

Inspection of Riverside College Halton

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 April 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

Riverside College Halton (Riverside) is a medium-sized general further education college in Halton, Cheshire, serving the towns of Widnes and Runcorn. The college operates from three sites: Kingsway Campus, Cronton Sixth Form College, and CRMZ foundation studies centre. The newest building is the Hydrogen Training Centre which opened in March 2024.

Leaders offer a range of vocational, A-level, apprenticeship, professional, and higher education courses. For school leavers, leaders offer around 50 vocational and technical courses at Kingsway from entry level to level 3 in a full range of subject areas. The largest numbers of enrolments are in high priority skills areas, including construction and engineering, and health and social care. At Cronton, leaders offer over 30 A-levels with mathematics, psychology and sociology the most popular subjects. They also teach vocational programmes from level 1 to 3, mostly at level 3. Although leaders offer T levels in health, and education and childcare, these courses started in September 2023 with low numbers of enrolments.

Leaders offer three foundation studies pathways: pathway to independence, pathway to progression, and work ready to students with special educational needs

and/or disabilities. Pathway to progression has routes in construction, catering, digital business, and mixed options.

For adult students, leaders offer vocational, professional, short and access to higher education courses. The largest numbers study counselling, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), access to higher education, construction and engineering, hair and beauty, and English and mathematics courses.

The college provides 32 apprenticeships from levels 2 to 5. Most apprentices study standards-based apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3. The largest numbers follow apprenticeships in engineering technician, installation and maintenance electrician, business administrator, carpentry and joinery, senior healthcare support worker, metal fabricator, painter and decorator, bricklayer and hairdressing professional.

At the time of the inspection, just over 3,640 students were studying education programmes for young people, with almost two-thirds studying programmes at level 3 or above. There were 2,016 students on adult learning programmes studying from entry level to level 4, and 458 apprentices following apprenticeships. There were 146 students for whom the college receives high needs funding. Leaders subcontract a small proportion of their provision to two providers who offer specialist provision for the hardest to reach young students, and for adults in employability, customer service, and support in schools. The college does not provide Skills Bootcamps.

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

Students and apprentices enjoy their learning at Riverside. They display extremely positive attitudes and would recommend the college to friends, family and peers. Students and apprentices are articulate, enthusiastic and polite. They feel part of a community at the college and build trusting relationships with college staff. Students and apprentices feel valued and respected. They are highly motivated, want to do their best, take pride in their work and have high aspirations for themselves. Students and apprentices, including those who have additional learning needs, appreciate and benefit greatly from the support they receive from their teachers.

Students and apprentices enjoy a broad curriculum that extends their experiences and prepares them for their next steps, work and life in modern Britain. They take part in local, regional, national and international trips including to CERN in Switzerland, Krakow, Rome and Barcelona. Students join enrichment activities, such as tomorrow's teacher, scientist and lawyer, the centre of excellence in performing arts and the college sports teams. Many students take part in work experience activities, voluntary work and fundraising. Others do activities outside college, joining the fire cadets, volunteering or going to the gym. Students and apprentices highly value the enrichment offer linked to their curriculums, next steps or wider talents and interests. Participation rates are very high.

Students on education programmes for young people develop a wide range of highly relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours that prepare them exceptionally well for progression and their next steps. A-level mathematicians recall prior learning and apply it to complex activities, such as resolving algebraic equations to build a tarsia. Professional cookery students learn to make bread and pastries. They fillet fish and prepare scotch eggs to restaurant standards and tight deadlines for service. Information technology practitioners develop their knowledge of the online world and how online software is used, before learning about technology systems, hardware and networking. Students on the subcontracted provision learn to upcycle clothes from charity shops to make new outfits in their textiles module.

Adult students develop their confidence and employability skills. Counselling students improve their active listening skills. They learn to confidently and kindly challenge when they need help and support. ESOL students benefit from budgeting, teamwork, cooking and volunteering opportunities to practise and assimilate to British life. They develop their understanding of local dialect and idioms, gaining confidence when going about their daily lives.

Apprentices rapidly develop the new industry-standard knowledge skills and behaviours that they need to be successful at work. Business administrators develop a full understanding of data protection and how to implement project management plans. Engineering technicians fluently use high levels of mathematical skills, such as the creation of very complex G-Code. They swiftly become valuable employees.

Students who have high needs, especially those studying in vocational areas, develop their technical knowledge and skills very well. Teachers make learning

accessible by 'chunking' information, using coloured paper and repetition to make new information memorable. Construction students accurately identify tools and safety equipment and learn how to clean and store them safely. Engineering students make industry grade bevel gauges by using practical engineering, mathematics and problem-solving skills.

Students and apprentices feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe physically, mentally and online. They talk confidently about the importance of consent and healthy and unhealthy relationships. Students explain about maintaining their social media privacy and the threats of cyber-crime, online grooming, and radicalisation and extremism. Students and apprentices are confident that, should they have any concerns about their safety or welfare, they would be dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have a deep understanding of skills needs for the region. They have established highly effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders, including local chambers of commerce, the local borough council and the Liverpool City Region (LCR) combined authority. Leaders and staff inform and shape the local skills plan, contributing to consultations and surveys alongside local employers. Staff carry out extensive research to identify skills needs, particularly in the hydrogen industry. Leaders focus provision in their new buildings on the sectors most in need in the region. This includes the hydrogen centre and the planned green skills centre.

Leaders plan training effectively with employers to meet their skills needs. They engage very productively with employers and stakeholders to skilfully design and teach the curriculum. Staff work highly effectively with key employers in the welding and construction sectors to swiftly identify and respond to new skills needs in fabrication welding and hydrogen, and green skills construction methods. They provide hydrogen training of national strategic importance used by major national gas companies across the country.

