

Mid-Cheshire College of Further Education

General College of Further Education

Inspection dates

9–12 May 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Governance is inadequate. Governors have not established a secure and stable senior leadership team or ensured that leaders have implemented effective actions to improve the college from being inadequate.
- Leaders' and managers' actions have been hindered by significant levels of staff turnover and sickness. They have failed to secure sufficient improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for students since the previous inspection.
- Leaders do not ensure that the courses they provide for adults are relevant to filling the identified skills gaps in local communities. Too few courses for adults provide relevant opportunities for job progression.
- Students' attendance is too low, particularly in English and mathematics lessons.
- Leaders and managers have failed to reduce the numbers of students and apprentices who leave their courses early.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is poor. Teachers do not effectively plan activities to meet the abilities of all students; consequently, students' progress is too slow.
- Teachers do not record and monitor students' and apprentices' progress effectively enough. They do not set sufficiently challenging targets to ensure that students achieve the high grades of which they are capable.
- The quality of apprenticeship provision has declined in the last two years.

The provider has the following strengths

- Students and apprentices develop their self-confidence well, as well as the vocational skills they need for work.
- Students and apprentices behave well and are respectful to each other and their teachers.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Mid-Cheshire College is located in Vale Royal, a rural and urban district of Cheshire. It provides education and training for approximately 1,700 students, over two-fifths of whom full-time 16- to 19-year-olds. The college provides courses from entry level up to level 5 in a range of vocational subjects, the largest of which are arts, media and engineering. The vast majority of students attend the main college site in Hartford, just outside Northwich, and a small minority of students attend the Winsford site. Mid-Cheshire College works with three subcontractors.
- Approximately 334,000 people live in the local authority of Cheshire West and Chester, and around 40% of the population have qualifications at level 4 or above. This is higher than the regional average. The proportion of students in Cheshire who achieve five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is higher than the national average. Levels of unemployment are at 4%, and are lower than the regional and national averages.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that governors strengthen their oversight arrangements, and provide effective challenge to senior leaders, in order to bring about rapid improvements in teaching, learning and assessment and students' outcomes.
- Governors, leaders and managers should:
 - establish high-quality and stable leadership and management
 - improve the accuracy of self-assessment and set challenging targets to improve quality
 - ensure that improvement targets are meticulously and consistently monitored so that students and apprentices across all courses benefit from rapid and sustained improvements.
- Leaders should resolve swiftly the staffing issues so that students and apprentices have consistency in the staff who teach and assess them.
- Leaders and managers should work closely with partners to ensure that the provision for adults is relevant to local employment opportunities, and supports local and national priorities.
- Leaders, managers and teachers should improve students' attendance and reduce the numbers of students and apprentices who leave without achieving their qualifications.
- Teachers should plan effectively to meet the abilities of students and apprentices. They should be ambitious in challenging students to achieve their potential and provide clear and constructive feedback on how they can improve their work and attain higher grades.
- Senior leaders and managers should ensure that systems to track and monitor students' and apprentices' progress are rigorous and that teachers use them consistently to set targets that challenge students and apprentices to make the progress of which they are capable.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Governors and senior leaders have failed to improve areas identified as weak at the previous inspection. Since the previous inspection the senior leadership team has frequently changed and very recently another new senior team has been appointed. High staff turnover and sickness have negatively affected students' outcomes, which remain low and are below that of similar providers. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate, and the quality of the apprenticeship provision has declined.
- The financial status of the college remains very weak. The college is in financial administration and is dependent on the continued support of the funding agency and the proposed merger to ensure that it can continue to operate in the future.
- Self-assessment is insufficiently self-critical and results in weak action planning to secure improvement. In too many instances managers do not identify or evaluate the impact of the actions they have taken on the areas for improvement. Consequently, the associated action plan has failed to result in consistently rapid improvements in teaching, learning and assessment and students' outcomes.
- The regular meetings with managers to monitor course performance have yet to have a swift or positive impact on the progress being made to improve the quality of provision. Managers do not routinely follow up the impact of actions agreed in monitoring meetings, even when the action is identified as urgent. As a result, managers do not intervene consistently, or on a timely basis, to improve students' outcomes.
- Leaders and managers do not challenge weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment effectively to ensure that all students make at least the progress expected of them. Managers now use the outcomes of the observations of teaching, learning and assessment to support the professional development of staff to improve their practice. However, these actions have not led to rapid improvements in the quality of teaching and learning across all courses.
- The curriculum provision is narrow, particularly for adults. The current offer does not meet the needs of students or the communities served by the college. The extent to which the provision for all students can be developed and sustained over time is unclear and is currently dependent on the proposed merger taking place.
- Leaders and teachers do not set high enough expectations for students' attendance. Attendance is too low, particularly in English and mathematics lessons. Furthermore, a significant number of 16- to 19-year-olds, and adult students, have persistently low or sporadic attendance.
- In a few curriculum areas, local businesses work well with teachers to develop students' understanding and work-related skills by enabling students to apply the theoretical concepts learned in the classroom in real industry environments.
- The initiatives that senior leaders have implemented to improve student's behaviour and attitudes to learning are effective. Consequently, students and apprentices are respectful to each other, and to their teachers.
- Managers have made good progress in the current year in ensuring that a much greater

