FE&S report

West Cheshire College

General Further Education College

Inspection dates	**22–25 September 2015**
Overall effectiveness	**Inadequate**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
16–19 study programmes	Inadequate
Adult learning programmes	Require improvement
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- The requirements of the 16–19 study programmes have not been met.
- There is insufficient rigour in the monitoring of underperforming programme areas.
- The financial future is not currently sustainable.
- Teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are not high enough; as a result, students do not achieve their targets.
- Support for students who need extra help with their studies is not effective in enabling them to make good progress.
- Feedback given to students does not provide them with sufficient information and guidance to improve their work.
- Teachers do not develop students' skills in English and mathematics well enough.
- Too many students, particularly those on 16–19 study programmes, make slow progress and do not achieve their learning goals.
- Not enough students progress from intermediate- to advanced-level courses or from the first to the second year of their programmes.

The provider has the following strengths

- The college provides an inclusive environment permeated by an ethos of respect.
- Well-managed apprenticeship programmes enable most apprentices to make good progress.
- Good partnerships with local employers enable a high proportion of adult learners and apprentices to gain relevant skills and employment.

Full report

Information about the provider

- West Cheshire College is a general further education college with two main campuses in Chester and Ellesmere Port. Subcontracted provision is placed with two providers for students to gain additional qualifications to complement their vocational programmes.
- Approximately 4,000 students study at the college; of these approximately 1,600 are full-time students aged 16–19, 900 are adult learners, mainly on part-time programmes, and 1,200 are apprentices. About 350 students aged 16–19 enrolled at the college without a GCSE grade C or above in English and/or mathematics. Unemployment in West Cheshire at 8.2% is below the national average of 9.7%.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Meet all the requirements of 16–19 study programmes by:
  - providing work experience opportunities, impartial careers information, advice and guidance, and enrichment opportunities for all students aged 16–19
  - ensuring that students aged 16–19 who do not join the college with GCSE English and mathematics at grade C or above are able to develop their skills and improve their GCSE grades.
- Address the financial concerns rapidly so that the college has a sustainable financial future.
- Ensure leaders and managers have a clear and detailed understanding of all programme areas, through rigorous and systematic monitoring of underperformance in order to raise standards and bring about sustained improvement.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment swiftly to ensure that more students than is currently the case make or exceed the progress expected of them, and fully develop their English and mathematics skills, in order to successfully complete their learning programme.
- Provide effective support for students who need extra help with their studies by referring to initial assessments to identify the individual support needed; plan effectively to meet individual needs inside and outside the classroom and regularly monitor the impact that targeted support has so that students make good progress.
- Improve the quality of teachers' written feedback by providing clear guidance about exactly what students need to do to improve their work; monitor this consistently against students' performance to ensure they make rapid progress, achieve their learning goals and are able to progress from intermediate to advanced level or the second year of their courses.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Senior leaders and governors acknowledge that the college's financial position is precarious. Senior leaders have been managing a considerable period of upheaval, trying to resolve the financial problems which have beset the college since before their arrival, including overspends on significant capital projects and poor financial control. Although expenditure has reduced, they have not yet taken actions to secure long-term financial sustainability.
- The senior leadership team has led many good new initiatives to improve quality across the college but these have yet to have the much-needed impact on raising students' outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The majority of ambitious targets set by senior leaders and agreed with governors, including consistently improving students' achievements, have not been met.
- Self-assessment is not yet an effective tool for improvement because it is not evaluative enough and does not draw sufficiently on evidence to support judgements. Managers overestimated the effectiveness of leadership and management. Departmental reviews are too long and too many quality improvement plans lack focus. This has resulted in too many curriculum areas requiring improvement over two or more years. The college has very recently revised its self-assessment process to align it with the new structures, ensure judgements are evidenced and include clear targets for improvement. The new system is yet to make an impact.
- Recently introduced targets for managers and staff are not consistently ambitious. A new staff appraisal system has been introduced for all staff in order to hold them to account for their performance, and this has resulted in a number of staff leaving the college. However, the new system has had limited impact as appraisals are not rigorous enough; although most include clear targets for performance they have not usually been reviewed with sufficient regularity.
- The college is a member of the local enterprise partnership and most of the courses it offers link closely to its strategic priorities. Managers have worked proactively with Jobcentre Plus and employers to develop programmes to meet employers' needs. Staff deliver many innovative programmes and work with adult students to develop good English, mathematics and IT skills in the workplace. While all students on study programmes who do not have a grade C in GCSE English and/or mathematics are expected to improve their skills, the college's progress on implementing this expectation has been too slow. Consequently, too few students achieve a good pass grade and many leave college without these qualifications.
- The college does not meet the requirements of 16–19 study programmes. Too few students on study programmes benefit from a substantial work placement linked to their core studies. Progression is poor from one-year study programmes to other courses in the college. While there are sufficient opportunities for students to receive careers advice and guidance, the take-up is too low.
- Many observations of lessons carried out by the college overstate strengths and focus insufficiently on students' learning, their progress in class and what teachers need to do to improve. Managers changed their approach to the observation of teaching, learning and assessment during spring 2015 in order to better standardise observations and have greater focus on improving teaching and learning. The new system is yet to have any impact.
- The college self-assessment recognises that there is a need to better embed equality and diversity in teaching and training and, as a result, staff have all had professional development to help them do so. Currently, too few college observations of lessons show the impact this has had. The college has made good progress in reducing differing success rates for different groups of students.
- The college has sought to use in-year data more systematically in order to identify areas of concern. Programme area reviews take place four times a year for full-time learners and monthly in work-based learning. However, in some cases last year, programme area reviews did not accurately identify ongoing areas of concern and, consequently, have not had any impact on raising the quality of provision and improving students' achievements.
- Students say they are attracted to the college by its impressive new buildings. The Principal has made many efforts to improve the college environment with inspirational quotations, pictures and a new library. However, the very spacious environment is vulnerable to noise and movement disruption during lessons which has a detrimental impact on teaching and learning.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - A committed and knowledgeable team of governors has recognised the need to respond to the previous inspection and to change the culture of governance to provide greater challenge to senior leaders. Newly appointed governors have been able to contribute further financial and educational

