



Uckfield Community Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114590
LEA East Sussex
Inspection number 279419
Inspection dates 14 September 2005 to 15 September 2005
Reporting inspector Christine Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Downsview Crescent
School category	Community		Uckfield
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		East Sussex TN22 3DJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01825 764844
Number on roll	1655	Fax number	01825 760 237
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Neill Barker
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2000	Headteacher	Mr Craig Pamphilon

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 14 September 2005 - 15 September 2005	Inspection number 279419
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Uckfield Community Technology College is much larger than other comprehensive schools and has a large sixth form. Most pupils are white-British. Very few come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The vast majority have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low and the percentage of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with that in other schools.

The school is involved in a wide range of initiatives that enhance pupils' learning and the life of the school. For example, the development of a new off-site facility in conjunction with other community colleges aims to develop relevant courses meeting the needs of both students and the local business community.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the college's own evaluation that Uckfield is an outstanding school, strong in all areas with many exemplary features.

Standards are high at all levels and all groups of pupils make very good progress. The information available on student performance indicates that there is scope for raising standards and progress further to outstanding levels. Considerable efforts are made to ensure that lessons are relevant to the pupils and that they enjoy their work. Spiritual and cultural aspects of school life could be improved. The college takes exceptionally good care of the students and they feel safe, valued members of the school community. Overall the use of funding is tightly monitored and well managed and the college gives excellent value for money.

Through the highly effective management and outstanding leadership of the headteacher, well supported by the leadership team, middle managers and the governing body, the college has made very good progress since its last inspection. The work of the college is now thoroughly planned and regularly evaluated. Through this clarity of self-knowledge the leadership team have a good view of both the daily life of the school and can evaluate long-term success. This has potential to lead to further improvements in the progress students make and the standards they achieve. The governors could add depth to this by gaining more direct experience of the students' life in school.

The attainment of boys has improved and the college now adds good value to the education of all its students. ICT has improved although the college is still working on further developments to advance provision and raise standards.

Above all students enjoy coming to school to learn and know they have every opportunity to do well. They feel fully involved in the college, one pupil spoke for many when she said "You don't have to pretend here – they accept you for what you are".

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is, as the college knows, also outstanding. Managers deploy resources carefully to accommodate the learning needs of individual pupils and provide very good value for money. The relatively open access policy leads to an inclusive programme of study for all students and the sixth form has grown significantly in strength and popularity over the past five years. Standards are high, the sixth form is in the top 30 per cent of schools nationally with considerable potential to reach even higher standards. The college is constantly striving for improvement and innovation while caring for the students is top priority.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate improvements in standards in English as part of the continued drive to raise standards to outstanding levels.
- Extend opportunities for promoting pupils spiritual and cultural development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The standards students achieve in external tests are very high in comparison with those reached nationally. They start in Year 7 with average standards and make very good progress by the end of year 9, particularly in mathematics and science.

Older pupils also make very good progress. The percentage gaining five or more higher GCSE grades was well above average in 2004, and continued to improve in 2005. Within this strong performance, there are one or two subjects such as English where results need to be more consistent each year.

Students also do very well in the sixth form and there is no significant underachievement by any group. Students make very good progress and standards are above national average although with potential for further improvement.

The school works hard to raise the achievement of different groups of pupils, for example those with particular gifts and talents. Very good progress is made by those who enter the school with the lowest levels of attainment and by those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The college met its own challenging targets for standards in 2005 but not in 2004. The college states that achievement and standards are outstanding. Analysis of information on the students' performance indicates that, although standards are very high, they are not quite outstanding as yet and there is scope to raise them to exceptional levels. The very good provision, excellent teaching and the care taken of the students provide an excellent springboard for further improvements in the value added to students' education and for accelerating the progress they make.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

From their attitudes both in and out of lessons, it is clear that students enjoy coming to school. They get on well with each other, their teachers and other adults and value the help they receive. Students' behaviour is exemplary. They attend school regularly, mostly arrive on time and are rarely late to lessons.

Students develop a very good sense of social awareness through the college's strong moral framework. Bullying is not seen to be a problem. Students know that if it occurs it will be tackled promptly and effectively by the college. The ethos in the sixth form is also excellent and the students are very supportive of their school. The active and influential school council gives students a genuine voice in decisions about running the school.

Students enjoy the huge range of extra activities organised by the college, some of which enhance their contribution to the local community. Other activities increase understanding of different cultures such as the presentations on aspects of life in Ghana. However, more could be done and opportunities for effectively raising awareness of different cultures are underdeveloped. Assemblies promote good opportunities to develop community spirit, but neither these nor tutor periods meet fully the statutory requirements for collective worship.

Students are aware of the need to work safely in lessons such as science and always behave sensibly outside of their classrooms. The college works hard to promote healthy lifestyles. The college cafeteria and vending machines only provide healthy food choices and students understand about the nutritional value of the food they eat. When asked if they would like to return to the days of 'burgers and chips' they replied with a resounding "NO!"

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is always very good and often outstanding. A strong focus on planning what the students are going to learn, using a common approach across the school, has resulted in lessons that are fast-paced and challenging for the students. There is a strong emphasis on varied activities during the lessons such as a mathematics teacher who likes to "make sure my lessons are not predictable". This approach is helped by good use of technology, especially interactive white boards that motivate the students. The school identifies and provides very effectively for students' additional learning needs.

Students are eager and successful learners. They know they are doing well and appreciate the efforts made by teachers of all subjects to help them succeed. Some work has been done on encouraging more independent learning styles, especially in the sixth form. There is still scope for this to be further developed across the school.

