

West Cheshire College

General further education college

Inspection dates		10–14 March 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Too few learners on advanced level courses pass or make better than adequate progress. Programmes do not consistently meet their needs or sufficiently prepare them for progression to higher education or employment.
- Not enough teaching is good and assessment practices lack rigour and challenge.
- Observations of teaching and learning are not consistently rigorous enough to ensure that individuals and curriculum areas are clear about what to address to improve teaching and learning quickly.
- The college does not sufficiently capture students' destinations.
- Not all curriculum area self-assessment reports are sufficiently self-critical.
- Best practice is not shared sufficiently between the successful apprenticeship provision and weaker classroom-based provision, particularly where they are in the same curriculum area.
- The importance of English and mathematics skills is not given sufficient priority in all subject areas.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Good apprenticeship provision.
- Highly flexible response to meet the changing needs of employers and students.
- The energetic and inclusive senior leadership team has strengthened the focus on improving the quality of provision.
- The college provides good support for vulnerable students.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the college by:
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of what their students can achieve and drive success throughout the college
 - taking prompt and decisive action to resolve the significant weaknesses in early years and playwork
 - ensuring that information from initial and on-going assessments inform planning for individual learning appropriately and that lesson activities meet the needs of different learners well
 - ensuring that all students' individual learning plans (ILP), and supporting tracking and monitoring documents, contain specific and measurable targets, so that their progress against their targets is reviewed and challenged frequently
 - planning lessons that include a range of activities that engage and motivate all students to learn new knowledge and skills
 - ensuring that written feedback to students is of a consistently good standard in helping them to improve the quality of their work and make better progress
 - ensuring that students develop independent working and research skills by setting activities that involve work outside lessons, including the use of information and learning technology (ILT), so that they are well prepared for progression into further study or employment.
- Increase the proportion of students who successfully complete English and mathematics qualifications by:
 - making sure that all staff understand and reinforce the importance of functional skills in all lessons
 - significantly improving the development of students' English and mathematical skills in vocational lessons
 - closely monitoring students' attendance at functional skills lessons.
- Develop the ability of teachers to improve assessment strategies in lessons, assignments and target-setting, so they can gain a more precise view of the progress that students make and help them to achieve higher grades for their coursework and in examinations.
- Further develop and improve the impact of the observation of teaching and learning process by:
 - improving the rigour and clarity of written feedback to teachers so that they are very clear about what they need to do to improve their teaching and how they can do this
 - observing and analysing all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment including scrutinising and commenting specifically on the work and progress of learners in the lesson observed
 - ensuring that the practice of the more experienced observers is effectively shared throughout all members of the lesson observation team
 - including the effectiveness of learning support assistants in the observation of lessons
 - consistently grading the observation of tutorials to share the good practice seen in these areas across the college.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2012/13 the proportion of students successfully completing their programme declined and was well below the average. At advanced level a high proportion of students left the college leading to very low success rates. ▪ The proportion of students who successfully completed courses at foundation and intermediate level improved in 2012/13 year require improvement. In the same year, success rates in most subject areas declined and were below their sector average. The college delivers a high volume of short courses which had poor success rates in 2012/13. ▪ However, college data for the current year indicates a very high proportion of students staying on courses at every level, particularly on advanced level courses. ▪ Students who complete their course make the progress expected of them given their previous qualifications. Few students make better than expected progress. ▪ Female students aged 16 to 18 have consistently outperformed male students and the performance gap has widened over the last three years. The gap has narrowed between female and male adult students over the last three years. The few minority ethnic students achieve in line with other students. ▪ The performance of students with difficulties and/or disabilities has been slightly lower than other students, but the gap narrowed in 2012/13. Subcontracted workplace provision has higher success rates than the college's directly delivered provision. ▪ Apprentices have had consistently high success over the last three years and most achieve their framework within the planned time. Apprentices make good progress. However, success within the planned timescale for those learners on workplace National Vocation Qualification (NVQ) programmes is well below the average. ▪ Around half of foundation and intermediate students progress on to higher level courses within the college and around a fifth of advanced level students progress to higher education. In health and social care, the majority of students on a fast track diploma were accepted at university. However, the college does not know the destinations of a significant proportion of its students. ▪ The standard of students' work on advanced level programmes requires improvement. In a number of curriculum areas their work is sufficient to pass but does not reflect the demands of higher grades. The standard of work at foundation and intermediate level is appropriate. ▪ Most students on the study programme develop good personal, social and employability skills. The college provides good real-work environments in catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy which enable students to experience the demands of employment first hand. Many of these students also have part-time jobs and speak of the seamless transition between the two. ▪ Performing arts courses build students' confidence to act in front of audiences. In travel and tourism students dress in cabin crew uniforms and are encouraged to think about their presentation and professionalism in preparation for work. ▪ The availability of work experience on the study programme varies considerably. Health and social care students have a good range of work placements which they enjoy and students develop the confidence to apply to university. However, students in some areas, such as construction, information and communication technology (ICT) and engineering do not have formal opportunities for work experience, although they are encouraged and supported to find it by college staff. 	