Leaders and managers work closely with the local authority resettlement team to meet local growing demand for ESOL provision. They are highly responsive to feedback from Jobcentre Plus, swiftly embedding vital digital skills into the curriculum to support students' employment opportunities. Leaders work collaboratively on local investment projects, including the health and education hub in the borough. This will provide short courses to unemployed adults to address key skills shortages in the local NHS community healthcare trust.

Leaders and staff are highly visible in the community and work very effectively with stakeholders for the best interests of Halton and the wider LCR. They ensure that their curriculum and courses closely align to the skills needs of the region.

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

Senior leaders and managers have a very clear rationale for their aspirational curriculums. Leaders carefully consider the courses they provide for students, apprentices and those who have high needs. They have a strong sense of community and are passionate to provide life-changing opportunities for young people and adults, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve their personal and career goals. They work collaboratively with their subcontractors to provide training for students, including for those that are the furthest from employment and education, to prepare them for work, further learning, apprenticeships and their next steps.

Leaders and managers are highly ambitious for their students and apprentices. Staff work closely with universities and employers to plan curriculums to ensure that students and apprentices are well prepared for their next steps after college. For example, managers have worked with the engineering department at a local university to identify what students need to know to prepare for their degree. They have introduced a mathematics for engineers module to prepare students to work with complex mathematical equations and formulas. Leaders offer apprenticeship readiness groups that support students into apprenticeships with employers in the region.

Students and apprentices benefit from high-quality initial and ongoing careers information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) to ensure that they are on the right course and are well prepared for their next steps and progression. They frequently discuss careers pathways with college staff and teachers. Students with high needs access cross-college careers events, fairs and CEIAG. In addition, students with more complex needs benefit from a dedicated special educational needs and/or disabilities career advisor. Students and apprentices are very well informed about their potential next steps and career pathways after college.

Students' and apprentices' attendance is very high. Leaders and staff track and intervene to improve attendance rates should students fail to meet their very high expectations. They involve employers immediately if they have any concerns about apprentices' attendance, punctuality or behaviours. Staff routinely recognise and reward the positive professional behaviours and improving attendance they expect to see in successful students and apprentices.

Leaders ensure that teachers are highly qualified and have expert subject knowledge. Teachers benefit from a range of staff development to improve their teaching skills and to maintain their vocational currency. They complete back to industry days, training on sticky knowledge, dual coding, cognitive load and retrieval practice. Where appropriate, teachers who are new to teaching are placed on the early career framework and attend placements at local high schools to support and develop their teaching skills. Staff highly value the 'great teaching' development programme introduced by leaders.

Students and apprentices benefit from highly effective teaching. Teachers give a great deal of thought to the order of teaching to help students learn and remember more. A-level mathematicians learn fluency, reasoning and problem-solving to develop their knowledge and reasoning simultaneously. Adult counselling students practise their interpersonal skills and learn about the context within which counselling and the referral process can be used, including the importance of maintaining ethical standards. Students with high needs develop their social skills, such as confidence, resilience and independence as well as developing their communication and employability skills to build their knowledge, skills and behaviours in a meaningful way.

In apprenticeships, staff plan and coordinate on- and off-the-job training very well. They routinely identify opportunities for apprentices to practise their skills at work so that apprentices rapidly hone their new knowledge, skills and behaviours and become valued, skilled members of their teams.

Teachers systematically provide high-quality developmental feedback to students and apprentices that tells them what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their practical and written work. They routinely challenge students and apprentices to expand their answers to include fuller responses to ensure they achieve their aspirational targets. Students and apprentices greatly improve their skills and written work at college.

Teachers use assessment incisively to adapt their teaching and to check the progress that students and apprentices make towards achieving their qualifications. This includes aspects such as attendance, self-organisation, career aspirations, resilience, and effort. Teachers set clear and concise targets for students and apprentices. When students fall behind, they attend booster sessions to help them to catch up quickly and improve their grades. Students and apprentices make or exceed their expected progress.

Students with high needs on academic and vocational programmes achieve at least as well as their peers. However, on the non-accredited foundation learning programmes, teachers do not always recognise and record learner progress and achievement towards their educational health and care plan outcomes. Staff do not routinely monitor or share information of what students could not do, can do now and what they need to do next. Consequently, these students do not routinely make progress at the rate of which they are capable.

Leaders and managers use a range of highly effective quality assurance processes to monitor and improve the quality of education. They assure the quality of the subcontracted provision very effectively. Apprentices who stay on programme achieve their apprenticeship and most pass their final assessments at their first attempt. Where grades are available, the large majority achieve merit and distinctions grades. Leaders recognise that on a few apprenticeships too many apprentices left their programmes early. They have swiftly identified valid reasons and implemented effective interventions to ensure that apprentices remain on their

apprenticeships and make strong progress. As a result, retention has significantly improved in the areas that were a concern.

Leaders create a culture of continuous improvement. Staff have manageable workloads. Leaders listen to feedback from staff to reduce workloads and stress. Staff feel appreciated for the contribution they make to the college. They value the well-being days, where they participate in activities, such as yoga, football and silent discos. Staff feel well supported by their managers.

Governors have significant expertise to carry out their roles. They have a wealth of experience across the education sector. Governors have a highly accurate understanding of the college's strengths and areas of improvement. They receive detailed and accurate reports to provide effective scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders. Governors set clear and precise targets for leaders and managers for sustained improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130622
Address	Kingsway Widnes Cheshire WA8 7QQ
Contact number	0151 257 2800
Website	www.riversidecollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Mary Murphy
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	26 February to 11 March 2020
Main subcontractors	Power in Partnership (PIP) Lorraine Michaels (trading as Crosby Training)

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the 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 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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