

UTC Reading

Crescent Road, East Reading, Reading, RG1 5RQ

Inspection dates 19–20 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of students	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of students	Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and students

This is an outstanding school.

- 'This place is amazing.' Thus commented one student, reflecting the way in which UTC Reading kindles students' desire to learn and succeed.
- The inspiring leadership of the Principal, supported and challenged by knowledgeable, highly effective governors and business partners, has resulted in outstanding achievement for students.
- Senior leaders have quickly implemented very robust systems for assessment and tracking students' progress. As a result, effective support is given swiftly to any students who need it.
- The business-like ethos of the college permeates all aspects of learning. Students are prepared exceptionally well for their future lives in modern Britain.
- Teachers make very good use of information about students' progress to plan effective lessons. Teachers' high expectations of all students are matched by students' keenness to learn and succeed.
- Teachers offer effective feedback to students verbally, online and in their books. However, marking does not always correct students' spelling or grammatical errors in all subjects.
- All groups of students make very good progress. Disadvantaged students make exceptional rates of progress in English and mathematics. Gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and their peers are closing rapidly.
- Students with a disability or special educational needs make excellent progress because of the support they receive.
- The UTC provides an exciting specialist curriculum with additional enrichment activities. However, leaders do not evaluate students' participation in these additional activities to ensure that all students benefit fully.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary in class, and around the college. They are mature, articulate and polite young people who are taking full advantage of the outstanding opportunities offered to them.
- Safeguarding is a high priority for the college. All statutory requirements are met. Students report that they feel very safe in college, and parents agree.
- In the sixth form, students achieve very well and provide excellent role models for younger students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made 21 visits to lessons to observe teaching and learning, six of which were accompanied by senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with the Principal and senior leaders, subject and project coordinators and groups of students from all year groups. In addition, an inspector met with representatives of the governing body. An inspector held a meeting with a group of parents and also met with a group of ten of the UTC’s business partners.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including the college’s self-evaluation document and improvement plan, safeguarding documents and the college’s central record of staff vetting checks. Inspectors reviewed the college’s information on students’ attendance, behaviour and achievement.
- Inspectors reviewed 36 parent responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View. One written response from a parent was considered.
- Twenty-one questionnaires from staff were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Catherine Anwar, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Derrick Baughan

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Joe Skivington

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- University Technical College Reading (UTC) opened in 2013. This is the first inspection carried out since it opened. The UTC has a range of lead and associate business partners. The sponsor for UTC Reading is Activate Learning. Lead academic and industry partners are: University of Reading; Microsoft; Cisco; Network Rail and Peter Brett Associates LLP. Associate partners are: CGI; On-systems Limited; Keysight Technologies; Thames Water; Denford; Autodesk; Prodigy Learning; Filemaker; Sytel Reply; Fujitsu; Francis Construction; Keir Construction; Salesforce; We.Know.Data; the Army; Rockwell Collins; the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board and the Women's Engineering Society. In addition, Reading Rugby Club is an associate community partner to the UTC.
- The curriculum at the UTC is specialised to focus on computer science and engineering. A core part of the UTC's provision is delivered through the college's work with business partners.
- The UTC is much smaller than an average secondary school and has students in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13. The sixth form is smaller than average.
- There is a much smaller proportion of girls at the UTC than boys than is nationally the case.
- The proportion of students eligible for the government's pupil premium grant is smaller than average.
- The proportion of students of a minority ethnic heritage is slightly higher than average at just over a third. More than one in ten students have a first language which is not English; this is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of students with a disability or special educational needs is average.
- No students attend alternative provision.
- The Principal provides mentoring and support to newly appointed Principals from other UTCs and works closely with the Baker Dearing Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve senior leaders' monitoring of students' participation in the college's enrichment activities to ensure that as many as possible benefit from the opportunities provided.
- Make sure that all teachers, across all subjects, mark students' literacy more consistently.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Since the UTC opened, the inspiring leadership of the Principal has embedded a clear vision and ethos across the college. Her insistence on the highest standards in all aspects is shared by the leadership team and all the staff. Rigorous systems for checking students' progress are already well established. Staff embrace their accountability for students' achievement. In the words of one parent, 'the leadership of the Principal is stunning.'
- The promotion of equality is a key tenet of the UTC. Tolerance and mutual respect are evident in the college. Leaders tackle any, very rare, incidents of discrimination robustly and effectively.
- Senior leaders ensure that teachers' assessment of students' work is accurate by making regular checks. Leaders quickly seek external expertise as required, for example in English, so that they can cross-check their judgments.
- Regular monitoring of the quality of teaching is carried out robustly by senior leaders. Leaders observe lessons frequently and offer effective feedback to teachers, ensuring that practice continues to improve. Systems have recently been put in place to enable teachers to share best practice with each other. Moreover, leaders encourage staff to take additional external qualifications; several are following MA courses.
- College leaders carry out robust performance management for all staff using a range of evidence. As a result, all staff feel accountable for the achievement of the students they teach.
- Senior leaders currently carry out all leadership roles in the college. Effective strategic plans are in place to ensure the appropriate development of middle leadership positions as the UTC grows. Several coordinator roles have recently been created, including for literacy and science, but these are at a very early stage.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding thoughtfully. As a result, disadvantaged students make very good progress and are catching up quickly with their peers.
- College leaders have designed the curriculum with care. The UTC concentrates on its specialist subjects of engineering and computer science, with a strong emphasis on mathematics and science. At Key Stage 4, students also study English language and literature and PE, and can choose to study a modern foreign language, business, geography or history. Furthermore, two afternoons a week are provided for an enrichment curriculum. Here, students choose to participate in music, art, drama or additional PE activities. Students may also use this time to pursue independent interests. However, college leaders do not monitor students' participation in these activities sharply enough to ensure that all are experiencing a sufficiently balanced diet.
- The curriculum in the sixth form is exceptional. Students flourish in the specialist environment. In addition, students independently study for a range of well-regarded online qualifications.
- Tutor periods and 'Big Debate' lessons provide opportunities for students to study aspects of religious education and personal development, as well as wider social issues. Students' involvement with business partners through projects, work experience and internships results in high levels of confidence and excellent communication skills. Students are extremely well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Safeguarding is a high priority for the UTC and it meets all statutory requirements. All staff receive frequent safeguarding training. The college works very effectively with external agencies to support more vulnerable students.
- Students benefit from exemplary careers guidance and support because of the UTC's strong links with business partners. Business partners report that students are 'work ready', not only in terms of qualifications but of personal skills. Students participate in work experience that is relevant to their interests and future careers, and many win valuable apprenticeship placements with business partners.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is outstanding.
 - Members of the governing body possess an impressive range of relevant skills. This, combined with their strong knowledge of the college, results in a high degree of focused challenge to senior leaders.
 - Governors have strong connections with, or are business partners in, the college. This ensures that the UTC ethos is embedded seamlessly.
 - Governors are fully involved in the strategic development of the college. They review leaders' evaluations of standards regularly and follow this up by frequent visits to the college and meetings with key staff to test out leaders' judgments.
 - Information about students' progress is fully understood and keenly analysed by governors.
 - Governors are fully aware of the standard of teaching in the college and expect leaders' judgments to