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment vary across the college, which matches the variation in success rates across curriculum areas. Too few lessons are consistently good enough to secure good outcomes for most students. The new advanced practitioner team is beginning to support teachers to raise the standards of teaching and learning but has not had sufficient time to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all students.
- In too many lessons, teachers' expectations of students are not high enough and, as a result, they set undemanding work based on minimum assessment criteria rather than extending students' subject knowledge and understanding. Too frequently, all students complete the same tasks irrespective of their ability, and higher-performing students do not always have opportunities for additional challenge to accelerate their learning and progress or to achieve higher grades. In these lessons, teachers miss opportunities to engage students through discussion and the review of key learning points. This lack of challenge causes occasional low-level disruption and ineffective learning.
- In practical lessons, teachers use their industrial experience to help students gain good vocational skills and techniques that meet current industry practices. Foundation students benefit from well-planned and executed projects, such as the college garden project that skilfully integrates challenging language and mathematical skills with practical activities that develop employability and independent living skills. This is often not the case in theory lessons where teachers frequently give the same task to all students to complete regardless of ability. This leads to the more able students losing interest while others struggle to complete the activities.
- In the good lessons which form the minority, teachers have high expectations of students, and plan teaching and learning activities well to meet each student's needs. Students often work well independently, in groups and pairs, share ideas and learn from each other. These lessons are exciting and fun, and teachers set and demand high standards of their students, using a good range of strategies to explore their understanding effectively. Learners on apprenticeship programmes benefit from good teaching, and are very enthusiastic about their training and are supported well to achieve good outcomes.
- The assessment of students' work and the quality of feedback varies considerably across subject areas. Where it is good, it is detailed and frequent helping students to improve their work and achieve higher grades. However, too often, teachers do not provide sufficient written feedback and they do not consistently correct spelling and punctuation. Students are unclear as to how to improve and achieve higher grades. Teachers do not consistently use assessment information to change and adapt their teaching quickly enough to ensure all students make good or excellent progress.
- Good support for vulnerable students enables those who do not easily participate in lessons to gain enough confidence to do so. Learning support workers work well alongside teachers providing good support to those who need additional support in their lessons. Their detailed knowledge and understanding of the support needs of advanced level students ensure they are provided with clear and effective individual support plans and coping mechanisms to enable them to participate in all aspects of college life independently, without individual support. Specialist staff have a wide range of specific expertise in supporting students with, for example, dyslexia or mental health needs.
- The tracking and monitoring of the progress of apprentices are good and are readily accessible to, and used well by, employers. However, on the study programme teachers do not always make good use of the assessment of students' starting points when setting individual targets. As a result, targets are not always sufficiently specific or measurable, and this makes it difficult for students to know what progress they are making. Tutorials are generally well-structured and contribute to the development of good personal, social and independent learning skills.
- New arrangements to evaluate and improve teachers' professional practice are showing benefits for students in some, but not all, curriculum areas. Feedback following observations of teaching

is not specific enough in all cases and does not consistently report, or reflect on, the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress. The grading of the quality of tutorials is inconsistent. Observers do not take sufficient account of the work of learning support workers in lessons when judging the quality of learning activities. Consequently, opportunities to share the good practice in these areas are missed.