expertise; the board has recently restructured to involve all members in discussions on finance and standards, which are now informed by clear and detailed information such as financial accounts in order to provide greater challenge in holding senior leaders to account.
  - Progress and finance reports are not always distributed to governors quickly enough and the most recent success rate predictions given to the board were overly optimistic.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Staff work closely with many external agencies to ensure a full framework of support for learners. Through discussions with inspectors and student surveys, a very high proportion of students report they feel safe and know to whom they would report concerns including bullying and harassment, radicalisation and extremism.
  - All staff work hard to establish a safe, welcoming and supportive environment with a culture of vigilance to safeguard all students. Training for all staff has supported an increase in safeguarding referrals and timely identification of vulnerable students, such as those with issues of homelessness or requiring financial support.
  - The college is committed to ensuring that the minor administrative errors are eliminated from the maintenance of the single central record as a matter of urgency.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate overall and, as a result, students' progress is slow and too many do not achieve their learning goals.
- Teaching, learning and assessment on 16–19 study programmes, the largest provision type, is inadequate. Teachers' expectations of what students can achieve on 16–19 study programmes and adult learning programmes are not high enough. Too much teaching does not challenge students to achieve or exceed their targets. Teachers take insufficient account of students' starting points when planning learning. They often use learning activities that are uninspiring and insufficiently responsive to students' individual needs. As a result, students often lose interest in their lessons and time is wasted.
- Teachers do not set meaningful targets for students, and they do not always monitor the progress that students make towards achieving their targets; as a result, too many students make slow progress.
- Feedback to students in lessons and following assessment does not provide them with sufficient information and guidance about what they need to do to improve their work. In a few subject areas, such as sport, feedback is specific and detailed, and is closely linked to what students need to do to achieve their targets. In too many other subject areas, including engineering and health and social care, teachers' feedback is often cursory and unhelpful.
- Support for students who need extra help with their studies is not always effective in enabling them to make good progress. Too much learning support is poorly planned to meet students' needs. Planning to meet the needs of students with high needs is particularly weak, with poor initial assessment and a lack of relevant and challenging targets.
- Teachers do not develop students' English and mathematics skills well enough on study programmes and, as a result, most students' progress in improving these skills is weak. Students have insufficient opportunity to improve the personal skills that they need for work through work experience and other work-related activity. The development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills is good.
- The standard of teaching, learning and assessment on the apprenticeship programme, which makes up approximately a quarter of the provision, is good. Apprentices benefit from high-quality training, particularly in the workplace, that enables the majority to make good progress. Employers contribute fully to developing and delivering training for apprentices and adults on employability programmes to enable students to gain the skills that they need at work.
- Assessors set challenging targets for apprentices, closely monitor apprentices' progress in acquiring occupational skills, and provide good support when apprentices are falling behind.
- Teachers successfully promote a supportive ethos in their lessons, and students work well together and show a high level of respect for their teachers and their peers. However, teachers do not always give sufficient attention to developing students' understanding of different social and cultural groups in our diverse society.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