proportion of students undertake work experience and enrichment opportunities than at the previous inspection.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is inadequate.
- Governors have been far too slow to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report and subsequent monitoring visits, and too many areas for improvement are yet to be rectified successfully.
- Governors do not challenge leaders effectively. The information provided by senior leaders to governors about performance does not enable them to challenge leaders about underperformance effectively. This includes the decline in the achievement rates of students and apprentices on several courses, and an overall decline in attendance. Reports to governors are descriptive and often overly positive, resulting in governors not fully understanding the extent of the weaknesses in the college.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. However, the inspection team found some administrative weaknesses in systems and processes and health and safety, for which senior leaders took very swift action during the inspection to address the concerns raised.
- One governor, who is well informed about safeguarding, works effectively to create a link between governance and with the college's safeguarding team.
- Most students know how to keep themselves safe. Staff development is effective in giving staff the confidence to make appropriate referrals, where any cause for concern exists, to enable early intervention. Managers act promptly on any safeguarding or bullying referral and work effectively with relevant agencies, including social care providers, to fully resolve the issues.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent across subjects, levels and types of programmes, with too much remaining weak. Teachers do not plan activities that sufficiently challenge students and apprentices to make the progress of which they are capable. In too many lessons, the pace of learning is slow and students become disengaged.
- Teachers' expectations of what students and apprentices can achieve are still too low in too many subjects. Too few students meet or exceed their minimum target grades. This is particularly the case for full-time level 3 students aged 16 to 19, where around half are not expected to achieve their minimum target grade this year.
- Few teachers and assessors check or extend students' and apprentices' learning sufficiently, resulting in inadequate development of their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- In too many instances, teachers do not provide students and apprentices with good enough feedback to help them to improve their work, or to achieve the grades of which they are capable. In many cases, student assessment feedback sheets are incomplete.

Teachers do not consistently apply the college standard to the correction of spelling, grammar and punctuation. In the few areas where teachers provide detailed feedback, including art and design, applied science, and health and social care, students are able to improve the quality of their work.

- Teachers and assessors do not set students sufficiently challenging and precise targets. Few teaching staff routinely use the electronic monitoring system and as a result the tracking of students' performance is not effective. For example, on a few level 2 courses for students aged 16 to 19, all of the students were set a minimum target grade of pass, irrespective of their prior attainment. On most full-time adult courses, students' target grades are low.
- Most students and apprentices are not aware of their target grades, or the progress that they are making towards them. Teachers do not use the information held on the electronic monitoring system effectively to support students to make sufficient progress. Furthermore, a lack of timely and targeted intervention by teachers hinders students' and apprentices' progress.
- Students' development of English and mathematics skills remains poor. In English and mathematics lessons, frequent timetable and staff changes have hindered students' progress. Too few teachers in vocational lessons develop or reinforce the language skills needed in their subject areas. For a minority of apprentices, teachers develop apprentices' English and mathematical skills well. For example, in business administration an apprentice was able to select and use formal language for communication with customers. Managers have very recently put in place actions to improve English and mathematics across the college, but the impact on whether these actions will lead to an improvement in students' skills, and their achievement of qualifications in these subjects, is not yet evident.
- Teachers in vocational practical lessons use their skills and expertise well so that students and apprentices develop industry-standard skills and knowledge that prepare them well for work. For example, in a science lesson adult students successfully cultured several single colonies of E.coli bacteria, and in hairdressing, students cut and colour hair with confidence and use these skills in part-time jobs in salons.
- Staff identify students' support and additional learning needs quickly. Staff provide effective support in class both to small groups and on a one-to-one basis, which helps this group of students achieve as well as they can. Students value the support they receive from their teachers, and this helps prepare them for their next steps. For example, students in performing arts were well prepared for their university interviews, because of the support they had received from their teacher.
- The very small number of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have well-established transition plans. Their programmes meet their individual specific needs and they achieve well on their learning programmes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Attendance is low for learners aged 16 to 19 and adult students, with a significant minority having persistently low or sporadic attendance. Too many students are not punctual for lessons, which disrupts learning for others. Poor attendance by students and

