 3DJ

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 2022

Outcome

Uckfield College continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and students are confident, determined and ambitious. They are proud of their school and have every reason to be. They appreciate the range of subjects, and they are committed to their studies. Pupils show considerable respect for each other. Relationships are harmonious and supportive. Pupils are happy and feel safe, including from bullying.

Pupils relish their leadership roles and contribute significantly to the life of the school. The school council gives an excellent account of their work in standing for and championing others in the school. Diversity and differences are celebrated.

Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Fundamental British values are highlighted in well-chosen texts covering tolerance, identity and freedom. Subject areas contribute significantly to pupils' growing social, moral and cultural awareness.

Pupils access an extensive range of clubs and enrichment opportunities. These include performing arts, sport, music, an eco-club and a debating club. Sixth form students undertake voluntary service and pursuits ranging from cooking to mindfulness.

The careers programme meets quality benchmarks with additional provision in Year 8 to support options. The school uses subjects, careers fairs, virtual fairs and visiting speakers to highlight career opportunities. As a result, students and pupils have high aspirations.

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

Considerable thought and research have gone into developing the curriculum. It is exceptionally well planned and carefully sequenced across all years, including the sixth form. It is firmly embedded and coherently developed. It builds upon, and often exceeds, the national curriculum.

Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are well supported. They are well known, and actively encouraged by their teachers. They achieve exceptionally well in line with the policy of 'high support and high expectations'. Higher attaining pupils are given extension work and challenged to deepen their knowledge.

Teachers are highly skilled and have very strong subject expertise. Lesson planning ensures that content is revisited with an emphasis on retaining knowledge. This is supported through starter activities, deep questioning and regular assessments, which allow pupils to extend their knowledge.

Literacy skills are supported across the curriculum. Subject specific words are actively highlighted. Highly effective use of assessment enables teachers to understand what pupils have learned and remembered. Feedback is detailed and this helps pupils understand their next steps. The tracking of progress is thorough and forensic.

Reading is promoted well across the school. Pupils who are at the earlier stages of reading receive tailored support from staff. Catch up programmes have narrowed the gaps between reading and chronological ages. Staff and student reading champions actively promote reading for pleasure, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Leaders have planned a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) for pupils. They have successfully woven this programme through PSHE lessons, assemblies, tutorials, and focus days. The careers programme is well considered. It is successfully prioritised for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. All pupils benefit from one-to-one careers interviews.

The sixth form offers an exceptional experience for students. The curriculum is ambitious and relevant. There are 30 A level courses as well as a strong vocational offer. Students are highly motivated. Staying on, and retention rates are high. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, including support for Oxbridge and Russell group university applications.

Leaders have exceedingly high expectations for behaviour. This is supported by clear behaviour policies, procedures and practices. Inspectors saw no evidence of poor behaviour during the inspection. Lessons were calm and orderly with wellbehaved and engaged pupils. In a small number of Year 7 and 8 lessons, a few pupils reported that their learning was 'slowed down' by the behaviour of a very small minority of pupils.

Leaders are passionate about the school. They are extremely ambitious and supportive of staff, students and pupils. Teachers value the professional development they receive both at subject and whole-school level. They say that their workload is manageable.

There is no complacency on the part of leaders and governors. Governors have a good understanding of the school. They ensure that the school fulfils its statutory duties and hold leaders to account. Senior leaders collaborate with other local schools to support

improvements in the area. They accept that more work is needed to engage, inform and involve all parents and carers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a well-established culture of care at the school. Safeguarding records are fastidiously kept. They are regularly audited and updated in line with statutory requirements. All staff have received high-quality safeguarding training as well as frequent updates. They know what to do if they have any concerns.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. They are aware of the risks they face. They are taught about keeping safe and the importance of healthy relationships. Pupils know who to speak to if they have concerns. The school offers considerable support for pupils' mental health and well-being.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The behaviour of a small number of younger pupils is not as good as it could be. A few pupils reported that their learning was 'slowed down' by a small minority of pupils. Leaders should continue their work to support these pupils needing additional help in managing their behaviour.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	114590
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10226888
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1557
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	305
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Julie Laughton
Principal	Hugh Hennebry
Website	www.uckfield.college
Date of previous inspection	28 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Uckfield College is a much larger than the average-sized, 11 to 18 secondary school maintained by the local authority.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors conducted deep dives in English, mathematics, history and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, talked with teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, staff and pupils, including members of the school council. They reviewed the single central record and checked the school's safeguarding procedures and practices, including those for safer recruitment.
- Inspectors considered policies provided by the school. They looked at curriculum documentation, behaviour logs, attendance records and destination statistics. The lead inspector met with governors and looked at the minutes of their meetings.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey of parents' views, additional written comments from parents and parent emails received during the inspection. They reviewed the survey returns and responses to the online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

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