

Inspection of Warrington and Vale Royal College

Inspection dates: 8–11 October 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Warrington and Vale Royal College is a general further education college formed following a merger in August 2017. At the time of inspection there were 1,440 learners on education programmes for young people, 1,634 on adult learning programmes, and 75 learners who have high needs. The college offers courses in most subject areas, the largest being health and care, arts and media, and construction. Courses are offered from level 1 to level 4, with 38% of learners studying at level 2 and 36% at level 3. Just over half of the college's 743 apprentices are on frameworks with the remainder on standards-based apprenticeship programmes. Most apprentices study level 2 or 3 programmes. The largest volume of apprenticeships are in business administration and electrical installation. The college's largest campus is in Warrington, there is a smaller site in Winsford and around 30 learners study on electrical installation courses in Hartford. The college works with three subcontractors who provide apprenticeships and education programmes for young people.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners enjoy a wide range of courses that meet local and regional needs very well. This helps to ensure that most learners and apprentices progress to further study or work.

Learners and apprentices told us that they benefit from a very caring and highly inclusive learning environment and inspectors agreed. Relationships between them and their teachers and assessors are excellent.

Learners and apprentices benefit from using industry-standard equipment. This helps them develop practical skills which are valued by employers. For example, teachers in catering have introduced up-to-date methods of cookery, such as sous vide. This goes beyond the requirements of the qualification they are working towards.

Learners who have high needs and/or special educational needs and/or disabilities receive early help and individual support. Teachers and assessors motivate learners and apprentices to be successful in their learning. This helps them to develop their confidence and self-esteem.

Most learners and apprentices quickly develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours. This prepares them well for further study, employment or promotion at work.

Learners and apprentices feel safe in their learning and work environments. Learners and apprentices always follow the correct health and safety practices in workshops and while at work.

Plumbing and carpentry apprentices and learners on GCSE English and mathematics courses do not benefit from the same high-quality experience as others.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders make skilful use of a range of local and regional information to inform and shape the curriculum offer. They tailor programmes to meet the needs of learners, employers and the priorities of local enterprise partnerships.

Assessors involve employers in the planning of the curriculum. Assessors adapt the order in which they deliver components of the curriculum to fit in with the work being completed by apprentices in their job. Apprentices develop the specialist work skills where shortages are identified. For example, construction apprentices learn how to build roof structures on site.

Employers value the new skills and knowledge that apprentices gain. For example, business administration apprentices work on information technology projects to increase efficiency. Most young people, adults and apprentices achieve their qualification.

In a few occupational areas, such as plumbing and joinery apprenticeships and in GCSE English and mathematics, the implementation of an ambitious curriculum is weak. Teachers in these subjects do not identify well enough the gaps in students' knowledge and deliver the curriculum to build on what learners already know. Consequently, not all apprentices and learners improve their understanding to a high enough level.

Learners who have high needs on vocational courses develop the skills they need for work and independence. For example, in brickwork, learners with high needs get extra support to develop their proficiency and can build a wall to a high standard.

Teachers do not ensure that learners who have high needs on foundation courses have access to an ambitious curriculum. For example, they do not set challenging enough goals for them that link well to their education, health and care plans.

Teachers and assessors plan learning activities carefully to reinforce knowledge. For example, on the level 3 media course, teachers discuss with students the key features of successful film making, such as the planning and reviewing of budgets. Students consolidate their knowledge by applying it in planning, making and editing their own films to commercial standards.

Most teachers and assessors set high expectations for what learners and apprentices can achieve. They check understanding and allow them time to practise, review and recall their learning. For example, adults on beauty courses practise on each other and then on friends before they consolidate their skills by practising on clients and completing more complex spa treatments.

Most teachers and assessors address any misconceptions in learners' and apprentices' subject knowledge. Teachers reinforce the importance of thorough research. They encourage learners to develop their understanding through skilful questioning and by checking learners' understanding of key concepts. For example, learners on access to higher education courses use research methods well to develop a deeper understanding of topical issues. They use their new knowledge to skilfully debate different views.

Most learners and apprentices receive useful feedback from their teachers and assessors. This allows them to reflect on their learning and identify how they can improve further. For example, art and design learners improve their critiquing skills when they review their portfolio, and this helps them to improve their practical techniques.

Most young people and adult learners enjoy a wide range of useful activities that complement their programme and develop them as individuals. For example, catering learners are successful in prestigious work skills competitions. They quickly develop the skills and attitudes to be professional chefs.

Attendance in most classes visited by inspectors for young people and apprentices is high. In access to higher education, beauty therapy and theatrical and media make-up,

attendance of adults was too low.

In classrooms and around the college, learners demonstrate excellent conduct and show respect for each other. Apprentices model and adopt professional standards. Most learners on programmes for young people and those who have high needs complete meaningful work experience or internships.

Most learners and apprentices receive high-quality information, advice and guidance. They make well-informed choices about courses matched to their individual needs and intended career aspirations. In a few cases, such as electrical installation, teachers do not ensure that the curriculum is ambitious.

The senior leadership of the college is highly effective. Senior leaders have developed and implemented a clear strategy that has resulted in sustained improvement across the merged institution. They have reviewed the curriculum to ensure that courses are not needlessly duplicated and to ensure that there are clear progressions routes. They have ensured that most learners and apprentices, including those completing courses with subcontractors, have access to an ambitious curriculum.

Staff morale is high, and most teachers feel valued. Leaders provide support and opportunities for staff to develop their subject expertise. For example, teachers in beauty receive specialised spa training. Electrical teachers and assessors complete the new wiring regulations training.

Governors make a valuable contribution to the oversight and the effectiveness of the college. They effectively hold the senior leadership team to account. They have a wide range of business and educational skills that enable them to monitor the quality of education effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are diligent in ensuring that learners are safe. Designated leads are well trained and quickly resolve any concerns raised. Staff receive frequent training and updates on safeguarding. Procedures for checking the backgrounds of staff when they are appointed are effective. Safeguarding leads have excellent relationships with external agencies. This ensures that learners identified as at risk receive help. Learners know how to report any concerns about themselves and others. Most learners and apprentices have a basic understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the dangers associated with extremist ideas or behaviours.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that teachers in plumbing, joinery and in GCSE English and mathematics identify the gaps in students' knowledge and deliver the curriculum to build on what they already know and can do.
- Ensure that teachers of learners who have high needs plan an ambitious foundation level curriculum so that learners can meet challenging goals.
- Increase the attendance of adults on access to higher education, beauty therapy and theatrical and media make-up courses.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130617
Address	Winwick Road Warrington Cheshire WA2 8QA
Contact number	01925 494494
Website	www.wvr.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Nichola Newton
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	19–22 January 2016
Main subcontractors	Cheshire Fire Service NSEG Training Association Limited Aspire Procurement Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the interim assistant principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the further education and skills inspection handbook and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including conducting learning visits, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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