

Advice note for a pre-registration inspection of an academy/free school/studio school/university technical college (UTC)

School name	UTC Reading
DfE registration number	N/A
Unique reference number (URN)	139268
Inspection number	422406
Inspection dates	11 July 2013
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

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Information about the inspection

This inspection was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.¹

Context of the school

The proposed University Technical College, Reading, is to be located in the premises of a former college in Reading. The school's specialisms are computer science and engineering. Its lead sponsors are The Oxford & Cherwell Valley College Group and Reading College Group. Its industry and academic partners are The University of Reading, Microsoft, Cisco, Peter Brett Associates and Network Rail. It is due to open on 9 September 2013. The school has applied to be registered to admit up to 600 boys and girls in the age range 14 to 19 years. It will admit 140 students in Years 10 and 12 in its first year. There are 103 students registered for enrolment at present, one of whom has a statement of special educational needs. The school has no religious affiliation. It aims 'to educate and train the next generation of technicians, engineers and industrial innovators who will be inspired by the relevance and challenge of solving real-life industrial and community problems'.

Compliance with the regulations

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school is likely to meet all of the regulations, but implementation could not be seen. The school's policy for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students addresses all the required areas. The school intends to adopt a house system and key workers to further students' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. In keeping with its ethos, each of the four houses is known as a 'company'. Each company will elect a chair and a board, thereby offering students experiences of commercial organisations and responsibility. The company splits into project teams for the curriculum.

The programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) contains highly relevant activities to promote the students' understanding of right and wrong and the consequences of personal decisions. There is a firm expectation that students will develop a strong sense of personal responsibility, alongside social and corporate responsibility for the local and wider community. There are plans for students to assist the local primary school with computer network issues, as well as extra-curricular events to support local community groups such as the elderly who require assistance to develop computer literacy so they can access information more readily.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/99

PSHCE also includes comprehensive coverage of the British civil law system, its public institutions and democratic processes. A weekly 'big question' debate is also planned to address topical and moral issues, whereby students will reflect and contribute their views in person or via video conferencing. The planned timetable also includes enrichment afternoons when students follow programmes in the creative arts and physical education.

The provision for religious education follows the locally agreed syllabus and gives the students opportunities to develop an understanding and tolerance of other faiths and beliefs. The planning includes visits to places of worship.

The governors have ensured that the planned curriculum includes appropriate safeguards to ensure that partisan political or religious views are discussed in a balanced way. Other policies and practices, such as the whistleblowing policy and staff contracts, underpin this stance.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Documentary evidence indicates that the majority of regulations are likely to be met. The proprietors have drawn up all the required policy documents to promote the students' welfare, health and safety. All policies are agreed by governors and include safeguarding, child protection, safer recruitment, anti-bullying, first aid and behaviour for learning. The Vice Principal is the designated member of staff for safeguarding and has been trained at the appropriate level. All appointed staff have completed training in child protection at an appropriate level. The Principal intends to serve as deputy safeguarding officer, although she is yet to fix a date for training. Senior staff have been appropriately trained in safer recruitment and recruitment continues until the school opens. The files of staff already appointed contain evidence of checks with regard to their previous employment history, character and professional references.

Suitable policies have been prepared for all required aspects of health and safety, including risk assessments for the premises and for students' visits off site. A comprehensive fire risk assessment has been drawn up, although this has not been finally agreed by the fire authority; nor has a fire authority report been compiled until a site inspection is made on 20 August 2013. Admission and attendance registers will be maintained electronically and their formats meet requirements. The school's disability access statement is a commitment to provide equality of access and includes diagrams of access areas for disabled students, staff and visitors. The proprietor has not yet created a three-year plan to increase accessibility, as required. In order to meet the regulations in full, the school should:

- produce a fire risk assessment and arrange for a satisfactory report from the fire authority following a site inspection (paragraph 13)
- produce a three-year plan to increase accessibility as required by the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Implementation to date indicates that all regulations are likely to be met. All of the checks to confirm the suitability of the proprietors, staff and others are rigorously carried out and recorded appropriately on a single central register. Checks are completed and entries on the register updated as new staff are appointed. The school does not intend to employ supply staff but is aware of its responsibilities should supply staff be appointed in the future.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

Evidence from plans and a site visit indicates that the school is likely to meet all the regulations. The school is to be located in the premises of a former art and design college in Reading. The premises are currently undergoing complete refurbishment with some areas being newly built. Detailed plans for the premises and accommodation were scrutinised and a tour of the site was made with architects and representatives from the agencies responsible for the new premises. Regular monitoring visits to the site are made by school staff and their representatives. Communication with the contractor is maintained on a daily basis.

Initially, students will be admitted only into Years 10 and 12. The premises, when completed, will be suitable for safe and effective learning. The plans and site visit indicate that there are specialist rooms for all areas of the curriculum, including computing, engineering, science, art, music and physical education. Several areas of the building are colour themed to assist the students' navigation of the various dedicated learning zones. Classrooms are of adequate size and sufficient in number for envisaged maximum roll. Some new furniture, suitable for the proposed age range, has arrived and there are firm orders for delivery prior to the planned opening in September. There are sufficient washrooms, including showers and changing rooms. Suitable arrangements have been made to ensure that water temperature is appropriate and students have ready access to identified supplies of drinking water.

Adequate ventilation is assured by appropriate glazing and an active carbon dioxide monitoring system throughout the school. Plans also show that there will be adequate lighting throughout the building in addition to exterior lighting. Suitable consideration is also given to ensuring the acoustics of the new provision are optimised for learning. The plans include appropriate facilities for medical examinations or for students who may be ill. Suitable regard has been given to the safe preparation and serving of food. There is sufficient safe outside space for recreation, including playing fields. The premises are made secure by perimeter fencing and controlled access points for students, staff and visitors.

Provision of information

The provision meets all regulations.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school must meet the regulations identified in the check sheet (detailed below).

Recommendation to the Department for Education Registration

YES. The school can be registered and allowed to open on receipt by DfE of evidence of improvement in relation to the following matters:

- produce a fire risk assessment and arrange for a satisfactory report from the fire authority following a site inspection (paragraph 13)
- produce a three-year plan to increase accessibility as required by the Equality Act 2010
- ensure that the complaints procedure sets out clear timescales for each stage of the process (paragraph 25(c))
- ensure that the procedure states that at the initial stage of the procedure, complaints may be made and considered on an informal basis (paragraph 25(d)).

Recommended number of day pupils: 600

Recommended age range: 14–19

Recommended gender of pupils: Mixed

Recommended type of special educational needs: N/A.