

Mid Cheshire College

General further education college

Inspection dates 19–22 January 2016
Overall effectiveness **Inadequate**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Adult learning programmes	Inadequate
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Safeguarding is ineffective.
- Too many learners leave their courses before completing their qualifications.
- The requirements of study programmes are not met.
- Senior leaders have allowed the quality of provision to decline to unacceptably low standards.
- Reports to governors do not provide sufficient detail about learners' performance, progress or success rates in order for governors to challenge senior leaders effectively.
- Success rates in English and mathematics for 16 to 19 year olds, and the development of learners' English and mathematics skills are poor.
- Learners' progress on 16 to 19 study programmes and adult learning programmes is poor and many do not achieve the high grades they are capable of.
- Leaders do not have an accurate overview of the quality of teaching and learning and the extent of weak teaching across the college.
- Planning, coordination and vetting of external work experience placements are inadequate.

The provider has the following strengths

- Well-managed apprenticeship programmes, developed in collaboration with employers, enable the majority of apprentices to make good progress and achieve.
- Learners with high needs and those who need specialist support develop good levels of independence and make good progress.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Mid Cheshire College is a medium-sized general further education college located in Vale Royal, a rural and urban district of Cheshire. The college has two sites, one in Hartford just outside Northwich which houses the majority of provision and the Winsford site which houses apprenticeship programmes and hairdressing.
- Approximately 2,600 learners study at the college, two thirds of whom are full-time 16 to 19 year olds. A number of schools in the locality have sixth form provision and a sixth form college is located close to the college. The college offers vocational programmes of study. The proportion of learners in Cheshire who achieve five GCSEs grade A* to C, including English and mathematics, is higher than the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure health and safety policies and procedures, including those for the vetting of external work experience placements, are fully implemented in order to keep learners safe.
- Ensure planning, coordination, vetting and evaluation of external work experience is rigorous and benefits learners.
- Meet all requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme by:
 - providing external work experience opportunities, impartial careers guidance, enrichment activities and opportunities for additional qualifications for all learners aged 16 to 19
 - ensuring learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who have not previously attained GCSE English and/or mathematics at grades A* to C are able to improve their GCSE grades and skilfully develop their skills in English and mathematics.
- Increase significantly the proportion of learners who successfully complete their programmes, ensuring that learners make good progress and achieve the high grades they are capable of.
- Monitor and closely evaluate the actions taken by senior leaders to improve provision and accelerate the rate of improvement.
- Strengthen quality-assurance processes for teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of provision so that swift and decisive action can be taken to tackle weaknesses.
- Improve the quality of reports to governors; ensure governors are provided with sufficiently detailed information regarding learners' performance, progress and success rates so that they are better placed to hold leaders and managers to account.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is inadequate

