

Inspection of UTC Reading

Crescent Road, East Reading, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5RQ

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

This school was last inspected eight years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have very mixed experiences at UTC Reading. Many pupils enjoy the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, and the emphasis placed on preparing them for the world of work. However, others feel badly let down.

Pupils' learning is routinely disrupted by the behaviour of others. Some pupils wander the corridors and arrive late to lessons. In class, many pupils talk over their teachers. This goes unchallenged. Staff do not have consistently high expectations. As a result, interruptions to learning continue. Some groups of pupils feel unsafe because of the boisterous behaviour of others in corridors. Bullying is rare but dealt with well. Worryingly, not all pupils feel they can report serious safeguarding concerns to staff. This is because they have little confidence staff will act.

There are inconsistencies in how well staff teach the curriculum. As a result, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The experience of students in the sixth form is more positive. They benefit from a more consistent approach and their knowledge and skills develop more successfully. Despite this, far too many students in the sixth form fail to attend school.

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

Leaders have developed a curriculum that responds to the needs of local employers. The engineering and computer science specialisms, together with a focus on STEM subjects, mean that the curriculum is designed to prepare pupils well for future training or employment. Leaders' ambition is for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to achieve highly. However, this ambition is not being realised. Most, but not all, subjects have been planned and sequenced well.

Staff are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. However, the way they teach the curriculum is inconsistent. This is particularly the case in key stage 4. In some subjects, staff explain new concepts clearly. They ask helpful questions of pupils to check their understanding. However, in other subjects, staff do not check that pupils understand their learning. Pupils develop gaps in what they know and can do as they move through the year groups. Pupils with SEND do not receive effective support because staff do not know which strategies to use to support these pupils. Leaders' monitoring of the provision for pupils with SEND is not working.

Reading is a priority. Leaders have designed a well-thought-out plan that was put in place at the start of the academic year to improve the reading curriculum. Leaders check pupils' reading abilities when they join the school. They provide extra help to pupils who need more help. However, leaders' plans are still in the very early stages of development.

The attendance of sixth-form students to lessons is far too low. Leaders have recently made their expectations clearer. They have established a set of consequences for students who do not attend lessons. However, many students are not happy about this and are not on board. There is more for leaders to do to ensure that students recognise the importance of attending lessons. Some students vote with their feet because they do not value the lessons that are taught by staff who are not their usual teachers.

Leaders are in the early stages of revamping the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme. While they have thought about the broad topics they will teach in each year group, they have not identified the specific content pupils need to learn. There has been too little focus on the PSHE curriculum, particularly for Year 11 pupils. As a result, pupils have significant gaps in their understanding of important topics, such as the range of protected characteristics. Too many pupils do not show respect for their peers, for example some use racist language towards each other and banter. They do not understand what is appropriate. Staff do not always take effective action to tackle these behaviours.

A wide range of clubs provide pupils with opportunities to develop their talents and interests. Pupils gain certifications that will improve their employability, for example Microsoft and Adobe. The careers and futures programme ensures that pupils develop an awareness of the different careers they could pursue. Pupils receive helpful, independent careers advice. Leaders work closely and effectively with employer partners. Some of these partners work directly with pupils.

Trust leaders have a clear vision for UTC Reading. They are beginning to support the school well. They identified that standards were slipping, however this was very recent. Trustees and local governors have clear roles and responsibilities. They hold leaders to account. However, leaders and those responsible for governance had not, until the inspection, realised the extent of some of the weaknesses. During the inspection, the chief executive officer (CEO) and chair of trustees were proactive in making some immediate changes to tackle these weaknesses.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Recruitment checks are thorough. Staff receive training so that they understand the risks facing pupils. Staff know what to do if they have concerns about pupils. Simple systems and processes ensure that staff can easily report concerns. Staff routinely record concerns on the school's safeguarding system. The safeguarding team takes swift action and works well with other agencies to ensure pupils receive the right help. Despite this, not all staff understand the importance of modelling professional behaviours. The boundaries between staff and pupils are blurred. Pupils describe staff as 'more like friends than teachers'. Some pupils told inspectors that this makes them feel uncomfortable.

Several pupils made serious allegations about staff directly to inspectors during the inspection. Too many pupils told inspectors that they had not felt able to report them to school staff. Pupils told inspectors that, in one case when they did report serious concerns to staff, these were dismissed.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff have an underdeveloped understanding of their professional responsibilities. They do not observe the professional boundaries that need to exist between staff and pupils well enough. This makes too many pupils feel uncomfortable. Leaders and those responsible for governance need to ensure that the staff uphold high professional standards consistently. Some pupils do not feel that they can report safeguarding concerns to adults in the school because they feel that their concerns will not be treated seriously by adults. Some pupils do not know who to report concerns to so they do not report them. Leaders need to ensure that pupils know who to report concerns to and that they have confidence that their concerns will be listened to and acted on every time.
- Staff expectations of pupils' behaviour are inconsistent both in lessons and around school. Regular interruptions to learning go unchallenged. Consequently, pupils do not achieve as well as they could and some pupils feel unsafe. Leaders need to ensure that all staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and that the behaviour management system in place is understood by all and followed consistently.
- Leaders do not provide staff with specific strategies that will support the needs of pupils with SEND. This means that these pupils do not get the help they need to achieve well. Leaders need to ensure that processes for identifying and reviewing strategies for each pupil are consistently embedded.
- The PSHE curriculum is not fully developed. Leaders have not identified the important content they need pupils to learn. As a result, pupils have gaps in their understanding. Leaders need to rapidly review the curriculum and ensure that it is implemented effectively.
- The curriculum is not implemented consistently across all subjects. This means that pupils' experiences of learning are very mixed as they move from one subject to another. Leaders need to improve their oversight of the curriculum to ensure that inconsistencies are identified and resolved quickly.
- The attendance of students in the sixth form is poor. As a result, not all students benefit from the education offered. Leaders need to rapidly improve the attendance of students.

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	139268
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	10265833
Type of school	Technical
School category	University technical college
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	499
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	298
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Cheri Ashby
Principal	Jonathan Nicholls (Executive Principal) Jax Snipp (Head of School)
Website	www.utcreading.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 and 20 May 2015, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- UTC Reading is a university technical college within the Activate Learning Education Trust.
- The school has specialisms in engineering and computer science.
- The school has several employer partners. These include the founding partners: Activate Learning, Microsoft, Cisco, University of Reading, Network Rail and Stantec. Other partners include Royal Navy, National Grid, Alstom, AWE, Fujitsu, Sage, SSE, Thames Water, Science & Technology Facilities Council and Vodafone.
- Since September 2022, the school has been led by an executive headteacher and head of school.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and

engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

- The school does not currently use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, engineering, computer science and 3D Design. They discussed the curriculum with leaders, staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with leaders to discuss the personal development of pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the PSHE curriculum.
- The lead inspector visited lessons to explore how well pupils with SEND are supported. He scrutinised education, health and care plans and pupils' individual learning plans.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, staff, pupils and those with responsibility for governance, including the chair of trustees and the chair of the local governing body. The lead inspector scrutinised trustee and local governor meeting minutes.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO of Activate Learning Education Trust.
- Inspectors scrutinised behaviour, bullying and racist incident records.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the confidential staff survey. They took account of the responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and comments made by those who responded.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, met with the safeguarding team and spoke with pupils and staff. They scrutinised school records of the safeguarding checks carried out on adults working at the school and spoke with governors. They scrutinised child protection records. The lead inspector also spoke to the local authority designated officer.

Inspection team

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