

Inspection of Priestley College

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 November 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Information about this provider

Priestley College is a 16 to 19 academy situated in Warrington, Cheshire. The college is part of the Challenge Academy Trust, which consists of Priestley College, five primary and five secondary academies. Priestley College provides academic, vocational and technical education to young people and English and mathematics courses to adult students.

At the time of the inspection, 2,385 students were studying education programmes for young people. Students study across four pathways at level 3. Most students study either A levels, vocational programmes, or a blend of vocational and A-level programmes across a range of subjects. Of the 2,385 students, 103 students were studying T levels across five programmes. These include digital production design and development, education and early years, design and development for engineering and manufacturing, health, and management and administration. At the time of the inspection, there were 118 students studying at level 2 across six programmes. These include art and design, business studies, health and social care, media studies, public services, and sport, as well as GCSE English, mathematics and science. There were 21 students in receipt of high-needs funding.

There were 33 adult students studying English and mathematics courses. Of these, 26 were studying functional skills English at levels 1 and 2. The remaining students were studying level 1 and 2 functional skills mathematics.

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

Students speak highly of the inclusive culture at Priestley College. They explain how they have a sense of pride studying at the college and enjoy being part of the Priestley community, where they feel cared for. Most students are polite and courteous and demonstrate high levels of respect for their teachers and their peers. However, a few students do not experience the same levels of respect from other students outside of the classroom.

Students benefit from studying in a calm and respectful environment, where teachers have high expectations. Students are motivated to achieve, and they arrive to lessons prepared and ready to learn. When working in groups, they work collaboratively and contribute well to group discussions. Attendance is high. In the very few instances when students are absent, they are supported well to catch up.

Students access a wide range of additional activities to support their ongoing development. They take part in the college council and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and they learn British Sign Language and plan charity events. Dance students participate in local community performances and take part in dance workshops with leading choreographers. Students on the graduate programme develop their essay writing skills and benefit from a range of talks from guest speakers to support them with their applications to Russell Group and Oxbridge universities. Students develop their wider skills by completing the active citizenship and anti-bullying awards, and they complete a mental health first-aid course. Students use these skills to support their peers.

Students benefit from a wide range of unbiased, impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance, which prepares them well for their next steps. Adult students learn how to write CVs and receive guidance on preparing for interviews. Young people benefit from drop-ins and individual support from highly qualified and experienced careers advisers. Students attend university and apprenticeship fairs and access an online portal that provides them with information on relevant progression events. As a result, most young people are well informed about their next steps and progress to positive destinations.

Students feel safe and know who to contact if they have any concerns. Students are confident that they will be supported by staff and that concerns raised will be dealt with swiftly. Students learn about a range of topics such as sextortion, domestic abuse and the impact of coercive and controlling behaviour. They are aware of the support they can access both internal and external to the college.

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

Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculums that they offer young people. For example, students complete four AS levels in Year 12, with the choice of reducing this to three A levels in Year 13, to provide a breadth of curriculum learning. Students on vocational programmes complete an additional qualification alongside

their main programme, such as the extended project qualification or the certificate in finance. Most students progress to higher-level study at university or gain employment.

Leaders have nurtured highly effective relationships with employers and the local community. They work closely with these stakeholders to design curriculums that meet the skills needs both regionally and nationally. Students on T-level engineering participate in simulation activities with large employers and universities on projects such as the development of 'mars rover.' This develops their employability skills to support them on their work placements. Managers have redesigned the vocational sports curriculum to include topics on biomechanics, exercise and physiology. These students progress on to higher levels or employment in pathways such as physiotherapy. The English and mathematics functional skills programmes support adults to access higher-level qualifications or move into employment.

Teachers assess what adults and young people already know and can do at the beginning of their programmes accurately. For example, health and social care teachers use the information they gather to quickly identify students who require study skills support. Sociology teachers use written assessments to identify students who require support with structuring their written work and essay writing. However, teachers of adult mathematics do not routinely use this information to plan a personalised curriculum. Adult mathematics students follow the same learning and do not progress as quickly as they could.