- Senior leaders and governors have identified many key areas where the college needs to improve, but have not acted quickly enough to raise the quality of provision so that all learners make good progress and achieve positive outcomes. The proportion of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes and adult learning programmes who successfully achieve their qualifications has declined over the last two years and is poor. A new senior leadership team has started to make changes but so far has had insufficient impact on raising standards.
- The pace of change and improvement in raising the quality of teaching and learning and improving learners' outcomes in English and mathematics is too slow. The rate of progress students make from their starting point improved in 2014/15, but it is still not good enough. Attendance targets are not challenging and learners' absences from lessons are too frequent. The quality and management of the provision varies greatly. Apprenticeship provision is well managed and outcomes for apprentices are good; however, the management of access to higher education and 16 to 19 study programmes is ineffective.
- Leaders and managers have been too slow to implement the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme. In 2014/15 only 11 learners from approximately 600 gained external work experience. Plans to ensure that current learners complete a mandatory work placement as part of their study programme are unrealistic. The quality of teaching in English and mathematics is inadequate.
- The strategic plan sets out a clear direction for the college but the many operational plans that are intended to deliver the outcomes lack challenging targets and milestones against which leaders and governors can monitor and evaluate progress.
- Leaders do not have sufficiently high expectations of staff or learners. College targets to improve outcomes for learners lack aspiration. The performance management of teachers to ensure learners receive good teaching and learning is poor. Leaders have failed to identify the full extent of weak teaching and learning.
- Self-assessment lacks rigour. Curriculum self-assessment reports accurately identify key strengths but underestimate the scale of weaknesses. Judgements are overly optimistic. Validation panels include senior staff and governors, but too many subject areas are judged as good even when outcomes for learners are poor. This lack of challenge perpetuates weak practice and inertia; opportunities to focus timely actions for improvement are therefore missed.
- Performance monitoring of the curriculum lacks rigour and managers fail to monitor the performance of all requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme, which results in a poor quality of provision for learners.
- Managers collect information on learners' intended destinations but do not analyse data or use it to better support learners into higher-level courses, including apprenticeships and sustained employment.
- Managers do not adequately ensure that diversity is actively promoted across the college to enable learners to understand other cultures better and to promote the values of respect and tolerance of others. There are few cross-college events to promote diversity and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) learners have no voice.
- The college has strong links with employers and other stakeholders. Managers with responsibility for employer engagement work well with employers and stakeholders to shape the curriculum, which is responsive to local and regional employment needs. Apprenticeship provision is extensive and meets learner and employer needs well.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governors are highly committed to their roles; the governing body has been refreshed with many new governors recently appointed. The governing body now has a range of skills and expertise including finance, education and human resources. However, senior leaders do not provide governors with the information needed to use their skills effectively. Many reports to governors provide an overly positive view of the college, particularly in relation to learners' performance, progress and success rates.
 - Governors and senior leaders have recently developed a process to increase the rigour and effectiveness of their scrutiny of the college; however, this has not had an impact on improving standards.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective**
 - Appropriate policies and processes are in place but are not implemented fully. Arrangements to promote health and safety in classrooms and workshops are effective, but senior leaders do not pay sufficient attention to wider health and safety risks to keep staff and learners safe. Fire regulations are not upheld, risk assessments for external visits by learners are not sufficiently robust, safety issues are

not always followed up and rectified in a timely manner. Too many work placements have not been adequately vetted or risk assessed.

- The college meets its statutory duties to protect learners from the risks of radicalisation and extremism. However, this duty is not reinforced consistently well across all areas of the college. For example, in terms of staying safe online, websites accessed by learners are not always sufficiently checked for offensive content.
- The college supports and protects vulnerable learners such as looked after children and those with mental health issues very well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies greatly across subjects, levels and types of provision, with too much being inadequate. Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, the largest type of provision, and adults, make slow progress in improving their skills, knowledge and understanding. The development of learners' study skills is very weak. For example, lessons to train teaching assistants do not provide learners with the skills that are necessary to be a successful education practitioner.
- Teachers' expectations of what learners can achieve are too low and, consequently, only a minority of learners meet or exceed their minimum targets. Teachers do not challenge learners well enough, which results in low-level disruption and poor behaviour in a minority of lessons. Attendance during the inspection was low in a significant proportion of lessons.
- Teachers fail to assess learners' progress in lessons well enough, and too few check carefully enough that learners have a secure understanding of a topic before moving on, leaving learners with significant gaps in their knowledge.
- Learners, particularly on 16 to 19 study programmes, do not have sufficient opportunity to develop essential employability skills to prepare them for work and life beyond college.
- Teachers' feedback on learners' assessed work does not provide sufficient detail on how learners can improve their work. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar persist in learners' work because these are not systematically corrected by their teachers. Individual targets that are set for learners lack stretch and clarity, therefore making it difficult for teachers to track learners' progress effectively. As a consequence too many learners fail to make the progress they are capable of.
- Teachers are overly reliant on a narrow repertoire of teaching methods. This means that learners sometimes become disengaged or fail to develop a greater level of autonomy and control over their learning. Consequently, learners do not develop the key skills that enhance future employability or progression opportunities. Teachers' use of questioning is weak and opportunities to extend learning, deepen understanding or challenge misconceptions are often missed.
- The development of learners' skills in English and mathematics is poor. English and mathematics skills are not competently developed or reinforced through teaching or in the feedback on learners' assessed work. Attendance at English and mathematics lessons is consistently lower than in other lessons.
- Careers advice and guidance are inadequate. Too few learners and apprentices are provided with impartial advice and guidance to support them in making informed and accurate decisions about their next steps in education, employment or training.
- Teaching, learning and assessment for apprentices, who account for approximately a fifth of the provision, are good. Classroom-based teaching provides learners with high-quality knowledge and skills, enabling apprentices to link theory to workplace practice. Apprentices make good progress in developing commercial job-related skills while in the workplace, and the majority complete their apprenticeship programme. Highly effective partnerships with employers ensure the individual needs of apprentices and employers are met successfully.
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or difficulties and those with high needs achieve well, developing the personal and social skills needed to make good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