- Resources are satisfactory. The college's virtual learning environment supports learning well in a few subjects but it is generally underdeveloped and is not used well to support and extend learning outside of the classroom. In a significant minority of lessons noise from other classes in the same area is disruptive and prevents students from concentrating fully on the learning taking place in their own lesson. Students on study programmes have access to a broad enrichment programme that includes visits, talks by outside speakers, meetings with employers and volunteering opportunities.
- Changes in the arrangements to provide students with good initial advice and guidance are having a positive impact on the behaviour and attendance of students in most curriculum areas in the college. Teachers and support staff are now accurately assessing students' abilities prior to them coming to college in order to place them on appropriate courses. They quickly identify the support needs of those students requiring additional help with academic or personal support. Careers advice for progression into employment is effective.
- English and mathematics skills are generally well-developed in functional skills sessions. For most apprentices the development of mathematics and English skills are well-planned and effectively linked to lessons and in progress reviews. However, this is not the case in many curriculum areas. In too many lessons, as well as in the marking of work, the development and reinforcement of students' English and mathematics lack impact.
- All staff work hard to provide an inclusive and safe learning environment. Students treat each other with respect and courtesy. Although equality and diversity are promoted well in some lessons, this is not consistent across the college.

Health and social care 16-19 study programmes 19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement which is in line with the proportion of students who successfully complete their qualifications. All students develop effective employability skills in a good range of local work placements, including the local NHS, arranged by a dedicated work placement officer. Many students progress to further learning, employment or higher education.
- Teachers have relevant teaching and subject qualifications and good levels of industry expertise in a range of professions which include social work, nursing and anthropology. However, they do not always use their experience to stretch and challenge students to their full potential. In particular, teaching on advanced level courses requires improvement and it does not support students to become independent thinkers and students. Teachers running classes in open study areas do not use technology well such as smartboards to deliver exciting and dynamic lessons to students, and progress in too many lessons is affected by the disruption caused by noise levels from other classes.
- Teachers' assessment of students' knowledge in lessons and through assignments is variable. They return work promptly but do not give sufficient guidance to challenge and help students to produce work to the best of their ability. Teachers use a range of assessment techniques to meet the needs of all students such as questioning, assignments and presentations but these are not always effective in ensuring that all students are stretched to their maximum ability. Teachers do not encourage students to develop the kinds of skills they will need to study at a higher level, such as using information technology to produce their work, present information and practise referencing techniques.

- Students' development of English and mathematics skills requires improvement, although they are aware of the importance of having skills and qualifications in these subjects to meet the demands of modern health and care environments. In a few instances, teachers design activities to enable students to develop budgeting, teamwork and presentation skills within the classroom. Working within a budget students designed posters, refreshments and a range of activities to meet the needs and interests of vulnerable community groups.
- Teachers provide good advice and guidance to students ensuring that they are on the right course for their career aspirations and that they have achievable goals for current learning, their future learning plans and in their personal lives. Students appreciate and benefit from regular tutorials with teachers and other dedicated support staff to assist them with learning and welfare issues.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity satisfactorily and used Global Dignity Day to raise awareness with students. One group of advanced level students who have work placements within the NHS designed a dignity tree on which each student added a leaf detailing what dignity and respect meant to them. However, teachers do not always use appropriate terminology with students to enable them to develop confidence in dealing with the rich and diverse range of community groups they will encounter in the workplace.

Early years and play work
16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Inadequate

- Teaching, learning and assessment are inadequate and lead to poor outcomes for students. The proportion of students successfully completing childcare courses was well below average in 2012/13 due to many students leaving the course early. Success rates were particularly low on advanced level childcare courses. Current retention rates, though improved, alongside assessment data, indicate that success rates for 2013/2014 will continue to be below average.
- In the large proportion of lessons where students' progress was not good, teachers do not reflect upon the extensive experience that students have in work placements to enhance their learning. In advanced level lessons students do not demonstrate the higher levels skills of application and evaluation and do not develop independent research skills needed for employment or progression into higher levels of study. Teachers ask questions which are not directed at individual students which results in only a few students making responses. They do not ask probing questions and as a result, students do not deepen or extend their knowledge. Teachers do not plan teaching and learning sufficiently to meet the different needs and abilities of a range of students. The teaching environment is not conducive to learning. Three classes share an open plan workshop resulting in learning being disrupted by the noise and commotion from other groups.
- In the smaller proportion of lessons at foundation and intermediate level, where progress is good, students are able to reflect on their personal and work experience which enables them to deepen and extend their knowledge. For example, students were asked to reflect on their personal experiences of how praise and negative comments had affected their levels of self-esteem and resilience. They then were able to apply this to their work with children to review strategies to maintain children's confidence and resilience. Teaching in these lessons was challenging, and as a result, students were enthusiastic and developed good skills and understanding.
- Assessment is inconsistent and requires improvement. The quality of work on advanced level courses does not demonstrate the higher level skills required at this level and there is limited evidence of students demonstrating independent research skills. Students know their targets but on advanced level courses are not always aware of the progress they are making against them. Students on foundation and intermediate courses do feel they receive effective feedback on

their progress. The level of feedback on marked work requires improvement. Teachers do not routinely correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors and their written feedback does not provide students with detailed information to enable them to improve their work.

