

Inspection of Macclesfield College

Inspection dates:

21 to 24 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

Macclesfield College is a small general further education college located in Macclesfield, Cheshire. The college has one main site that serves the town of Macclesfield and the surrounding areas. Macclesfield College provides a range of vocational and higher education courses, as well as apprenticeships. The college is a partner of the Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology, which is currently under development.

At the time of the inspection, Macclesfield College had around 1,100 students on education programmes for young people studying a range of vocational courses at levels 1 to 3, including T levels. The largest subject areas were in construction, sport, art, and engineering. Around one in six students follow T-level courses in design; surveying and planning for construction; digital production; design and development; health; midwifery; mental health; and children and young people.

There were around 400 adult students studying at levels 1 to 5. Most adult students study part-time courses in English, mathematics, counselling, and accounting and bookkeeping. A small proportion study access to higher education courses in health, social science and humanities.

There were 64 students for whom the college received high needs funding. Of these, there were 25 students enrolled on the pathways programme to develop the skills they need for future study, work and independence. Students study life skills, social skills, art for mindfulness, sport, horticulture, mathematics and English. The remainder study on full-time vocational courses at levels 1 to 3.

Around 550 apprentices study apprenticeships at levels 2 to 5. Most study at levels 2 and 3 in sectors such as construction, engineering, early years, business, and hairdressing. The remainder study at levels 4 and 5 in accounting, healthcare, science, management, and human resources.

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

Most students and apprentices benefit from calm and focused learning sessions. They are motivated to learn and have a positive attitude towards their learning. For example, level 2 carpentry and joinery apprentices arrive punctually and ready to learn for their practical sessions.

Students' attendance on most education programmes for young people is too low. Tutors have begun to follow up non-attendance swiftly and implement effective actions for students to improve their attendance. This is beginning to have an impact on increasing the number of students who attend more regularly. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of these actions. Conversely, attendance for adult students and apprentices is very high.

Most students demonstrate positive behaviours and respect towards their peers and tutors. Students with high needs are supportive of each other when developing new skills. However, in a few instances, students on education programmes for young people do not always experience the same levels of respect from other students.

Most students and apprentices develop their confidence because of their courses. Business students develop confidence in presentation skills and present professional presentations in workplace settings. Students with high needs confidently speak with customers when they work in the college shop and reception.

Students on education programmes for young people do not always benefit from an ambitious curriculum. Where this is done well, students gain valuable new knowledge and skills swiftly. In art, students learn about lino printing, batik and fabric dying. Motor vehicle students learn about cooling systems of engines. However, in animal care, teachers do not plan activities that place sufficiently high demand on students. Too often, tasks are repetitive, and students do not develop the more complex skills that they need to make sufficient progress in their studies.

Adult students develop substantial new knowledge and skills because of their learning. Access to higher education students in health use academic writing and referencing confidently. In counselling, students distinguish between the roles of a person using counselling skills and a qualified counsellor before progressing to ethical frameworks and casework supervision.

Apprentices develop valuable knowledge and practical skills that prepare them effectively for their future careers. They make a positive contribution to their employers' businesses. For example, level 3 early years educator apprentices learn about security arrangements and child development. Level 2 carpentry and joinery apprentices learn about mortice and tenon joints and how these can be used to join two pieces of wood at a ninety-degree angle.

Students with high needs benefit from a broad and ambitious curriculum. They have individually tailored curriculums and develop wider skills such as communication,

independence and social interaction. This prepares them well to progress to further study, supported living, volunteering and employment.

Students and apprentices benefit from training on topics such as sexual health, healthy relationships, and the effects of drug and alcohol misuse. Most students and apprentices can recall and articulate their training in radicalisation and extremism. They are aware of local risks that may affect them, such as county lines and knife crime. This supports them to keep themselves and others safe when at college and in their personal lives.

Students and apprentices feel safe at college and on work placements. They know how and to whom they should report any concerns. They value the approachable and caring tutors. Students studying T-level health appreciate the support they receive from tutors when working with patients who are at the end of life. Early years educator apprentices know how to recognise changes in behaviour for the children they care for, as well as their peers.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work with stakeholders effectively across the Cheshire and Greater Manchester regions. They use this information to identify, understand and contribute to meeting local and regional skills needs. The information they gather from these groups is used to plan future curriculums, such as that for retrofit, electric and hybrid vehicle technology and the NHS T-level health cadet programme. Leaders work collaboratively with other local colleges in the development of the Institute of Technology, which will provide substantial investment to the region. Leaders work closely with schools to increase school engagement activities so that young people are equipped with the information they need to make informed decisions about their next steps. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training in the local area has reduced because of the delivery of a bespoke programme to work with those furthest from education.

Leaders have strong links with the five Chambers of Commerce and local enterprise partnerships to respond to the skills and employment needs that they have identified in the local skills improvement plan. They have responded to employment needs in hospitality by developing the 'Whites Chef Academy' in partnership with a chef patron from a highly acclaimed restaurant. This provides training for chefs wishing to have careers in professional kitchens across the region. However, leaders do not involve stakeholders sufficiently in the design of their curriculums across many of the courses they offer in the college.

Leaders work effectively with employers and education providers from across the Cheshire and Greater Manchester regions to develop curriculums to meet the needs of their region. For example, they have designed leadership and management training for the East Cheshire NHS Trust to develop the management skills of staff. Counselling courses have been implemented to support local medical practices,

which has enabled students to provide social prescribing to patients and free counselling for young people. Leaders have plans with an education provider to develop a social care academy to enable students with high needs to gain real-life skills within a specialist care environment.