Teachers of students with high needs use education, health and care plans to inform target setting and to carefully plan individualised learning. Learning support assistants liaise effectively with class teachers to carefully monitor the progress that students with high needs make. Where staff identify that further support is required, this is put in place swiftly. Students with high needs make at least the expected progress.

Leaders develop ambitious curriculums, which are carefully planned and logically sequenced. T-level engineering students learn about electronic principles and equations before moving on to aerodynamics. Biology students learn about photosynthesis through exploring photophosphorylation. They demonstrate an accurate understanding of light being used to synthesise energy for plants. Students deepen their knowledge and apply previous knowledge well to new learning.

Teachers use a range of recall and retrieval teaching strategies to recap prior learning and to emphasise key information. In biology, teachers focus on 'thinking hard' strategies to support students to recall previous learning. In dance, teachers use demonstration to help students develop their jazz kicks and identify key stylistic features of jazz. Students gain new knowledge and become more confident in their recall. However, a few teachers do not sufficiently check or consolidate students' learning during or at the end of sessions. For example, in health and social care, teachers ask students to take notes for revision, but they do not check the accuracy of these notes. Classes in health and social care end abruptly, and teachers do not

check students' learning. Teachers do not always identify misconceptions or gaps in students' learning.

A small minority of teachers do not always provide students with opportunities to fully demonstrate their depth of understanding when answering questions. They do not always challenge students to extend their answers or ask further questions to build on the responses that students give. Consequently, a few students do not develop a deeper knowledge of topics within their programmes.

Most teachers provide useful and developmental feedback that helps students to improve the quality and accuracy of their work. Adult students on English functional skills learn how to use prepositions and sentence starters correctly in their written work. When completing speaking and listening exercises, they use the correct tone and intonation. However, in health and social care and functional skills mathematics, teachers do not always identify errors in students' work. This results in students continuing to make the same mistakes. Students in health and social care do not always know what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.

Leaders have highly effective quality assurance and improvement processes in place. These processes have been strengthened to include learner reviews to support leaders to put in place targeted intervention swiftly to improve specific subjects. For example, leaders have a robust action plan in place to improve the mathematics curriculum for adults. Leaders are implementing new tracking processes so that they can accurately measure the progress that students make and put in place appropriate support if they fall behind. Leaders have taken swift action to improve the quality of provision for students with high needs. They have appointed new staff and provide comprehensive training for all teachers and support staff. Improvements are having a positive and sustained impact on the quality of education that students with high needs receive.

Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and have relevant vocational expertise. Staff maintain their vocational currency through industry workshops. Leaders provide comprehensive training to develop teachers' teaching skills. Teachers benefit from training on topics such as assessment and retrieval practice. Staff who are new to the college benefit from a robust induction programme, which includes support from a mentor and termly check-ins with a lead practitioner. Staff say they feel highly valued by senior leaders.

Governors are appropriately qualified and have relevant experience in the schools and further education and skills sector. They are passionate and committed to ensuring that students receive a high-quality education that prepares them well for their next steps. Governors and senior leaders of the trust take an active role in providing support and challenge to leaders and managers. Governors meet with faculty managers at least once a term to carry out learning walks and hold focus groups with students. Governors have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Review the curriculum and the use of starting points for students on adult programmes.
- Improve the feedback in health and social care and functional skills mathematics so that students know what they need to do to improve their work and achieve their qualification.
- Improve the consistency of assessment to ensure that all students rectify misconceptions or gaps in learning so that they build on their previous learning.

Provider details

Unique reference number	144782
Address	Loushers Lane Warrington Cheshire WA4 6RD
Contact number	01925633591
Website	www.priestley.ac.uk
Principal	James Gresty
Provider type	16 to 19 academy
Date of previous inspection	14 to 16 May 2019
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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