- English and mathematics are integrated within the childcare curriculum. Clear references are made to using accurate spelling and grammar in formal reports in childcare settings. Mathematics is developed well within childcare courses. For example, foundation students costed and planned the quantities of healthy foods required for a party for a large number of children. Students are also regularly using mathematics and English activities with children within their work placements.
- Poor information, advice and guidance resulted in a few students being placed on courses which do not meet their needs. For example, a group of students who had the entry qualifications to study at advanced level were placed on an intermediate level programme. Support received on courses is variable. Careers education and guidance are weak on advanced level courses. Internal progression between levels at the college and into employment is good but progression to higher education is low.
- Work placements are well organised. A placement officer ensures that the placements match the requirements of the variety of courses. Students do develop personal, social and employability skills as a result of the placements but teachers could enhance and extend the benefits more by ensuring a better application to the theoretical aspects of their courses.
- The programme promotes equality and diversity well. Students on all childcare courses develop a good understanding of equality issues and how they relate to childcare settings. Case studies and scenarios include examples of children from a range of multicultural backgrounds and children with a range of additional needs.

Engineering
16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes
Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement and are not yet good, which matches the poor success rates over the last three years in classroom-based courses. Success rates are better on apprenticeship programmes with better outcomes for advanced students than for intermediate students. The recently appointed manager and teaching staff are working hard to ensure that apprentices and students receive a better learning experience. Their strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on retention on long programmes with only a very small number of advanced level students leaving their programmes. However, it is too soon to judge the full effectiveness of these improvements on student outcomes.
- The range of teaching techniques in most classroom sessions is limited; tutors do not always take advantage of the good range of information and communication technology equipment to accelerate learning and progress and do not always prepare their lessons well. For example, in one session, after fully describing chemical reactions most of the accompanying demonstrations did not provide the results expected and had to be repeated several times. During classroom sessions the use of undirected questions results in the more confident students dominating and other students disengaging from learning.
- Apprentices benefit from the expectations of the knowledgeable and experienced staff and also through the acquisition of the good range of vocational and employability skills developed in the college workshops and on employers' premises. They train on industrial standard equipment to high levels of competency and work to exacting standards. The college's workshops are well equipped with relevant engineering equipment and machinery.
- Teachers promote and reinforce health and safety well in both the workshops and classrooms. Apprentices adopt relevant safe working practices on employers' premises and fully understand

the risks attached to their training. They receive a good and extensive range of engineering subjects, additional to their main qualification, which further enhances their employability skills.