- Teachers have low expectations of their learners and fail to challenge them sufficiently. Learners attempt to remedy this through independent work outside lessons. However, too many learners are unaware of targets set by teachers, and those who do know their targets are unsure if they are meeting or exceeding them. The quality and standard of learners' work varies greatly due to the lack of demand placed on them.

- Very few learners have access to external work experience. This year, only eight learners, all from science programmes, have accessed external work experience. The college's plan for the majority of learners to attend work experience is unrealistic and relies too much on learners finding their own placements. Most learners are aware of the need to attend work experience placements but are unsure of when this will take place. The planning, coordination and evaluation of the impact of work experience lacks rigour and, consequently, is of little benefit to learners.
- Leaders do not manage risks to ensure learners are kept safe on their work placements. For example, some learners work with chemicals in environments that have not been fully risk assessed. Risk assessments are inadequate, learners are not monitored or supported while on placement and work activities are not evaluated to ensure they are appropriate.
- Learners in a few subject areas, such as art and design, develop their technical, employability and work-readiness skills well through the completion of community-based projects. Enrichment activities such as visits, trips, fundraising and leisure activities are well planned; however, opportunities for enrichment vary greatly between subject areas.
- Learner induction includes an introduction to health and safety, personal safety and the promotion of inclusive values. Learners' knowledge and understanding of the threats of radicalisation and extremism and of values such as democracy and rule of law is weak. A minority of learners are unaware of fire evacuation procedures, particularly learners on evening programmes and those at the Winsford campus, as they have yet to participate in a planned fire evacuation drill.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance are ineffective. Career and study options are not explored in sufficient depth during learners' courses; advice is not always impartial, and a few learners find out too late in their programme that they do not meet the entry criteria for progression to university.
- Attitudes to learning of the majority of learners are generally good although low-level disruptive behaviour is evident in some lessons. During inspection, attendance and punctuality were poor in a significant minority of lessons.
- Apprentices develop high levels of self-awareness and self-confidence as they successfully develop their technical skills in the workplace and during theory lessons at college. Apprentices develop good personal and employment skills as they work towards bespoke apprenticeships that have been developed by employers and the college; for example, apprenticeships specifically designed for the National Health Service and engineering and banking firms. Consequently, most apprentices gain sustained employment or promotion.
- Provision to support the most vulnerable learners is good. Referral to external agencies, where appropriate, is swift. College recording of bullying incidents shows that almost all are related to the inappropriate use of social media. Actions to address bullying incidents are swift and effective.