- Students are very positive about their learning, are calm and purposeful, and are respectful to teachers and each other. They show genuine care for themselves and their peers.

- Students have positive attitudes to learning. They arrive on time to lessons with all necessary resources such as pens and paper. Students studying hairdressing, beauty therapy and business administration courses are required to wear uniforms; they do so appropriately and act in a professional manner as befits the workplace.
- Articulate and confident apprentices develop good personal and employment skills which are valued in the workplace. Apprentices' technical skills are very effectively developed, for example as they meet the individual medical needs of clients in different care settings and when colouring and cutting hair in salons.
- Students feel and are kept safe. Managers have introduced a college social media page which enables staff and students to communicate safely. The 'Respect' team has a visible presence in the college and works with students during induction and tutorials to ensure students are aware of and know how to report concerns such as radicalisation and extremism.
- Students want to learn in spite of teachers not always having high enough expectations of them. Teachers often provide insufficient challenge in lessons which results in a very small minority of students disrupting learning by talking inappropriately in classes and inappropriate use of mobile phones.
- Students are committed to achieving high standards in their work. Challenging aspirational targets for achievement are set by students themselves, but these are not based on their starting points as teachers have yet to share this information. Poor attendance is common due to unresolved timetabling issues for many students and is made worse when teachers start lessons late or finish them early.
- Students are encouraged to secure their own work placements and around half of students on 16–19 study programmes do so. However, managers and staff do not make enough effort to secure work experience for students who are unable to find their own work placements. Students in a significant minority of subject areas develop highly effective personal, employability and technical skills through the completion of employer-based projects that benefit the local community.
- Although careers guidance is well planned, not enough students on 16–19 study programmes access careers guidance and, for those who do, actions set are not detailed enough in helping students make decisions about the next stages of their education, employment or training.
- The majority of students on 16–19 study programmes have the opportunity to gain additional qualifications aligned to their vocational programmes to enhance their employment opportunities. For example, performing arts and sports students take qualifications that complement their programmes, such as teaching qualifications linked to their vocational courses.

