

Inspection of VTC Independent School

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

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff at VTC Independent School give pupils the support, and sense of purpose they need, to re-engage with education. Staff create a highly purposeful atmosphere. Pupils quickly learn to value both the vocational and the academic education provided. Many pupils experience a sense of academic success for the first time. This is highly motivating for pupils and encourages them to really commit to their learning. As a result, pupils achieve well.

The school environment has been developed to provide a high-quality vocational education. Pupils particularly enjoy studying motor mechanics, welding and catering. In these subjects, pupils benefit from industry-standard equipment, which gives them a real understanding of what is required in each respective vocation.

The school helps pupils to reimagine a more positive future for themselves, and then work with them to create a clear pathway forward. Developing positive behaviours and attitudes is a key part of this work. Pupils know exactly what is expected from them at school and when on school trips and visits. Most pupils develop positive and trusting friendships with their peers. Pupils in the sixth form demonstrate the professional behaviours that will be expected once they are in a workplace.

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

The school has a very strong vocational offer that has been designed to enable pupils to secure apprenticeships or employment when they leave the school. Expert teaching in these areas enables pupils to become increasingly proficient and competent over time. Additionally, pupils' daily experience of working safely and responsibly with industry-standard facilities gives them a clear sense of what to expect in the workplace, as well as what will be expected of them.

Since the last inspection, the school has strengthened its academic curriculum. In the strongest subjects, leaders have introduced clear, well-sequenced curriculums that break down key learning into small steps. The school has recruited additional teachers who have secure subject expertise. Pupils are carefully assessed when they join the school, and teaching is tailored to each pupil's starting points and identified gaps in knowledge. In these subjects, all pupils achieve well.

In a small number of subjects, ongoing recruitment and retention challenges continue to impact teaching. The school is keenly aware of this and provides teachers who are teaching outside of their area of expertise with additional support, training and guidance.

The school has strengthened the teaching of reading since the last inspection. Pupils who arrive at an early stage of learning to read follow a phonics programme and read books that match the sounds they are learning. Those who are more fluent benefit from daily reading sessions at school. Teachers assess how well pupils

progress in their fluency and comprehension and any gaps are identified and addressed through careful support.

Reading is promoted within the school environment in a range of ways. For example, texts and publications that link to pupils' vocation studies are available for pupils to read at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Pupils regularly visit the local library to select their own reading books. As a result, pupils' reading horizons are gradually widening.

The school aims for every pupil to develop into a well-rounded member of society. Pupils are supported to engage positively with the local community, for example, by litter-picking in the local area. Older pupils complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme with careful support from the school. The school has developed a clear curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and for relationships and sex education. Pupils view staff as trusted adults and value the advice and guidance they receive.

As pupils' behaviour has improved, the school has planned an increasingly ambitious programme of trips and visits that support the planned curriculum. Pupils have enjoyed visits to local beaches linked to the school's geography curriculum, for example.

Everything the school does is aimed at encouraging and supporting pupils, and students in the sixth form, to aspire and understand what they need to do to reach and succeed in the next stage of their career journeys. Many students remain at the school for sixth form and study welding or catering alongside English and mathematics. However, pupils who wish to pursue a different path get impartial advice and are supported to identify the right college or next step for them. Students at the sixth form benefit from the school's knowledge of industry, and careful partnership work between the school and apprenticeship providers.

The chair of the proprietor body has a very clear vision for the education they want pupils to receive. This vision is well realised, particularly in relation to the vocational pathways that pupils follow. The school no longer has a governing board. However, an advisory board and a school improvement partner have been appointed to support the chair in ensuring that the independent school standards are consistently met and that the education that pupils receive is making a positive difference to their lives. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a small number of subjects, the steps of learning are not clearly broken down into a logical sequence. Teachers sometimes teach outside of their area of expertise. Pupils are sometimes asked to complete complex activities when they do not have the requisite knowledge or understanding to be successful. The school needs to ensure that the small steps of learning are clearly broken down and understood by teaching staff and that teachers who are teaching outside of their area of expertise are supported to develop their subject knowledge.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	147205
DfE registration number	886/6156
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10286468
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	19
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	6
Proprietor	Vocational Training Centre Ltd
Chair	Paul Thompson
Headteacher	Greg Higman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£16,000 to £84,000
Telephone number	01795 899240
Website	https://vtcindependentschool.co.uk/
Email address	greg@vtcindependentschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 to 24 March 2022

Information about this school

- The school's last standard inspection was in March 2022.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Most pupils have previously been excluded from education or are at risk of exclusion. Almost all pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and are placed by the local authority. A small number of placements are commissioned directly by schools. These pupils may or may not have an EHC plan and remain dual registered with their school of origin.
- The school has developed a second site to house their sixth form. This is located at Unit 13, The Glenmore Centre, Castle Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3GL.
- A new headteacher took up post in November 2023.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the proprietor body and the headteacher.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, physical education and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the quality of education provided in other subjects, and reviewed schemes of work for some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors carried out other activities to check that the school meets the independent school standards. These included a check of the school premises and wider work to comply with health and safety laws (including fire safety).

Inspectors considered the school's approach to risk management. Inspectors also checked the relevant policies and the school website.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Maxine McDonald-Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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