Outcomes for learners

are inadequate

- The majority of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, which account for almost two thirds of the provision, and adult learning programmes, make insufficient progress relative to their starting points. Because too many learners leave their programmes early, the proportion of learners successfully achieving their programmes has declined over the last two years and varies considerably between subjects, levels and ages. College internal data indicate that the proportion of learners retained on their programmes has increased slightly compared to the same point last year. Learners in two thirds of the college's provision achieve less well than those on similar provision at other colleges. The college's self-assessment report judges outcomes to be inadequate for a third of the provision for adults and for 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Too many learners on classroom-based programmes fail to achieve the high grades they are capable of. In 2014/15, half of level 3 learners on 16 to 19 study programmes achieved or exceeded their target grades. The majority of current learners do not make the progress expected of them in lessons and, as a result, progress over time is inadequate.
- The proportion of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who achieve functional skills qualifications in mathematics and English is low; overall success rates in these subjects, particularly at level 2, are very low. The proportion of learners who achieve GCSE English and mathematics at grade A* to C is low and below that at similar colleges. The proportion of adult learners who achieve English and mathematics qualifications is significantly higher than those on 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Too few students progress to higher-level courses. The proportion of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who progress to the next level of study is low; around a third of learners progress from level 1 to level 2 programmes and slightly less than half progress from level 2 to level 3 programmes.

- Leaders and managers do not systematically analyse data in order to evaluate destinations of all learners. Too many learners' destinations are classed as unknown. The proportion of learners on access to higher education programmes who progress to university is poor. Most apprentices progress to sustained employment or are promoted within the workplace.
- Success rates for apprentices declined in 2014/15 but remain significantly above the national average. Apprenticeship managers have clearly identified reasons for the decline and have effective actions in place to reverse the decline in success rates. Apprentices make good progress, and most achieve their apprenticeship. Apprentices produce a high standard of work which meets or exceeds industry standards.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

are inadequate

- The college provides 16 to 19 study programmes across 10 subject areas. The largest areas include construction, health and social care and childcare, creative media and graphics. Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes account for almost two thirds of the provision.
- Leaders and managers have not yet implemented all the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme. Very few learners on 16 to 19 study programmes benefit from external work experience placements that are relevant to their career aspirations. A small minority of learners benefit from a range of additional activities such as trips and visits that broaden their learning and skills development.
- Too little teaching and learning across all 16 to 19 study programmes is sufficiently challenging to enable learners to make good progress. Teachers' expectations of learners are low, the pace of lessons is slow and they lack challenge. Teachers do not check frequently enough that learners make the progress they are capable of. For example, teachers do not provide learners with opportunities to think for themselves or skilfully probe their answers in order to extend learning.
- As a result of weak planning, too few teachers use information about learners' starting points and, as a result, almost half of learners are working below their expected target grades. A minority of learners benefit from good teaching and learning which is purposeful and includes challenging and varied activities. Where learners are highly motivated they work well independently and improve their learning. For example, in performing arts, learners lead their own learning effectively; they work purposefully and enthusiastically in groups as they plan the production of a play.
- Too few learners make progress in improving their English and mathematics skills. Learners' progress on GCSE English and mathematics courses is slow. Teaching on vocational programmes fails to develop learners' skills in English and mathematics. Teachers do not routinely identify errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. A small minority of learners benefit from opportunities to explore the use of English or mathematics in a vocational context; for example, in graphics lessons where learners analyse the lyrics of a song in order to create a suitable compact disc cover.
- Assessment does not clearly identify what learners need to do to improve their work or develop the accuracy of their writing. Targets are not used consistently well in order to help learners improve or make the progress expected of them.
- Attendance and punctuality are often poor and teachers do not consistently challenge lateness. Attendance has improved compared to the same point last year but does not meet college targets.
- Careers advice and guidance are ineffective. Learners receive insufficient advice on their future career opportunities. As a result, too few learners progress to their next stage of education, employment or training.

Adult learning programmes

are inadequate

- Adult learners account for just under a fifth of the provision. The majority of learners are on part-time courses. The remaining learners are on full-time adult classes such as access to higher education or infill into 16 to 19 classes.
- The quality of teaching and learning across the majority of full-time adult provision is inadequate. Teaching often lacks pace and challenge, learners' progress is frequently too slow and too many learners fail to achieve their full potential. Where teachers have high expectations of their learners and teaching is planned to ensure that learners' needs are well catered for, then progress is good. Instances of this quality of teaching are too rare.
- Because of weak leadership and management of adult provision, data management is weak. Leaders cannot accurately identify learner numbers. High levels of teacher turnover negatively affect learner

progression. Too many learners leave the access to higher education course and full-time adult classes. Attendance is low in many classes and current attendance falls below the college target.