In the sixth form, teaching is very effective not only in ensuring that learners make very good progress in individual subjects but also in developing their confidence, motivation and social awareness. Students talk about their teachers with enthusiasm and praise. They say "In every department there are excellent teachers who engage and motivate us"

Thorough marking of students' work ensures that they understand what needs to be improved. This view is supported by the students themselves who report that their work is marked regularly and gives them a good idea about how they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. All students have individual targets, which were described by one student as "challenging but achievable, just!"

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Students are well served by an appropriate and dynamic curriculum where provision is reviewed regularly allowing the college to make amendments that reflect the changing needs of its pupils. There is very good focus on improving the basic skills of students and, in Year 7, students take part in a "learning to learn day".

For older students an extensive range of courses includes vocational and more advanced courses. The college makes very thorough arrangements to meet individuals' special educational needs and the Flexible Learning option provides the opportunity for an individually tailored curriculum. As a result almost all are able to move on after GCSE into further education or employment.

Some Year 11 students have the opportunity to take AS level examinations and others participate in the Modern Apprenticeship scheme for business. There are opportunities to take up unusual courses such as 'Equine Studies'.

The college, together with other local community colleges, is developing an innovative "Wealden Skills Centre" to deliver courses in engineering and motor mechanics.

The college has put a lot of effort into ensuring smooth transition into the sixth form. As a result, a very large number of students decide to continue with further studies. Recruitment has increased as the wide range of courses enables students to study appropriate and stimulating subjects.

The excellent range of enrichment and after school opportunities provided by the college are seen by the students as a real strength. As one boy reported there is "always something to do after school" whether it be sporting activities, developing links with a partner school in Ghana or taking part in a concert.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support of the college for its students are outstanding strengths. The college places a very high value on the welfare and progress of all of its students. There are well established practices for caring for their health and safety, to which the college nurse makes a strong contribution.

All staff are thoroughly trained in procedures for dealing with child protection issues and assessing risks. The pastoral team is very effective in dealing with the needs of individual students, making full use of strong links with external agencies. Support for vulnerable students is very good. The very strong mentoring programme deals flexibly with students according to need.

Sixth form students are encouraged to participate fully in college life and act as excellent role models for the rest of the school. Many volunteer to organise events both within the school and in the local community. Students are supported very well by their teachers and mentors resulting in high retention and pass rates.

The college takes pains to provide a safe environment. The site is very thoroughly monitored to keep it safe, both in terms of supervision of activities and also through regular checking of its physical condition. Staff take prompt action to deal with causes for concern.

Pupils especially appreciate the new toilets. One said, "It's safe to go in there because it's so clean and we really like the smoke alarms".

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The outstanding college leadership and management results in a clear sense of purpose throughout the college that is based on challenging all students to do their best while giving them the encouragement and support they need to do this. This approach is appreciated by the parents who feel that their children make "amazing progress" and "become confident and more self-assured". In particular the way in which the college manages the transition from primary schools was greatly appreciated. Views of parents and students are acted upon, for example the school council is very influential in contributing to school decisions such as the new toilet block.

The college knows itself very well through its own systematic monitoring that gives a clear picture of how things are going. For example the college has an accurate view of its very good and often outstanding teaching. This self evaluation and review is a clear strength of the college and allows for rapid response and revision of ideas to find out what works most effectively.

This drive comes from the hard working leaders throughout the college. At the centre of this is the headteacher, well supported and challenged by the governors and assisted by a committed and effective senior team. Governors have a strong strategic over view of the college but could be more active in visiting classes and students.

The leadership and management of the very successful and happy sixth form are also outstanding. Good management of the relatively open access policy leads to an inclusive programme of study for all students, a full range of courses and rising student numbers.

The headteacher conveys a strong sense of commitment to the personal development of all members of the school community, both staff and students. Use of staff is imaginative and effective, for example the setting up of Deputy Directors of year who are not teachers is proving particularly successful and popular with pupils.

The college is infused with a lively atmosphere that encourages innovation and a continual striving to develop the very best education for the students. As a result the leadership and management are in an excellent position to take the college forward in the future.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Uckfield Community Technology College Downsview Crescent Uckfield East Sussex TN22 3DJ

19th September 2005

Dear Students

We visited your college on 14th and 15th September 2005 and I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. We enjoyed our visit very much and it was a pleasure to talk to you about your life in school and to watch you enjoying your lessons. If you read our report it will tell you in more detail about what your school does well and how it could be made even better.

You are rightly proud of your college and we found it to be an outstanding school in which to grow and learn. We do not think there are any major weaknesses in the college. The main strengths are:

you work very hard, achieve very good results and make the most of all the opportunities your college has to offer

your behaviour is outstanding and you are very positive about your learning

excellent teaching that makes sure that you learn as well as you can

outstanding leadership by the headteacher and senior staff

relationships between staff and pupils are very good. You work well together and respect each other

the college takes very good care of you, teaches you to adopt a healthy lifestyle and makes sure you are safe

the college organises an excellent variety of courses

there is a superb range of out of school activities and many of you join in

the way you take a responsible part in school life, for example through your lively and active school council.

We have made a few recommendations to try to make your outstanding school even better. We would like the college to continue to make sure that you reach the highest standards you can in all your subjects, especially English, and to help you to improve the way you study and learn on your own. You could have a better understanding different ways of life in other cultures and get to know the Governors of your school a little more.

Thank you for your contribution to this inspection. You are a credit to yourselves as well as the school and your parents.

Dr Christine Jones HMI Lead inspector