- The recently introduced and extensive tracking and monitoring system ensures the progress of all students is recorded accurately. Managers and staff use the systems very effectively to identify students who are at risk and they implement a good range of actions to support them. Support for those who are persistently late or who have low attendance is good. Students identified with barriers to learning at initial assessment, those declaring a need for support and those identified while on programme are provided with a range of support including half-term workshops, additional English and mathematics sessions or more individual specialist help in order to improve their progress.
- Written feedback to students and apprentices for their portfolio and assignment work is inconsistent. In the few better examples, written feedback after assessment is clear, summarising the standard of performance of the apprentice and how improvements can be made. However, the majority of written feedback is brief with no guidance on how to improve the quality of work. Assessors do not routinely check and correct spelling, punctuation and grammar during assessment of written work. Verbal feedback by instructors in the college workshops is better and clearly helps the apprentices and students to understand the improvements that they can make to produce a better standard of work.
- For recruited apprentices, progress reviews are regular; employers participate well and are clearly interested in the progress their apprentices make. However, short-term targets set during progress reviews are not clear enough to guide apprentices in the next steps of their technical training. The frequency of progress reviews for a few apprentices' training on employers' premises is poor. A small number of apprentices have not received a progress review for a lengthy period of time. Managers are taking urgent actions to remedy this and are working towards reinstating regular and timely reviews.
- Teachers use a range of activities that engage students and maintain their interest in discrete sessions of English. They make good use of information learning technology that involves students in interesting activities, challenges them, promotes their understanding of the correct use of written English, and improves their skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In one example, pairs of students enthusiastically competed with each other to correct the use of commas and score points for their team.
- Mathematic sessions for engineering students are well managed and taught well. Teaching activities are varied, provide challenge and maintain the interest of students who develop their knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts. During engineering theory sessions, teachers integrate mathematical theory into the subject effectively.
- The recent and very effective changes to recruitment and selection practices have benefited students. Students now clearly understand the challenges they will face when they enrol on engineering programmes and are able to select with confidence the course that suits their requirements, interests and abilities. Information, advice and guidance are good. Students are fully informed on the course requirements and undergo initial assessment, a subject specific interview and a series of further tests to determine their suitability for the programme.
- The promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity are inconsistent. In the better classroom sessions, teachers integrate equality and diversity naturally into the taught material and take good advantage of opportunities that arise to focus and discuss relevant issues. However, in most theory sessions, they do not always plan equality and diversity into learning activities. During progress reviews, tutors and assessors miss opportunities to use naturally occurring events or the use of local and national issues to reinforce equality and diversity.

Building and construction
16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement which is in line with the poor success rates for the last three years. Managers and staff have put a number of strategies in place which have improved both attendance and in-year retention significantly.
- Teaching and learning in theory sessions require improvement. In many sessions an over-reliance on tutor input for prolonged periods results in students losing concentration and not extending their knowledge sufficiently. The pace of many sessions is slow, resulting in too many students being inactive for prolonged periods which restrict their learning and progress. The checking of learning requires further improvement as there is too much reliance on open questioning and completion of gapped handouts; this results in insufficient challenge for the more able students.
- Lessons where students make better progress are well planned and make good use of students' starting points following effective initial assessment. Tutors use their good subject knowledge to challenge students to be creative to resolve complex theoretical concepts. In one session on safely isolating a live supply, students on an advanced level electrical course used an innovative method of identifying the correct sequence of isolation using colour-coded prompt cards.
- Students display safe working practices which are reinforced through workshop posters and tutor direction. Tutors provide good vocational support which helps students develop good practical skills and produce work to a high standard. In the best sessions, tutors provide opportunities for more able students to undertake problem-solving techniques and to develop their practical skills further. For example, foundation level students set out and constructed wood benches to a high standard, which were then used within the carpentry and joinery workshops.
- The assessment of students' work is good. Student portfolios are well structured and feedback to students is clear and accurate. Students are verbally informed on what they need to do to further improve but this is not always recorded within portfolios. Students value access to learning materials outside of the classroom and use the college's virtual learning environment well to extend their learning.
- The development of students' mathematical skills is satisfactory and effectively integrated into lessons, but teachers do not systematically check and correct students' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Students participate in competitions and voluntary projects to develop employability skills and enhance employment opportunities. Work experience is not yet embedded across all areas.
- Information advice and guidance are good, and following the recent development of a broader curriculum, now ensures students are placed on the most appropriate level of course, which is leading to improved retention. Tutors and a wider support team carry out regular reviews with using an electronic tracking system to monitor students' progress. An early intervention strategy is having a positive impact on attendance and retention, for example, one student who had suffered memory loss, was effectively supported by a mentor to successfully complete his qualification and is now considering progressing onto higher education.
- Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. The college provides an inclusive environment and responds effectively to the promotion and celebration of a range of diverse issues. Tutors have recently received update training and more widely promote equality and diversity but this is not fully extended into lessons or tutorials.

