

Uplands Community College

Lower High Street, Wadhurst, TN5 6AZ

Inspection dates 4–5 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students' academic and personal development are promoted equally well in this school.
- Students enjoy school and say that they feel safe, and their parents agree. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good, and often exemplary.
- Students achieve well, but progress rates are not consistent through the school. Students make rapid progress through the main school, but, for many, their progress is slower in the sixth form.
- Students' GCSE attainment has improved well over the last three years and is consistently above the national average.
- Students' reading, writing, speaking and numeracy skills are developed well. Students have very good support in overcoming difficulties when they arise.
- The school is purposeful and teaching is good overall, with some that is outstanding.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has established a unity of purpose in driving forward improvements. Action is being taken to address areas of relative weakness in the school's work so that teaching and students' achievement are improving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The teaching in the sixth form is not as effective as that in the main school. The most effective approaches in the sixth form have not been shared widely enough, and some teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what students can achieve.
- Teaching approaches in the main school do not give students enough opportunities to develop their independence to support their further study or to require them to improve their work after it has been marked.
- Overall absence rates and the numbers who do not attend regularly have risen this year.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons including joint observations with members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspection took account of 90 responses to the online Parent View survey submitted prior to and during the inspection, together with questionnaires completed by 64 staff.
- Meetings were held with three groups of students, school leaders and staff, and representatives of the governing body and local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and attended an assembly. They scrutinised students' work, progress data, evaluation and development documents, information about how the school cares for and protects students and staff, and records relating to behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Roger Fenwick

Additional Inspector

Susan Jackson

Additional Inspector

Heather Leatt

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Uplands Community College is an average-sized secondary school which holds specialist status in science and the creative arts with English.
- The school serves the village of Wadhurst and surrounding rural area. Around half of the students are dependent on public transport to and from school.
- Most students are White British.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families) has doubled over the last two years, and at a tenth, is well below the national average. There are currently no students of service families in the school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well below average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Each year the school uses alternative providers, including Key Stage 4 places at Kent College for a few students to follow motor vehicle, construction or plumbing vocational courses, farm and countryside courses at Plumpton College, part-time work placements, home tuition, and specialist provision for a very few students who require additional emotional support.
- The leadership of the school has changed since the previous inspection, including that of the headteacher who took up his post at the beginning of the academic year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching and learning across the school, particularly in the sixth form, by:
 - identifying and disseminating more widely the most effective practice in sixth form teaching
 - raising the expectations for students' achievement in the sixth form by setting more challenging targets for their attainment
 - ensuring that students in the main school are given more opportunities to develop the skills required for independent learning, so that they find things out for themselves more often and are better prepared for post-16 work
 - making sure that teachers consistently check that students have acted on the advice given in marking.
- Raise attendance levels overall and reduce the numbers of students who are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' good achievement means that they are prepared well for the next stages of their lives. It is rare for a student to leave without entering further education, training or employment.
- Students make very good progress from their broadly average starting points in Year 7 and GCSE results are consistently above those found nationally. Last year, results were higher than national results in all subjects which had enough students entering to make comparisons statistically reliable. Students achieve very well across a wide curriculum; progress was within the top 25% of schools nationally in English, modern languages and humanities, and in science it has been within the top 5% for the last two years.
- The school has addressed a relative weakness in mathematics that was evident last year. Students' attainment in the subject is now close to that in English and science. These subjects have been particularly successful over a number of years, reflecting the school's specialist focus. The school does not enter students for examinations before Year 11, but the results of winter examinations show that there has already been an increase of 15% in the proportion gaining good mathematics grades. Students continue to study the subject, with some taking further examinations as they aim for the highest grade of which they are capable.
- A key focus this year on promoting literacy in other subjects is proving effective. Initiatives such as promoting reading in tutor time when students read aloud, and in incentives for students to read at least 10 novels per year have captured students' interest, particularly in Years 7 and 8. As a result, they are equipped well for reading and writing in other subjects.
- The 'development groups', giving younger students the opportunity to accelerate their English and mathematics skills, are rapidly improving their achievement, and the opportunity for students to self-refer to the groups enables them to grow in confidence.
- Students continuing into the school's academic sixth form in recent years have not made the same rapid progress as they did in the main school. Their attainment on entry to their sixth form courses has been marginally below that found for students following equivalent programmes nationally and their final overall attainment has been below national averages. However, their results have enabled almost all to follow their chosen career paths. A fresh focus on setting more challenging targets and monitoring progress towards them this year is beginning to result in faster progress rates, particularly for Year 12 students who are on course to improve considerably on last year's AS-level results.
- The learning and progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is very good. In Key Stage 3 it is exceptionally good with pupils making excellent progress in mathematics, reading and writing. The introduction of 'pupil passports' has allowed pupils to share with staff which types of activities help them to learn most effectively, as well as identifying what they will do to help themselves.
- Pupils eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium are making good progress that is helping them to narrow their gap in attainment with their peers.
- Last year, the GCSE results of students entitled to pupil premium support were around a grade less than others in English and mathematics, in line with the national difference. The specific needs of the current year group indicate that the gap remains at a similar level, showing marginally less progress for this group than for other students. However, the gap is narrowing rapidly in other year groups; for example, in Years 7 and 8 these students are making faster progress than their peers and, in Year 9, their attainment in writing is higher.
- Students who are on college courses make good progress and achieve their vocational qualifications. The progress and safety of all students on alternative programmes are monitored closely by the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students benefit from teaching which is usually good and sometimes outstanding. However, a small amount of teaching requires improvement, including the amount of good teaching in the sixth form. Senior leaders are taking effective steps to address these inconsistencies, and teaching is improving.
- Teachers use their good subject expertise to plan lessons which are often based on everyday issues so that students find learning relevant and interesting. This was seen in mathematics when Year 8 students had to use a range of mathematical skills to solve a series of problems to 'eliminate suspects from a murder enquiry'.
- Relationships between staff and students are good. Teachers conduct lessons with enthusiasm and use humour well to engage their students. There is good encouragement for students to share their ideas, and they feel comfortable to do this confidently.
- Teachers use good questioning techniques to deepen students' understanding and challenge their thinking. In the best lessons, teachers encourage students to find things out for themselves and learning is active and practical. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, students carried out a series of tasks related to the production and use of electricity; students said that they found this type of activity helped them to learn well because it was practical and they were learning from talking things through together. However, it is more common for students to have to respond to a series of short tasks managed by the teacher so that they do not develop the independence for extended work necessary for successful study beyond Year 11.
- In most lessons, students' tasks are accurately matched to the range of abilities in the class, ensuring that all groups of students make good progress.
- Teachers monitor students' progress regularly. This information is used effectively to set up additional small group teaching to help students catch up when they are finding work difficult so that potential underachievement is addressed at the earliest possible stage. This has been particularly successful in closing gaps in students' literacy skills in Years 7 and 8 so that they are confident to tackle later learning.
- Teaching assistants have been trained well to give additional support within lessons and in smaller groups. Consequently, students who are disabled or who have special educational needs have good levels of help and make progress in line with their peers.
- Lessons frequently help students to understand the quality of their work by showing them what is required to meet level requirements and GCSE grades. Marking is thorough and regular, and generally shows students very clearly what they have done well and what they have to do to improve their work further. There are some effective strategies in place to structure students' response to marking, but these are not used consistently across the school. Consequently, often students miss opportunities to develop their learning by acting on the advice given.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' very positive attitudes to school contribute to a friendly and welcoming school atmosphere. They are well mannered and helpful.
- Students are interested and keen to learn, and are punctual to their lessons. In this culture of learning, low-level disruption is uncommon, and usually linked to the very few lessons which lack sufficient challenge and interest for students. Students respect adults and one another, so that discussions in lessons are successful because they listen carefully to one another's opinions.
- The number of exclusions has dropped markedly this year showing the success of the school's point system for good behaviour.
- The strategies for tackling bullying, including cyber-bullying, are effective. Students say that any form of extremist behaviour, such as bullying or derogatory language, including racist or homophobic comments, is rare. They are confident that such issues are taken seriously and dealt with quickly. Consequently, students feel safe in school and around the site, and