be externally validated. They know how good teachers are rewarded, and fully support the Principal in her robust management of any weaker teaching.

- The governing body promotes equality well in the college. Members are keen to recruit more girls to the UTC and are working hard to achieve this aim. Governors understand how the college actively promotes British values through the 'Big Debate' curriculum as well as its day-to-day work.
- Governors know how the pupil premium funding is spent and how it impacts on the achievement of disadvantaged students.

The behaviour and safety of students are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. This is because senior leaders have successfully embedded a highly positive ethos across the college.
- Students demonstrate exemplary behaviour in lessons. They are on time, well organised and keen to learn. Students respond enthusiastically to teachers' questioning, and instinctively support each other in their learning. This positive approach contributes to students' excellent learning.
- Students' mature and self-confident approach is exemplified by the way in which they articulately greet any visitors to lessons with an explanation of what they are learning and the progress they have made.
- The college's business partners are greatly impressed by students' maturity and their ability to solve problems in the adult work environment.
- Around the college, students revel in a congenial atmosphere of mutual respect. Their courteous approach to visitors reflects the college's business ethos. Bullying is extremely rare. If it occurs, leaders take swift action to remedy the situation. The rich cultural diversity of the college is a strength. Students from all backgrounds benefit from harmonious relationships.
- Leaders have embedded robust systems for tracking and monitoring student absence. As a result, students' attendance is higher than nationally, including for all groups of students. Exclusions are rare.

Safety

- The college's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Students who need it receive high levels of care and support from senior leaders working tightly with external agencies. Students report very positive relationships with their teachers and feel very safe in college.
- Students comment that there is no bullying in the college because of the business-like, adult environment. They are rightly proud of the way in which all students get on together.
- College staff receive extensive child protection training throughout the year, and all safeguarding requirements are met.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers know the abilities of their students extremely well. This is because effective training has ensured that teachers have the skills to assess work accurately and to use information about students' progress to spot any areas for improvement. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants are quick to give additional support where it is needed, helping students make rapid progress, including in the sixth form.
- Teachers demonstrate impressive levels of subject knowledge, particularly in the college's specialist subjects. This commands the respect of students and ensures high levels of engagement in their learning. For example, in a physics lesson the teacher took advantage of a student's interest in the various effects of radiation to extend his thinking by introducing much more complex ideas.
- Mathematics is extremely well taught in subject lessons and numeracy is constantly reinforced across the curriculum. As a result, students thoroughly enjoy mathematics and achieve very well.
- High expectations of students' work, attitude and learning behaviour pervade the college. One student commented, 'Here, all teachers want you to do really well. They always push you to do better.'
- The opportunities given to students for independent study as part of the curriculum pay dividends in terms of their achievement. Students complete demanding group projects linked to the UTC's business partners. The projects, which involve extensive reading, research and presentation, result in extraordinarily high