apprentices in English and mathematics lessons hinders their current progress. In a minority of classes students are disengaged from their learning and show a lack of care and respect for their teachers and surroundings.

- A minority of students and apprentices do not demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe from extremism and radicalisation. Students and apprentices feel safe and know to whom they can report any concerns. Students have a good understanding of how to protect themselves from the risks associated with the use of the internet and are able to give examples of how to keep themselves safe online.
- The understanding of British values for students aged 16 to 19 requires improvement. In many instances, students do not have sufficient awareness of social and ethical issues to prepare them for life in modern British society. Adult students and apprentices have a well-developed understanding of British values, and equality and diversity.
- Careers information, advice and guidance is weak for those students who wish to progress to employment. Staff do not provide effective or timely advice or guidance to help students develop realistic plans for their future careers. Students who are intending to progress to higher education receive good advice and guidance to help them make appropriate university choices. For example, business students were very positive about the support they had received in completing their university personal statements and applications, and this has resulted in offers to universities.
- Managers respond effectively to bullying or safeguarding issues, and students are clear about how to report any concerns they have. Apprentices use their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities well in the workplace.
- The vast majority of students aged 16 to 19 benefit from external work placements, and many experience a wide range of activities, including guest speakers, work-related visits and links with employers. Students and apprentices gain valuable experience of the skills required to work in their vocational area, and develop broader employability skills such as teamwork, communication skills and working with employers. Apprentices apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in their place of work, which makes a positive contribution to their employers' business.
- The majority of students and apprentices are well behaved and respectful of their peers and teachers, creating a supportive learning environment in which they develop good social skills. In a minority of lessons, low-level disruption hinders students' progress and students' use of inappropriate language goes unchallenged by their teachers. Adult students demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours to learning and gain confidence on their learning programmes, which improves their personal well-being.

Outcomes for learners

Inadequate

- Achievement rates are low. For students aged 16 to 19, who account for over two-fifths of the college's provision, achievement rates in 2015/16 are below that of similar providers. Achievement rates are particularly poor in construction, motor vehicle, hairdressing and beauty therapy. The number of students aged 16 to 19 who remain on their courses to the end has declined since the previous inspection, and remains lower than that of similar providers.
- The proportion of adults who achieve their qualifications has declined since the previous

inspection. Achievement rates in 2015/16 are poor on entry-level courses, level 1 courses and level 2 courses, which together make up about three-quarters of the college's adult provision. The number of adult students who remain on their course to the end, though improved since the previous inspection, remains lower than that of similar providers.

- The number of students and apprentices in the current year who have left their course without achieving their qualification is too high.
- The progress that current students make is slow and too many students do not progress far enough from their starting points. Consequently, too few students achieve high grades, develop their skills and reach their full potential.
- Too few students develop their English and mathematics skills sufficiently well and do not make the progress required to improve their GCSE grade. In 2015/16, a significant number of students did not achieve their functional skills English and mathematics qualifications.
- Apprenticeship achievement rates have remained above the national rate for the past three years. However, too many apprentices do not complete their apprenticeships within their planned timescales, and this has declined over the past three years. The progress of current apprentices is slow. Around a third are forecast to make slow progress towards completing within their planned timescales. Almost one half of apprentices who are aged 24 and over, who make up almost half of the apprenticeship cohort, do not complete their apprenticeship within the planned timescales.
- The overall achievement rate in 2015/16 for students who have learning difficulties is lower than that of similar providers, particularly for adults. The very small numbers of students in the current year who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.
- In 2015/16, female students aged 16 to 18 achieved significantly less than their male peers did. This is a result of low achievement rates in health and social care, and hairdressing and beauty therapy, where the majority of students are female. In-year college data suggests that this gap has narrowed, and the number of females who remain on their courses is marginally higher than that of males.
- The majority of students who remain on their course and pass their qualification progress to further study or employment. While the majority of apprentices remain in employment, the proportion who progress to a higher-level apprenticeship, or gain promotion, is low.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- Currently, 746 students study a range of vocational programmes from entry to level 3, across 12 subject areas. Almost two-thirds of students study at level 3. The largest areas are art, design and media, health and social care, sport, engineering and construction.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment on study programmes is poor, and too many teachers do not challenge students effectively to extend their learning. Consequently, students do not make sufficient progress from their starting points. Teachers do not routinely plan to meet the individual needs of students, resulting in too few students making the progress they should. Where teachers use challenging activities