Outcomes for learners are inadequate

- Students in too many vocational areas make slow progress towards achieving their learning goals. The proportion of students who successfully achieve their qualifications varies significantly across subjects and age groups. Too few students on childcare, construction and engineering programmes, which were identified as weaker subject areas at the last inspection, achieve their qualification. Success rates are high on most courses in sports, public services, IT and performing arts.
- Success rates improved significantly in 2013/14, particularly at advanced level, to the national rate. College data for 2014/15 indicate that improvements have not been maintained, resulting in a decline in success rates and too few students, particularly those on 16–19 study programmes, achieving their qualifications. Inspection evidence confirms that a significant majority of students on 16–19 study programmes and a minority of students on adult learning programmes do not make sufficient progress.
- Students' targets are not always challenging enough. Not enough students on 16–19 study programmes gain the high grades expected of them in comparison with their starting points.
- Not enough students progress to higher-level courses, particularly from intermediate to advanced level. One fifth of childcare students, less than one tenth of construction students and less than half of science students progress to advanced-level programmes. In a significant minority of subjects, too few advanced-level students progress from year one to year two of their programmes.
- The proportion of students on 16–19 study programmes who achieve GCSE English and mathematics at grades A* to C is very low. College data indicate that one third of students achieved GCSE mathematics at grades A* to C and one quarter achieved GCSE English at grades A*to C in 2014/15. Success rates for functional skills English and mathematics on 16–19 study programmes are too low. Not enough students develop their English and mathematics skills well enough, which affects the standards of students' work and the development of technical skills such as the spelling of complex technical terminology.
- Apprentices' success rates are high in most areas and the majority of apprentices are successful in gaining their qualifications. Current apprentices are making good progress towards the completion of their apprenticeships. However, success rates for younger apprentices aged 16 to 18, although above the

average for similar providers, are declining and too many apprentices on retail and commercial enterprise programmes, a small element of apprenticeship provision, do not achieve their framework.

- Although leaders and managers track the destinations of most students when they have completed their courses, they do not routinely track the destinations of students who left their programmes early. The majority of students who successfully complete their programmes progress to higher-level courses, full- or part-time employment, apprenticeships or higher education courses.

Types of provision

16–19 study programmes are inadequate

- The college provides study programmes in 10 subject areas. The largest areas are media and games, art and design, health and social care, engineering and computing. Students on 16–19 study programmes account for just under half of the college's provision.
- Managers have not successfully implemented all aspects of the study programmes requirements. Only around half of students enrolled on study programmes benefit from external work experience.
- In the large majority of subject areas, too few students successfully achieve their qualifications. Poor use of information about students' starting points results in a small minority of students studying English and mathematics at inappropriate levels.
- Advice and guidance about progression opportunities are not sufficiently effective. Not enough students benefit from progression interviews, and when targets are set they are frequently too vague and do not specify what students need to achieve in order to progress to their next step. As a result, too few students progress from their study programme to their next stage of education, training or employment.
- Students in the majority of curriculum areas complement their programmes with good enrichment which includes cross-college and course-specific activities such as British Sign Language, first aid, sports activities and volunteering. However, the quality of enrichment activities is not consistently high.
- Attendance at GCSE English and mathematics lessons is low. Too many students make slow progress in developing their skills in English and mathematics because of insufficient reinforcement in vocational lessons.
- Teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are too low in the majority of lessons. Planning of lessons is often poor. Too many lessons lack challenge, do not stimulate learning and are delivered at a pedestrian pace. Consequently, in the majority of lessons, students do not make the progress expected of them. In a minority of lessons, including catering, media, health and social care and performing arts teaching is more successful, resulting in good progress.
- Assessment and feedback is ineffective; teachers often fail to clarify misconceptions or identify and close gaps in students' knowledge. Teacher's questioning to the class results in ineffective checking of individual students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers do not challenge superficial answers to check or extend students' understanding of topics. In too many lessons, students are unable to demonstrate their understanding or progress. In a few lessons, teachers assess students' progress very effectively through good questioning techniques to confirm students' knowledge and understanding.
- Students arrive punctually to lessons and are ready to work, with necessary equipment and uniform. However, teachers do not consistently reinforce high standards in terms of punctuality; a significant minority of lessons finish early and a small minority start late. Student attendance is low. Processes for improving poor attendance are unclear.