standards of work by students. This is because of the projects' foundation in real-life situations and the high expectations of business partners. Partners speak of remarkable outcomes for students in the development of their analytical skills and confidence in presentation. One partner commented that UTC students are 'fizzing over' with creative ideas.

- Students are expected to read widely across the different subjects, and their work shows that this is the case. Communication skills are well taught; the vast majority of students are able to articulate their opinions clearly and with confidence.
- Teachers offer a range of feedback to students on how to improve their work. This includes online feedback and verbal comments from teachers as well as marking in students' books. However, students' literacy is not marked consistently across all subjects. As a result, in some subjects, students' work shows weaker levels of spelling and grammar.
- In a very few lessons, teaching is less inspiring. Consequently students are less engaged and progress is not as rapid as it might be.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- There are no published data for the college.
- The college's information shows that students in all year groups make very good progress in English, mathematics and most other subjects from starting points which are slightly above the national average. Attainment is very high.
- UTC leaders have embedded a robust system of accurate assessment and tracking students' progress in the college. Teachers' assessments are regularly cross-checked by subject specialists to ensure that they are accurate. Moreover, leaders have brokered the services of external providers to validate assessments in non-specialist subjects such as English.
- Students undergo initial assessments when they enter the UTC. Leaders use these and other data to set challenging targets for all students. Students' progress towards these targets is scrupulously and regularly monitored so that any additional support that is required is swiftly put in place.
- Disadvantaged students make exceptional progress in English and mathematics across Key Stage 4 from their starting points. A relentless focus on individual students has resulted in disadvantaged students making more rapid progress than their peers in Year 10 in English. In Year 11, disadvantaged students make similar progress in English and mathematics to other students in the college, and much more progress than other students nationally.
- Some gaps in attainment remain between disadvantaged students and their peers in college. In Year 11, disadvantaged students are achieving around a grade below other students in college. However, these gaps are closing rapidly. In all cases the attainment of disadvantaged students is higher than that of their more affluent peers nationally, by about half a grade.
- The most able students achieve very well. The college appropriately enters a selected group of students early for GCSE mathematics. Outcomes show that all students made more than expected progress and achieved the highest grades. In lessons, the individual attention of expert subject teachers and opportunities provided for independent study allow more-able students to reach the highest standards.
- Students with disabilities and special educational needs achieve exceptionally well. These students all make at least expected progress from their starting points in English and mathematics, and the majority make more than expected progress. This is because of well-planned and sharply focused individual support by teachers and well-qualified teaching assistants.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress. Students achieve extremely well in the UTC's specialist vocational subjects and the extended diploma, which is taken by all students. Attainment in more academic qualifications has improved this year and is now above the national average. This is a result of strong leadership that has responded adroitly to the needs of the students.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The leadership of the sixth form is highly effective. Leaders constantly evaluate the provision in the sixth form and continue to develop it. For example, entry requirements for academic courses have now been raised as leaders recognised that, previously, some students' needs were not best suited by the courses they had chosen.
- Students benefit from an exciting and diverse curriculum within the college's specialism. All students follow vocational and academic qualifications, and the extended diploma. Study programme learning hours far

exceed the average. In addition, many students study independently for additional online qualifications.

- Teaching in the sixth form is very good and improving. Students' progress is tracked carefully and individual support provided swiftly for anyone that needs it. As a result, students make outstanding progress in vocational subjects. Disadvantaged students achieve as well as their peers. Achievement in academic subjects is higher than is nationally the case.
- The college's partnership with the University of Reading means that students have access to the university library and laboratories. Moreover, students participate in a range of stimulating projects and work experience with business partners. As a result, they are exceedingly well qualified for their next steps.
- Sixth form students provide excellent role models for younger students in the college because of their exemplary behaviour, particularly when working in mixed-age teams on projects. Students feel that they are respected as young adults, and appreciate the business-like environment provided by the college. They all feel very safe in the college.

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 students 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 students' needs. Students 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 students 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	139268
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	450066

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

Type of school	University technical college
School category	University technical college
Age range of students	14–19
Gender of students	Mixed
Gender of students in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	255
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lee Nicholls
Principal	Joanne Harper
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0118 9381020
Fax number	0118 9381020
Email address	Joanne.harper@utcreading.org.uk

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