Foundation English
16-19 study programmes
19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement and reflects the need to improve achievement in both functional skills and GCSE English A* to C. While success rates in functional skills improved significantly in 2012/13, achievement rates are still below the national average. Achievement at A* to C in GCSE English is also just below the national average.
- Information, advice and guidance are limited. Initial and diagnostic assessment is inconsistent and requires improvement. Initial assessment ascertains the level students are working at and therefore the appropriate level of functional skill or GCSE. However, the college does not have a standard diagnostic process to develop meaningful targets for students. ILPs contain long-term goals and targets which are set half-termly but they are not sufficiently specific and measurable to help students to make good progress.
- Individual learning plans are used to log completed activities and reflect on past achievements rather than to review and monitor targets on an on-going basis. English targets are not sufficiently shared with vocational teams to support the embedding of English into their curriculum and to help students achieve all their learning goals.
- In the majority of lessons teachers make good use of a range of learning strategies to develop and extend both students' employability skills and their development of language skills. In one class, foundation level travel and tourism, and health and social care students engaged in collaborative learning, developing teamwork skills while planning and producing the first draft of a piece of informative writing. Opportunities for writing are related to vocationally meaningful contexts including 'Travelling Safely Abroad', and 'Healthy Eating'. Learning activities develop students' confidence and their personal and social skills, building progressively on previous learning and knowledge.
- In a significant minority of lessons expectations of students are limited with the focus for learning being driven by the needs of the awarding body rather than the individual needs of the students. Activities are insufficiently differentiated leading to students' limited engagement and progress. However, in the best lessons students benefit from high expectations leading to active engagement and high levels of motivation. For instance in one class, intermediate level travel and hair and beauty students develop their understanding of how language, in particular the use of fact, opinion and bias, can be used in persuasive writing to promote National No Smoking Day to their peers.
- Teachers use their skills and expertise to carefully plan learning in order to fully engage and actively motivate students. For example, the highly effective use of directed questioning in a GCSE English class ensured students' responses were skilfully developed and extended, accelerating students' progress. Teachers challenge students to justify correct answers and revisit areas for development. They make good use of television characters such as Vicky Pollard to help students' understanding of accent, dialect and idiolect. Students are also encouraged to reflect on their own idiolect.
- Teachers encourage intermediate level creative arts students to become increasingly independent as they withdraw the use of writing frames over time. Students use 'Netbooks' to access the internet to enable them to engage independently with research activities. However, the use of interactive ILT and the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to extend learning are underdeveloped.
- In the best lessons there is excellent promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity. In a foundation level group of sport and public services students discussed the former youth commissioner's twitter feeds, encouraging them to reflect on appropriate and inappropriate communication via social media and the potential impact on any future careers. Opportunities to discuss stereotypes and for students to examine their own prejudices are very effectively exploited. However, there are frequently missed opportunities to celebrate diversity.

Administration and business management

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement which is in line with the below average success rates on the full-time advanced business courses. College strategies to improve retention are having a positive impact at this stage in the year. However, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent and affects the ability of many students to achieve high grades or to make good progress relative to their starting points. However, the success rate for the small group of intermediate level business students is high and a good proportion achieve high grades. Part-time adult success rates in administration, customer service and management are generally high.
- Students regularly develop research skills in class and teachers develop students' confidence to contribute to class discussions through involving them in presentations, thus helping them to share ideas and improve their work. In the sessions in which students make good progress, they develop good personal and business skills through stimulating discussions and activities which capture and maintain their interest. Teachers question students effectively to assess and extend their learning.
- However, in too many lessons, questioning is underdeveloped and as a result, students become disengaged or provide superficial answers. The needs of the most able students are not always met because the tasks planned are insufficiently challenging and the pace of lessons is slow at times. In a few sessions, teachers do not plan carefully enough what, and how, they want students to learn which results in low-order questioning and learning activities and sometimes low-levels of disruption.
- Students are well cared for and supported. For example, students have been supported during and following maternity leave; others started the course very late and were helped to catch up, while others were helped to complete the course quickly and 'fast track' due to their prior learning. Students benefit from opportunities to participate in team building exercises and trips at the beginning of their course and are helped to obtain work experience opportunities during the year to develop and extend their learning as part of the study programme. Business students demonstrate work-readiness by arriving to lessons in smart business dress which helps them to make presentations in class with confidence and professionalism; experiences which will serve them well in the workplace.
- Students receive good information, advice and guidance. The pre-enrolment process has improved this year with the curriculum team being responsible for interviewing students, which has had a positive impact on retention. A high proportion of intermediate business students progress to the next level. Half of the students who completed the advanced programme progressed to higher education and a small proportion entered employment.
- Teachers do not always use the detailed student profiles to inform session planning in terms of responding to individual students' needs and abilities. Full-time students and teachers use the electronic progress monitoring system to review targets and progress appropriately. Teachers make effective use of available resources and accommodation, by using laptops in the majority of lessons and utilising the open-plan spaces to support students when not in timetabled sessions.
- Assessment practice requires improvement. A few teachers highlight literacy errors on marked work but others do not. Not all students are encouraged to correct and improve their English. Feedback from teachers is often limited to the confirmation of assessment criteria rather than detailed advice on how a student might improve their work and gain higher grades. Individual learning plans are regularly updated but too many targets are vague, not measurable and do not set review dates.
- Teachers are integrating English and mathematics effectively in most sessions. For example, in an active learning session about performance management, adult students calculated total