which engage all students, students present their work clearly and confidently.

- Too few teachers plan to incorporate English and mathematics into vocational lessons and as a result, they miss opportunities to develop students' English and mathematics skills and make them relevant to their subject area.
- Teachers' feedback on assessed work does not provide sufficient information about what they need to do to improve in order to meet or exceed their minimum target grade. Student progress reviews are mostly ineffective and have little impact upon improving student outcomes.
- Teachers do not set challenging or rigorous target grades to enable students and apprentices to reach their potential. For example, on level 2 graded courses teachers set all students grades of pass, irrespective of their prior attainment or aspirations.
- The tracking and monitoring of students' progress is not sufficiently rigorous. As a result, leaders and managers do not have a clear overview of students' performance across all study programmes, and they are therefore unable to ensure that teachers have put adequate interventions in place.
- Teachers do not use career plans consistently to support students' ambitions and progression. While support for students progressing to higher education is good, teachers do not supply timely information and guidance for those students planning alternative progression routes.
- Leaders and managers have implemented all aspects of the study programme requirements. The majority of current students benefit from external work experience placements that are relevant to their career aspirations. An increasing number of students benefit from a range of activities, including trips, visits and guest speakers. However, this is not yet consistently available to students in every subject area.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is courteous and supportive of learning. They display high levels of respect for their teachers and peers, and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, taking pride in their work.
- In a few instances, teachers promote equality and diversity effectively in the curriculum. For example, in fashion and 3D design, students were encouraged to focus on a range of options when choosing their briefs, to extend their knowledge of a diverse society. Fashion students produced projects influenced by the Japanese kimono and the punk era, and in 3D design, students created sculptures to represent dementia.
- Students develop good personal, social and employability skills. This includes the use of live briefs, working in commercial salons, and the development of transferable skills such as team-working, communication and problem-solving. For example, in graphic design, students have recently worked on a live brief for a local housing trust and they have developed all the promotional material for the upcoming college production.
- Students understand how to keep themselves safe. Students know how to report any concerns they have and most speak confidently about the dangers of radicalisation.
- Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from well-planned support and programmes designed to meet their specific individual needs. The effective use of specialist support and learning support staff in lessons enables students with high needs to make good progress and achieve their targets and qualifications.

Adult learning programmes

Inadequate

- There are currently 416 students on adult learning programmes across 12 subject areas. Adults make up one-quarter of the college's provision, and students undertake a range of full-time and part-time courses from entry to level 4.
- Leadership on adult learning programmes is weak. Leaders and managers have failed to focus the current adult provision on the economic needs of the area and specific skills gaps. Adult learning programmes do not ensure that students develop the vocational and employment skills they need to meet the job opportunities in the region.
- Leaders and managers do not receive accurate, up-to-date data, which hampers their ability to improve the provision. For example, they are unable to identify precisely the number of adults who are currently on courses.
- Too many students leave their courses early and do not achieve their qualifications. Despite the measures which managers have introduced to reduce the number of students who leave their full-time courses, too many students continue to leave this provision.
- Attendance is low in too many lessons, and too many adults arrive late for lessons. A significant minority of adults have persistently poor attendance, and as a result, too many students do not make the progress of which they are capable. In many cases teachers do not challenge poor attendance and punctuality.
- Teaching and learning on adult courses is weak, and changes to teaching staff, because of staff turnover and absence, disrupt learning. As a result, adult students are not making the progress expected of them for this stage in the academic year.
- Teachers do not set high enough expectations of what their students can achieve, and they do not plan lessons well enough to challenge and inspire students. In the majority of lessons students complete the same tasks, despite their different starting points. Consequently, students move off-task, lose focus and do not make sufficient progress. Too often, the target grades that teachers set are too low.
- Subject teams do not record accurately students' in-year progress and consequently do not take appropriate action to ensure that students make expected progress. In a few instances, subject teachers record accurately students' progress and achievements, which students use to make improvements on their work; however, teachers do not use this consistently across the different courses.
- In too many instances, teachers do not provide effective feedback that helps students improve their work, or achieve the high grades of which they are capable. Teachers do not routinely identify spelling, grammar and punctuation errors in students' work. Consequently, students are not developing the skills to improve the quality of their written work because they are unaware of their mistakes.
- Careers information, advice and guidance is weak. In too many instances, students do not have a clear understanding of their future career and study opportunities and are uncertain about their next steps. A small number of adult learners who have been on college courses for over six years have yet to receive advice on future job opportunities. Advice and guidance about higher education provides good information to a very small number of adults, which helps them make informed decisions about their next steps.
- Teachers promote health and safety in practical lessons well and, as a result, students