Adult learning programmes require improvement

- Adult students account for just under one quarter of the college's provision. The majority of students are on college-based full- or part-time courses. The significant majority of full-time students infill onto 16–19 study programmes. Jobcentre Plus referred 900 students for short employability programmes in 2014/15.
- Highly effective partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and large local employers are successful in re-engaging, retraining and upskilling the local workforce to meet local skills shortages and fill recruitment gaps. For example, in engineering, the majority of students who complete and pass their course have successfully progressed to employment and apprenticeship programmes with large local employers or full-time courses at the college.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not always good enough on college-based courses to ensure students fulfil their potential and develop their skills to a high enough standard. Teachers' expectations of what students can do are too low in a significant minority of lessons, which results in students completing

mundane tasks which do not challenge or extend their learning. In lessons where teachers have high expectations of students, carefully planned lessons ensure students' starting points are used well to consolidate and extend learning, ensuring students develop good technical and industrial skills. For example, nail technicians demonstrate high levels of technical skill, good understanding of the requirements of manicuring and confidence in working with clients.

- The quality of teachers' feedback to students is not good enough. Most students receive written feedback on their work; however, this does not provide students with clear enough guidance on the precise steps they need to take to improve their work. Targets set for students on college-based courses are not challenging enough and their progress is slow.
- Students develop good personal and employability skills enabling them to progress to further study or employment.
- Not enough students make sufficient progress in GCSE English and mathematics. In a significant minority of GCSE English and mathematics lessons, attendance is low. Students make good progress in functional skills mathematics and English.

Apprenticeships are good

- Apprentices account for just over one quarter of the college's provision. Most apprentices follow programmes in health and social care, engineering and manufacturing and business administration. Small numbers of apprentices follow programmes in hairdressing and beauty therapy, IT and hospitality and catering.
- Apprenticeship provision is good. The majority of apprentices make good progress and successfully achieve their apprenticeships in the planned time.
- Highly effective planning with employers means that training in the workplace is of high quality and, consequently, apprenticeship programmes meet the needs of employers and apprentices. The principles and requirements of apprenticeship are met fully.
- Apprentices benefit from highly effective teaching, learning and skills development in the workplace. Most apprenticeship programmes are sufficiently flexible; they offer a range of specialist and additional options that meet the needs of individual employers and apprentices. For example, advanced-level apprentices on clinical care apprenticeships benefit from peri-operative units that allow them to progress to nursing studies.
- Most apprentices are confident and articulate; they develop good personal, technical and employability skills that make them valuable and valued members of their workforce. For example, health and social care apprentices quickly build the self-confidence necessary to help them develop appropriate English and mathematics skills in order to provide medication to clients. Manufacturing apprentices develop excellent skills in team working, critical evaluation of processes and independent and collaborative learning that are highly valued by car manufacturers.
- Most apprentices develop skills at an appropriate level in English and mathematics to help them succeed in training and for the workplace.
- Accurate progress monitoring and target setting enables assessors and managers to identify slow progress or poor performance early and provide effective and timely support for apprentices who need extra help. For example, motor vehicle assessors are particularly good at monitoring and supporting students so that they are able to complete their apprenticeship in the planned time.
- A minority of classroom-based lessons are dull and fail to inspire or challenge learners, resulting in apprentices not making the progress expected of them. During college-based theory lessons, teachers' feedback is not sufficiently detailed to help apprentices improve their performance.
- In construction, the tracking and monitoring of the progress of a small minority of apprentices lacks rigour, resulting in too few apprentices completing their apprenticeships in the planned time.
- Managers collect insufficient data to provide comprehensive information of the proportion of apprentices who progress to permanent employment or progress in their job roles.

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	2,805
Principal/CEO	Mr Nigel Davies
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	
16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
353	98	484	481	929	297	9	41

Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age

Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
163	537	89	442	2	42

Number of traineeships

16-19	19+	Total
n/a	n/a	n/a

Number of learners aged 14-16

Funding received from

Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency

At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:

- Prince's Trust
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Hailstone	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathy Passant	Ofsted Inspector
Clare Russell	Ofsted Inspector
Ruth Szolkowska	Ofsted Inspector
Elaine Smith	Ofsted Inspector
John Dunn	Ofsted Inspector

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

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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.

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