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

Most tutors plan curriculums in a logical order to enable students and apprentices to incrementally develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. T-level health students learn about cells, molecules and enzymes before progressing to more complex topics such as genetics, immunology and the impact of injury and trauma on the body. They use this information well to prepare for their work placements in their second year of study. In adult learning, students learn the fundamentals of anatomy before progressing to human disease. This prepares them effectively for their chosen health pathways in midwifery and nursing.

Too many students on education programmes for young people do not benefit from high-quality education and training. In a few curriculums, such as animal care, students have limited access to the resources they need to develop their skills. Tutors do not focus enough on the sector-specific knowledge and skills that employers require. These students do not swiftly develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to make progress.

Leaders ensure that adult curriculums meet the increasing employment demands in priority areas such as health and care. Students improve their skills and prospects for progression to higher education and employment. Nearly all students progress to their intended next steps.

Leaders and managers ensure that students with high needs on the pathways programme follow a well-designed and individualised curriculum. For example, students learn how to identify hazards in a house, which prepares them well for independent living. Students benefit from a range of access arrangements such as assistive technology, dedicated study support and classroom strategies. Nearly all students with high needs progress to positive destinations.

Most tutors of students with high needs break down the outcomes of students' education, health and care (EHC) plans into small and manageable steps for students to work on in lessons. However, a few teachers do not follow this process. Students in these lessons do not make rapid progress towards achieving these outcomes as part of their programme.

Most tutors and coaches use the starting points of students and apprentices effectively. In apprenticeships, tutors and coaches accurately identify apprentices' starting points, and progress is monitored regularly. However, in a few education programmes for young people, tutors do not use the information gathered from practical assessments at the beginning of the course to inform teaching. This results in tutors not adapting their teaching to meet the needs of all students.

The development of English and mathematics skills for students and apprentices is inconsistent. In too many instances, students on education programmes for young people are not sufficiently supported. For example, in motor vehicle, tutors do not systematically identify and correct repeated spelling and grammatical errors in students' work. However, where this is done well, art students develop technical language and hairdressing apprentices use mathematics to learn about angles in hair cutting techniques such as using a 45-degree cut for a graduated bob.

Apprentices and most students receive well-planned careers education, information advice and guidance. Hairdressing apprentices understand the progression routes such as self-employment and further learning. Students on education programmes for young people experience career development days, mock interviews and guest speakers when attending events at the Cheshire business school. This provides them with the knowledge and skills for their future careers.

Most tutors use assessment effectively. Adult students benefit from formative and summative assessment, where they receive feedback that helps them to improve their work. Most tutors on education programmes for young people plan assessments to monitor the progress that students make in the development of their knowledge and skills, and they help them to identify misconceptions. However, in a few education programmes for young people, tutors do not plan assessments carefully enough. During the inspection, students studying level 3 health and social care told inspectors they struggle to cope with the workload and fall behind.

The participation in work experience for students on education programmes for young people is too low. However, students who do participate have access to high-quality opportunities. For example, T-level health students have opportunities to experience clinical work in the NHS, which helps them to understand the different settings and job roles to which they can aspire.

Many students and apprentices have limited opportunities beyond their vocational curriculum to participate in activities to develop their interests and talents further. Where these opportunities do take place, a few students participate in skills competitions and volunteering. For example, Macclesfield College leads on Cheshire and Warrington skills competitions, which provide students and apprentices with the opportunity to showcase the technical skills they learn in construction, sport, hair and beauty, automotive, art and design, engineering, creative media and computing. In construction, students and apprentices work with a local charity to repair doors, windows and locks for victims of domestic violence.

Tutors and coaches are qualified and experienced to teach students and apprentices. Staff maintain their vocational competency by completing industry days, and many work as current practitioners in the sector. For example, counselling tutors remain up to date by continuing to work as counsellors alongside their teaching. Many staff are supported to complete further and higher-level study such as qualifications linked to their subjects, teaching qualifications and assessor and internal quality assurance awards. This ensures that most teachers develop their vocational and teaching skills effectively.

Leaders and managers are considerate of the workload and well-being of staff. They have implemented a hybrid working pattern for all staff. New staff have reduced teaching hours and are supported by a mentor. Staff feel supported by their line managers and value the supportive environment in which they work. Staff have access to counselling services, occupational health, free breakfasts and discounted gym memberships.

Governors have been too slow to hold leaders to account for the slow pace of improvements in the quality of education that young people experience. Leaders and managers have recently made changes to staffing and curriculums in weaker areas, but it is too soon to see the impact of these changes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Instigate appropriate actions to ensure that students on education programmes for young people attend their lessons regularly.
- Strengthen quality assurance and improvement processes to rapidly improve the quality of education for young people.
- Improve the use of EHC plans for students with high needs to ensure that they make swift progress towards achieving these outcomes as part of their curriculums.
- Improve the planning and teaching of the curriculums for students on education programmes for young people.
- Ensure the starting points of students on education programmes for young people are used effectively to plan learning.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130621
Address	Park Lane Macclesfield Cheshire SK11 8LF
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Website	www.macclesfield.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Rachel Kay
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	20 to 23 November 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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 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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