work safely and keep themselves and others safe.

- Students demonstrate appropriate attitudes and behaviours for work. Those who attend regularly are confident and motivated, and have a professional approach to learning.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Apprenticeships account for almost one third of the college's provision and programmes are offered in six subject areas, of which over half are at intermediate level. The largest proportion of the 527 apprentices are in health and social care and business administration. The majority of apprentices are aged 19 and older.
- The quality of apprenticeship provision has declined since the previous inspection. Leaders and managers have failed to stem the decline in the number of apprentices who do not achieve their programme within their planned timescales. Too many current apprentices make slow progress, and managers' actions have not been swift enough, or consistently enough applied, to improve apprentices' progress.
- Leaders and managers are too slow in putting in place adequate staffing arrangements. As a result, too many apprentices on electrical, construction and motor vehicle programmes make slow progress.
- Teachers and assessors do not challenge apprentices sufficiently to extend their learning. They do not check learning effectively, and lessons lack pace. As a result, too many apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable. A minority of apprentices do not have their spelling, punctuation or grammar routinely corrected. Consequently, they are unable to learn from errors.
- Assessors' reviews for apprentices require improvement. Too many reviews do not enable apprentices to understand fully their progress and what they need to do next. Employers do not always participate in reviews, and are not involved sufficiently in setting apprentices' targets. Review meetings fail to rectify the slow progress too many apprentices are making, although they take place at regular intervals, and are effective in reinforcing apprentices' understanding of health and safety.
- The provision of English and mathematics for apprentices is not consistently good across programmes. Functional skills teachers do not address poor punctuality effectively, and attendance in lessons is low. This results in apprentices' making slow progress in achieving their framework, particularly in health and social care. In some vocational activities, assessors embed the development of English and mathematics effectively. For example, engineering apprentices use formulae and calculations routinely in estimations and measurements.
- Careers information, advice and guidance for apprentices requires improvement. Apprentices who complete and achieve their qualification gain sustained employment. However, too few apprentices progress to higher-level programmes or gain promotion at work.
- Teachers and assessors ensure that apprentices' understanding of British values is sufficient. However, they have yet to ensure that all apprentices are aware of how to protect themselves from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders and managers develop effective partnerships with many employers. These

employers are supportive, and provide good training for their apprentices in the workplace. Arrangements to manage the fifth of apprentices who are in subcontracted provision are effective.

- The majority of apprentices develop new workplace skills, and are able to apply their knowledge to contemporary industry standards. A small minority of apprentices engage in additional learning and project work which helps them to do their jobs better.
- Apprentices develop purposeful, personal and employability skills to support workplace performance. They develop confidence, self-esteem and effective communication skills. Apprentices work safely, and have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities in learning and in the workplace.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity. In the more effective activities, teachers apply context to the workplace. For example, childcare apprentices actively use exemplars in the classroom and care situations to demonstrate appropriate use of language, cultural respect and how to challenge stereotypes.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130620
Type of provider	General College of Further Education
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,600
Acting Principal/CEO	Nichola Newton
Telephone number	01606 74444
Website	www.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	103	97	180	203	463	114	0	2
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	99	184	75	134	9	26		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	10							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority Salmas Beauty Academy Limited SHL Training Solutions Limited							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality and curriculum, as nominee. 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, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students 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 college.

Inspection team

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