production quantities on the whiteboard. To support English skills, key terms are regularly identified and written on the board for students to note. Success rates in English and mathematics functional skills are variable and attendance by the relatively small proportion of full-time business students in this area is low. Timetable constraints also mean that some students miss lessons in the vocational area in order to access their functional skills sessions.

- Equality and diversity are well promoted. Students feel respected and valued as individuals. In the best sessions, teachers integrate equality and diversity effectively. For example, in a management class, resources were carefully designed to be ethnicity- and gender-neutral. In an intermediate diploma class, students were taught how to give effective customer service to disabled customers.

Administration and business management Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment for apprentices are good and lead to high success rates. Apprentices in administration, customer service and management make good progress and many achieve within the planned time. Assessors have high expectations of apprentices and workplace reviews inspire and challenge them to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding. Apprentices are confident in the assessment process and are making good progress.
- Apprentices are developing good personal and business skills through practical activities in the workplace. In a busy workplace setting an assessor facilitated an effective professional discussion to test the underpinning knowledge of an advanced administration apprentice following an observation of a business meeting. In a few reviews questions are insufficiently challenging to support apprentices to reflect fully on practice in the workplace.
- Assessors plan reviews carefully to meet the needs of individual apprentices and the workplace context. Apprentices and assessors make excellent use of an online system to upload evidence and plan and record progress through all elements of the apprenticeship framework. Apprentices are highly motivated by the online system which displays the percentage of their completion of the framework and they are clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Regular communication by email and telephone helps to ensure that apprentices remain on target to succeed between workplace visits. Employers are happy with the quality of service provided by the college but have limited involvement in the review and target-setting process to support their apprentices' development in the job role.
- Assessors take opportunities to develop English and mathematics skills during individual reviews. Apprentices are able to attend functional skills workshops at their place of work and they have good access to functional skills resources on the college's virtual learning environment which helps them achieve well. The expectations of a group of intermediate business apprentices, aged 25 or over, working in a hospital environment are being exceeded. They are responding with enthusiasm and commitment to the challenge of achieving English, mathematics and ICT qualifications beyond the level required for their apprenticeship framework.
- All apprentices are employed and several have gained promotion at work following achievement of their apprenticeship framework. However, progression rates from intermediate to advanced level frameworks are low. The needs of a diverse range of apprentices are catered for very effectively and apprentices feel respected and understood as individuals. However, they are not always challenged to reflect on equality and diversity issues in reviews.

