

Uckfield Community Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114590
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	326043
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	David Butler HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1621
Sixth form	363
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Ziolek
Principal	Hugh Hennebry
Date of previous school inspection	14–15 September 2005
School address	Downsview Crescent Uckfield East Sussex TN22 3DJ
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 45 lessons and one assembly, and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the college's work, looked at the college's self-evaluation form and a range of other documentation and considered the responses from 268 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the consistency in the quality of teaching, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form
- the support given to vulnerable students and minority groups to ensure they achieve well
- the impact of the specialism in applied learning on the quality of the curriculum and on raising achievement.

Information about the school

Uckfield Community Technology College draws its students from a wide catchment area that includes the market town of Uckfield and its surrounding villages. The great majority of students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. The college gained its specialism in technology in 2002 and was awarded a second specialism in applied learning in 2007. The college works in partnership with three neighbouring schools and a college of further education to extend the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. This includes the provision of the Wealden Skills Centre. The current principal was appointed in September 2008.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Uckfield Community Technology College continues to provide an outstanding quality of education for its full range of students. The college has one simple aim, which is to realise the potential of every student. It has been highly successful in achieving this over many years, both in terms of academic excellence and in developing caring, well-balanced and mature young adults. The college has an extremely positive ethos, and morale amongst staff and students is high. There is no complacency and there continues to be a relentless drive throughout the college on continuously raising performance. Managers have an excellent understanding of the college's strengths and areas for further improvement, based on high quality information, including a great deal of evidence from lesson observations. The college is innovative and has a record of success in raising standards and achievement. Leaders and managers at all levels are extremely effective and fully capable of bringing about further improvement.

A major strength of the college is its focus on meeting the individual needs of students through its excellent curriculum and the outstanding quality of its care, guidance and support. This, together with consistently high quality teaching, results in students making excellent progress. Many students, including the more vulnerable, spoke very positively about the way they had been helped and supported to overcome any difficulties they faced. This was also reflected in the many positive comments received from parents; for example, one parent of a student with learning difficulties wrote: 'His confidence has grown so much since coming to UCTC, he now feels much more able to give things a go, with great results.'

The great majority of teaching observed during the inspection was at least good and much was outstanding, reflecting the school's own evaluation. Teaching in the sixth form is particularly strong. In the best lessons, students were very actively involved in making decisions and taking responsibility for their own learning but this was not the case in some of the less successful lessons. The use of assessment to improve students' learning is generally good, and there are examples of excellent practice, but there are some inconsistencies in the quality of feedback students receive on their work.

The college is about much more than just academic success and places equal emphasis on students' personal development, which is excellent in most respects. Students are generally well prepared for their futures but their understanding of

personal finance, economics and business is not sufficiently developed. Students' spiritual, social and moral development is strong but their understanding of different cultures is more limited.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection on the key issues identified for improvement. The college continues to make effective use of the additional resources provided for its specialism in technology. The introduction of the specialism in applied learning has had a very positive impact on the provision for vocational education and on raising achievement through meeting the needs of students more effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching further to ensure that even more students make exceptional progress by:
 - sharing more fully the excellent practice in teaching that already exists in the college
 - providing more opportunities in lessons for students to make decisions and take greater responsibility for their own learning
 - ensuring that the feedback students receive on their work is of a consistently high quality.
- Develop students' financial, business and economic awareness and a deeper understanding of different cultures by:
 - strengthening and making more coherent the provision in these areas
 - providing more opportunities for all students to engage with employers and businesses.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' overall achievement is outstanding both in the main school and in the sixth form. Students enter the college with levels of attainment that are broadly average. They make excellent progress during years 7–11 and attain examination results that are well above average. A very high proportion of students stay on into the college's sixth form where they continue to make excellent progress and attain examination results that are well above average. Many students continue to higher education. The very robust systems the college has in place for monitoring students' progress and the intensive support given to students at risk of underachieving ensure that no specific group of students underperforms. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress. Very few students fail to enter further education, training or employment when they leave the college.