- Expectations of what learners can achieve are too low and target setting for adults is weak. Consequently, progress towards expected outcomes is poor. Assessment of learning is often too superficial and does not accurately identify learners' progress or learning. The quality of written and verbal feedback to learners is not of a sufficiently high standard and, as a result, learners are not challenged to achieve the high grades they are capable of.
- Too many learners on access to higher education courses are unaware of their predicted grades and do not understand their relevance when applying to university. Progression from access to higher education courses to university or higher education is low.
- Although success rates are above those for similar colleges for English and mathematics, learners are unable to demonstrate the required level of learning in the majority of English and mathematics classes. In-class assessment fails to identify sufficiently areas for learners' development in English and mathematics.
- Community and Prince's Trust courses improve the confidence and motivation of those currently struggling to overcome barriers to employment. However, progression to employment, further education or training is low.
- A very small proportion of part-time learners benefit from teaching that skilfully links the curriculum to current legislation and its impact on living in Britain today. However, this is not consistent across adult learning provision.

Apprenticeships

are good

- Apprenticeships account for almost a fifth of the provision with the largest proportion in health and social care and business administration. Although success rates for apprentices declined in 2014/15, managers have very effectively addressed the decline; the progress made by current apprentices is good.
- Leaders and managers work closely with employers to ensure apprenticeships meet local and national needs. Managers work in collaboration with employers, developing bespoke programmes that benefit both the learner and employer. For example, managers have worked with a local engineering manufacturer to develop a unit-based apprenticeship programme based around the rotation of job roles which include fabrication and assembly tasks. Due to the success of this apprenticeship programme, the employer is recruiting additional apprentices.
- The good development of knowledge, skills and understanding through well-planned and relevant classroom-based activities supports further development of apprentices' skills in the workplace. Apprentices apply their learning in their job roles; for example, apprentices in childcare settings share their knowledge and skills in safeguarding and health and safety with their colleagues in order to keep children safe.
- Teaching and learning in classroom-based activities are good. Teachers plan a range of high-quality activities, utilising their own skills and expertise well in helping apprentices to develop theirs. For example, engineering apprentices make rapid progress in developing new skills using hand tools, lathes and milling machines and in creating and interpreting engineering drawings.
- Assessment in the workplace is good. Well-qualified and experienced vocational assessors skilfully support apprentices to achieve their apprenticeships, setting challenging targets to extend learning and developing skills to meet industry standards. Assessors use comprehensive and highly effective reviews to help apprentices reflect on their job roles, for example skilfully using questioning to develop apprentices' problem-solving skills.
- Tracking and monitoring systems are used well; apprentices know the progress they are making and are provided with good levels of support if they are falling behind in their work. However, the development of and target setting in English and mathematics require improvement for a small minority of apprentices who make slow progress.
- The majority of apprentices gain sustained employment or promotion in their workplace. Careers guidance during and at the end of apprenticeships is insufficient and, as a result, too few apprentices progress to apprenticeships at a higher level.
- Apprentices have a basic knowledge and understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and values such as tolerance and respect. However, apprentices have insufficient opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity.

Provider details

Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	4,535
Principal/CEO	Mr Richard Hollywood
Website address	Midchesh.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	101	303	299	226	651	245	41	194
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	83	163	58	147	2	50		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Salma Hair and Beauty Academy ■ Training Futures (UK) Limited ■ Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority ■ The Neuromuscular Centre 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Miller	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bryan Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Ruth Szolkowska	Ofsted Inspector
Patrick McKinley	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Maguire	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the director of curriculum, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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.



Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk



Employer View is a new website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too.

To find out more go to www.employerview.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 and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, 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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

© Crown copyright 2016