The effectiveness of leadership and management**Requires improvement**

- Recent, well-conceived changes brought in by the new leadership team have not had sufficient impact on improving learners' outcomes or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The college has introduced an extensive range of quality improvement processes and actions to support courses and curriculum areas that require improvement. Quality improvement extends to subcontractors, and the college has ceased to work with one as a result of the more rigorous approach. The management of subcontractors is good. Managers welcome the change in culture that supports them to be self-critical, and there are early signs of improvement in the quality of curriculum reviews and action planning. These new measures have significantly improved attendance and are reducing the number of students who leave their course prematurely.
- Performance management to improve teaching and learning requires improvement. Middle managers now conduct observations of teaching, learning and assessment, and a moderation process that includes joint observations is beginning to support consistency and reliability. The process is increasingly rigorous in most curriculum areas, particularly where it is conducted by managers from outside the area, and takes appropriate account of the students' overall experience, although it has yet to be extended to workplace learning. This means that the college is not yet able to share best practice across these two aspects of its work. A small minority of staff have progressed from support to a capability review but the observation process is not yet fully integrated into performance management. While there is little inadequate teaching, not all curriculum areas are improving their teaching quickly enough.
- Self-assessment is satisfactory. The most recent report is robust and in most curriculum areas reflects an accurate analysis of outcome data. The college identified through self-assessment that information, advice and guidance was ineffective in many curriculum areas, leading to students being enrolled on inappropriate courses or course levels. Enrolment arrangements have been radically overhauled, and so far this year, few students have left their courses. However, there are still cases where students have been enrolled on courses that do not meet their needs, and not all students understand enrolment decisions. It is too soon to be sure that achievement is improving in all curriculum areas at the same rate as retention.
- Staff share the principal's and leadership team's newly revised and widely communicated vision of high expectations and ambition for students in an area of historical low aspirations and underachievement. Governors are well informed about the college's current performance and now use good quality, comprehensive and timely information to support their scrutiny. They recognise the considerable cultural change that has taken place over the past nine months, but also how much more work remains to be done to deal with a history of underperformance.
- Students who have been in the college for more than a year welcome and value the new arrangements to gather their views and respond to their concerns. They are enthusiastic and enjoy being in college, and are well supported by teachers and student advisers. Most of those who access their records on the college virtual learning environment (VLE) know how well they are progressing, although the focus of tutorial reviews is on individual components. This means that students on study programmes do not review their overall progress. Target-setting and monitoring are areas for improvement on many courses.
- Curriculum planning to meet the needs of employers is good. The college contributes significantly to strategies to attract and retain inward investment by supporting the skills development of workers. Partnership work with the co-located local Jobcentre Plus office is innovative and very successful, and has attracted national interest and recognition because of the relatively large numbers of unemployed people supported into work. In the context of the local area and its historic challenges, the curriculum offer at foundation and intermediate level meets key priorities well.
- Apprenticeship programmes are particularly well organised, flexible and responsive. They meet the needs of employers well and completion rates are high. Employers make good use of the frequent contact with their account managers to continually improve this provision.

- Students are treated fairly and support for those with a disability is good and sensitively provided. A few teachers deal particularly well with diversity matters as they arise in lessons but in general this requires improvement, as the college recognises in its self-assessment report.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. The college uses student advisers, student union officials and its 'Respect' team well to provide a college-wide network of support for students in need of help. Students have taken a leading part in arranging anti-bullying activities, especially cyber-bullying. Relationships with external child protection agencies are well established and mutually productive. Safeguarding training is good and regularly refreshed, and higher level training is provided in partnership with the local safeguarding children board and children's trust.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Provider name

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3	NA	NA	3	NA	3	2	NA	NA
Outcomes for learners	3	NA	NA	3	NA	3	2	NA	NA
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	NA	NA	3	NA	3	2	NA	NA
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	NA	NA	3	NA	3	2	NA	NA

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	3
Early years and playwork	4
Engineering	3
Building services	3
Construction crafts	3
Foundation English	3
Administration	3
Business management	3
Administration	2
Business management	2

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	Full-time: 2654								
	Part-time: 12603								
Principal/CEO	Mr Nigel Davies								
Date of previous inspection	April 2010								
Website address	www.west-cheshire.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		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
Full-time	459	73	539	128	719	158	7	7	
Part-time	246	2100	182	1836	74	987	32	271	
Number of traineeships	16-19			19+			Total		
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	159	330	124	348	2	24			
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	11								
Part-time	41								
Number of community learners	61								
Number of employability learners	511								
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">Cheshire Fire and Rescue ServiceInternational School of BeautyForum Housing AssociationYour HousingStyle TrainingTraining Strategies Ltd								

Contextual information

West Cheshire College is a further education college that offers a broad range of vocational courses and apprenticeship programmes across its two main sites in Handbridge, Chester and Ellesmere Port and in the community. The college's catchment areas include Cheshire and Wales. In 2012/13 the college supported over 15,000 students, including 2,258 students aged 16 to 18, and 1,338 workplace learners and apprentices. Chester and West Cheshire is in the 20% most deprived areas in terms of income and in the 15% most deprived areas in terms of employment. The main source of employment in Chester is service and financial industries; in Ellesmere Port it includes motor vehicle, engineering, manufacturing and distribution. The unemployment rate in Chester and Cheshire West has decreased from 7.5% in June 2012 to 6.2% over a 12 month period from June 2012. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more grade A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2012 was similar to the national picture for Cheshire West and Chester.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

William Baidoe-Ansah HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the vice-principal, quality and student services, as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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