understand how to respond to and manage risk. Parents responding to the Parent View survey are equally positive that this is the case.

- There are many opportunities for students to take initiative. This was seen during the inspection in the organisation of house sports and the planned events for a charity fun walk.
- Following improvements in attendance in recent years, absence has increased marginally this year. The proportion of students who are persistently absent has risen, although the rate has fallen for students entitled to support through pupil premium funding because of the additional support provided this year. The school's systems for monitoring attendance, including in the sixth form, do not have the same rigour as those for monitoring students' progress, so that weak attendance is not always picked up and dealt with quickly enough.

The leadership and management are good

- Staff are extremely positive about the school's refreshed direction under the new headteacher. Together with the governing body and senior leaders, he moved quickly to identify where further improvements were needed, and improvement planning is accurate in setting out the actions needed to improve teaching and reduce any remaining variation between subjects.
- Middle leaders are empowered to play a key role in raising achievement and improving teaching. They give good support to their colleagues. Consequently, teamwork is strong and staff morale is high as they see consistency in the implementation of school policy.
- A wide variety of training is provided to improve teaching and this is closely matched to whole-school and individual needs. Good systems are in place to check the quality of teaching, and the leadership team is encouraging more peer observation as a way to disseminate the most effective practice, such as in the sixth form. Currently, there is inconsistency in the targets set for sixth form students, and the school is investigating how to set up a more rigorous system.
- Staff see performance management as fair, and say that targets are challenging but necessary if the school is to become even more effective. The link between effective performance and pay progression is implemented rigorously.
- Students have a good range of subjects to choose from in Key Stage 4. This enables all abilities to achieve well and the curriculum is kept under review to make sure that it meets students' needs, demonstrating the school's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all. This commitment is also reflected in the narrowing gap between students who are supported through the pupil premium and their peers, because the school identifies and addresses individual barriers to learning.
- Students have a very wide range of opportunities to enrich their academic learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well through activities organised as part of the school's specialism programme. These include regular drama and music performances, in addition to supporting work with primary schools in the area.
- The local authority has given good support for the school. While recognising that the school has the capacity to address most issues on its own, help has been given to support the school's development, for example improvements in the mathematics department. Under the oversight of the local authority, four secondary schools are working together to improve further the curriculum on offer for sixth form students.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body is a very well informed and skilled group of people who challenge and support the school. Governors know what is happening in the school. They are well briefed and understand the data that relate the school's academic achievement to that of other schools nationally. They recognise how the quality of teaching is improving, and seek assurance that teachers' pay awards are based on evidence of continuing levels of good performance. They set strategic direction and monitor the school's implementation of policy; for example, they are aware of how the pupil premium funding is allocated and the impact it is having. Governors regularly participate in training organised by the local authority and have

restructured the arrangements to ensure effective monitoring of the school improvement plan. The arrangements for safeguarding students and staff meet requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114591
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	413443

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	970
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gill Simmonds
Headteacher	Liam Collins
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 March 2009
Telephone number	01892 782135
Fax number	01892 782003
Email address	admin@uplandsccl.e_sussex.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