The overwhelming majority of students enjoy their learning. This was very apparent in the lessons observed and reflected in the questionnaire responses from parents. Students are focused, respond extremely well to the tasks they are set and make rapid progress in their learning across subjects and year groups. They are enthusiastic and keen to learn more, often through participation in additional classes and activities. They ask questions to seek clarification or extend their understanding. When given the opportunity, they demonstrate they can work independently over sustained periods of time and take responsibility for organising their own learning.

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. They rarely need to be reminded about how to behave. They relate very well to each other and to their teachers. They are courteous and mindful of the needs of others. Students' level of attendance is above average and there is no evidence of poor attendance by any particular group of students. Students willingly take on responsibilities in school and in the wider community. An excellent illustration of this is the 'Spiritus' arts and cultural initiative that is run by students who raise funds and put on events in the local community and nationally.

Students say they feel safe and secure and are confident that the rare cases of bullying or other forms of harassment are dealt with promptly and sensitively. Their views were very strongly reflected in the parent questionnaire responses. The school was able to present strong evidence that students adopt healthy lifestyles and develop an excellent understanding of the factors influencing their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers convey great enthusiasm for their subjects, and their high level of expertise ensures that lessons are well planned and that explanations are clear. They have excellent relationships with their students and use humour, praise and encouragement to good effect. Teachers have high expectations and do much to encourage students to strive for the highest standards. They accurately assess students' work and have a good understanding of the next steps students need to take to improve. In the most effective lessons, teachers are skilful at asking challenging questions and pursuing responses to encourage students to think very deeply. Students are given excellent support in preparing for public examinations. Effective use is made of modern technology to make learning more interesting and to

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

encourage independent learning and the development of research skills. Occasionally, teachers miss opportunities to link work to the real world and students' lives and in some lessons students are given insufficient opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning. Cover supervisors receive excellent training and deliver lessons with confidence. Learning support assistants provide effective support in lessons.

The curriculum has been enhanced since the last inspection, particularly in terms of the provision of more vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and Level 2 courses in the sixth form. The curriculum is flexible, tailored to meet individual needs as far as possible and provides a range of different pathways to enable students to eventually progress to Level 3 courses. Students are offered an excellent choice of subjects at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The development of the Wealden Skills Centre has been highly successful in enabling a substantial number of students to gain vocational qualifications and develop skills for the workplace. Many of these students said they might otherwise have become disengaged with education. The college has exciting plans in place to extend some aspects of this work to Year 9. The college also has plans to enhance some aspects of its provision for personal, social, health and economic education and for citizenship education. The college offers a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including opportunities for students to pursue their interests in arts and culture as well as sport.

The care, guidance and support provided to students is outstanding and a major factor in the success of the college. In all years, students feel safe, secure and happy and recognise that the college considers their welfare to be a top priority. This was also reflected in a very high proportion of the responses from parents. Excellent liaison with feeder primary schools enables Year 6 students to make a very smooth transfer to Year 7. Students are very well supported by their tutors, heads and assistant heads of year, who know them well and take a keen interest in both their personal and academic development. Students also have daily access to the college nurse. Students are given high quality advice and guidance when making their choices for Year 10 courses and post-16 education, training and employment. Excellent liaison with external agencies enables additional expertise to be used to support students with particular needs. Vulnerable children receive very thoughtful and carefully planned advice and guidance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal, with the highly effective support of the senior leadership team, has successfully maintained a shared vision amongst staff that is both ambitious and focused on bringing about improvement for all learners. He and his senior

colleagues, some of whom are also relatively new to the college, have set an excellent example by spending a great deal of their time in observing lessons, talking to students and staff and listening to the views of parents. This means that they have rapidly gained an in-depth understanding of the college. It also means that they are not seen as being remote by staff and students and that any changes that are introduced are carefully considered and rooted in first-hand evidence. Appropriate actions have been taken where necessary to bring about improvement, for example to strengthen the provision in English. Middle managers are highly effective in motivating their staff and raising achievement across subjects. Governors provide very good support and are prepared to question and challenge the college's performance in aspects of its work. Recent steps have been taken to link governors directly with areas of the curriculum to gain more first-hand knowledge of the college's work.

