

Inspection of UTC Oxfordshire

Greenwood Way, Harwell, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 6BZ

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 December 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

The head of school is Emma Reynolds. This school is part of Activate Learning Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Joanne Harper, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Cheryl Ashby. There is also an executive principal, Samantha Knowlton, who is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are excited about the opportunities provided that will help them to pursue careers in science and engineering. The school's curriculum offer gives each pupil a good understanding of the industry they would like to work in and how to get there. This confidence stems from the thorough workplace preparation that pupils receive and the school's ethos of support and ambition.

Pupils value their teachers' expert knowledge. Detailed learning across subjects is linked so pupils develop the different skills they need in readiness for their future career plans. Lessons are positive, where pupils enjoy debating and testing their knowledge with their teachers and classmates. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are sensitively supported to fully participate in class discussions and learning activities.

Pupils benefit from the school's close links to local businesses and other organisations. They develop a detailed knowledge of industry local to the school. They are helped to develop a broad range of skills beyond their academic qualifications. When describing their experience of school, pupils explain how the school's environment reflects what they imagine they will find in the workplace. In response, the majority of pupils show a mature attitude to their learning.

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

The school diligently prepares pupils for a possible career in science and engineering. A range of different qualifications are on offer. The support provided in each subject links to pupils' individual strengths and ambitions. Because of this, pupils feel enabled and motivated. In many subjects, the curriculum is well organised, with a clear awareness of what knowledge and skills pupils will learn at each stage. However, in a small number of subjects, this is not yet the case. This makes it more difficult for teachers to be clear on what pupils should be learning and when and to check whether pupils know everything they should.

Lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils appreciate the way that teachers link concepts from other subjects into their lessons. This helps pupils widen their technical knowledge. However, while teachers have good subject knowledge, there is some variability in how this is taught to pupils and how teachers check what pupils know and remember. As a result, some pupils do not learn as much as they could.

Exploring and applying technical language is an important part of the school's curriculum. Pupils use identified vocabulary fluently when describing their work. However, the school's help for pupils who find reading more difficult is not consistently provided. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen this support to ensure pupils can read fluently and confidently to understand what they are being taught.

Staff know the individual needs of pupils well. The school recognises that when pupils join, they have a variety of individual needs alongside varied experiences of education. Staff receive training to identify pupils' SEND needs and any barriers to learning. This means that pupils, including those with SEND, get the support they need to learn well. Many move into technical and specialist training after leaving school.

Pupils join the school from many different educational settings. Effective pastoral support systems provide support as pupils move into the school. The school makes sure that it has all the information necessary to help each pupil settle in quickly. Skilled staff are also available to provide guidance if pupils have any concerns or worries. Systems and the tracking of information ensure that behaviour concerns are immediately identified. Where needed, helpful support is quickly put in place to ensure pupils know how to meet the school's behaviour expectations.

Currently, leaders recognise that the attendance of a small number of pupils is not as regular as it should be. Specific support is in place, such as regular communication and meetings with parents to identify where additional support is needed. This is beginning to ensure more pupils are not missing out on their valuable education.

Careers provision is detailed and focused on pupils' different aspirations. Pupils benefit from visits to local research organisations and businesses. Trips to universities and apprenticeship providers help them to understand their future training options. Sixth-form students particularly value learning about the importance of teamwork, presentation skills, time management and other crucial skills for the workplace alongside their academic studies.

The wider personal development offer helps pupils learn the actions they need to take to keep themselves and their friends safe. The school uses its precise knowledge of each pupil to plan activities to help individuals understand specific risks and how to manage these. Pupils are thoughtful about the needs of others and are respectful and welcoming.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders have not yet precisely set out the detail and sequence of knowledge that pupils need to learn. This means that pupils' knowledge does not always build sequentially and that teachers can find it more difficult to identify if pupils have gaps. Leaders must ensure that the curriculum in all subjects specifically sets out the knowledge that pupils need to learn, and when they need to learn it.

- The school has not ensured that all teachers consistently teach the intended curriculum and sufficiently check that pupils have learned what they need before moving on to new learning. This means that pupils are not always learning as much as they could. Leaders must develop teachers' expertise to enable them to explore what pupils know and remember and to identify any gaps in knowledge and skills that need to be remedied.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	141111
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10288044
Type of school	Other secondary
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	290
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Cheryl Ashby
CEO of the trust	Joanne Harper
Principal	Samantha Knowlton (Executive Principal)
Website	www.utcoxfordshire.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is part of Activate Learning Education Trust.
- The school currently uses one registered and two unregistered alternative education providers to support a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held meetings with the executive principal, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, curriculum leaders and other staff.
- The lead inspector met with trustees and representatives of the local governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and engineering. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors looked at other aspects of the curriculum.
- The inspectors examined a range of documentation provided by the school, including leaders' self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also took into consideration the responses to the confidential staff and pupil surveys as well as speaking to staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Ed Mather, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Charlotte Wilson	Ofsted Inspector
John Burridge	Ofsted Inspector
Jo-Ann Henderson	His Majesty's Inspector

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