The promotion of equal opportunities is at the heart of the college's work. The college is proactive in tackling any form of discrimination and in seeking to ensure that all students achieve as well as they can. An example of the latter is the highly effective Year 10 class in English which is targeted at boys who are at risk of underachieving. The college is also doing a great deal to involve parents in their children's education and many parents commented on how valuable they found the family learning evenings. The principal provides regular 'drop in' sessions where parents can raise any concerns they may have about aspects of the college's work or their child's progress. Procedures to safeguard students, including the safe use of modern technologies, are very rigorous. An extremely high proportion of parents indicated that they were very satisfied with safeguarding arrangements in the college.

The college has successfully engendered a cohesive community, where all members show respect and tolerance for others. The college has a good understanding of its context and supports a wide range of activities and events in the local community, for example through the work of the Spiritus group. The college has a draft plan in place to develop a more strategic approach to all aspects of community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for	1

money	
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Sixth form

A high and growing proportion of students continue their education in the sixth form. There is open access to the sixth form, which caters for the full range of abilities. Students make excellent progress during their time in the sixth form because of high quality teaching, excellent support and a curriculum that closely matches their range of needs. A very high proportion of students complete their courses and the great majority achieve or exceed their examination targets. Very substantial numbers of students go on to university, including Oxford and Cambridge. Those taking Level 2 courses also achieve extremely well, with increasing numbers staying on for a third year in the sixth form to take A level equivalent courses. Students are enthusiastic learners and sharply focused on achieving their best. They build on the independent learning and other skills they have already developed lower down the college and which are essential for their future success.

Sixth form students develop into mature and thoughtful young adults. They play a very active role in the college, for example through supporting younger students, organising social events and fundraising. Many students are also involved in activities in the local and wider community, including environmental projects and supporting a school in Ghana. Students clearly enjoy their education and this is reflected in high rates of attendance, high completion rates and their level of participation in extra-curricular activities and social events. Students demonstrate a sensitivity to global issues, developed through taking part in events such as the Model United Nations General Assembly and the Holocaust study day.

The shared leadership and management of the sixth form is extremely effective. There is very close monitoring of students' progress, and students are provided with frequent and effective feedback on their performance. Students appreciate the many individual meetings they have with their mentors, as well as their regular tutor group meetings. Students value the high quality information, advice and guidance they are given to help them plan their futures.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The responses from parents and carers were overwhelmingly positive on all questions. Many parents wrote at length to say how pleased they were with the work of the college. A number of Year 7 parents referred to the very smooth transfer their children had made from primary education. There were very few negative written comments. A very small number of parents raised concerns about bullying or other forms of harassment. Inspectors found that the college has robust procedures in

place for dealing with bullying and other forms of harassment and takes the rare incidents of these very seriously.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Uckfield Community Technology College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 268 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 3019 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	181	97	13	1

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



8 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Uckfield Community Technology College, Uckfield TN22 3DJ

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your college recently, I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for helping us with the inspection. We were extremely impressed by the way you conducted yourselves in discussions and by the very positive attitudes shown by all of those of you we had the pleasure of meeting. I hope you take the time to read the whole report but I would like to share a summary of our findings with you.

We believe that your college continues to be outstanding and that you are right to be immensely proud of it. There are many reasons for this but in particular I would like to highlight the following:

- your great enjoyment of your education, your excellent behaviour and the way that you develop into confident and thoughtful young adults
- the excellent progress you make throughout the college and your high levels of success
- the high quality teaching you receive and the way the curriculum is designed to meet your individual needs
- the way in which the college supports you to do your best and the care and guidance it provides, particularly for those of you who experience difficulties in your work or personal lives
- the way in which you get involved in the life of the school and support others
- the highly effective leadership and management provided by your principal, senior teachers and other members of staff, who are very well supported by the college governors
- the outstanding quality of education provided in your sixth form.

Your college is very keen to become even better in the future. We have suggested that teaching would be improved further if teachers shared their excellent practice with each other more, you are given more opportunities in lessons to make decisions and work independently and that feedback you receive on your work is of a consistently high quality. We also feel that more needs to be done to develop your understanding of personal finance, economics and business and of different cultures to prepare you even better for your futures.

I know that you will do your best to help your college continue to be outstanding and wish you every success in the future.

David Butler
Her Majesty's Inspector

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