

# Inspection of Reaseheath College

Inspection dates:

15 to 18 October 2024

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

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

## Information about this provider

Reaseheath College is a specialist land-based college located in Nantwich, Cheshire. It provides full- and part-time courses from entry to degree level. Many students travel significant distances to attend the college due to its specialist provision. Around 1,000 students are residential at the college. Most students are on courses in agriculture, horticulture and animal care, with other significant provision in construction, sport, public services and food. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,150 students on education programmes for young people. Most students study at level 3, including 490 T-level students. There were 438 students on level 2 and 473 students at foundation level. The college receives high-needs funding for 243 students. Students with high needs study on a wide range of courses throughout the college.

Apprenticeship provision consists predominantly of land-based serviced engineering, construction plant, bus and coach engineering, and rail. Apprenticeships are also available in areas such as agriculture, horticulture, dairy technology and veterinary nursing. There were 829 apprentices in learning. The majority study at level 3, with around 80 apprentices on level 2 and 55 on level 4. Adult learning is a much smaller part of the college's provision. There are 49 adults currently in learning. Most study

functional skills in English and/or mathematics, access to higher education courses (access) and some are taught in classes with 16 to 18-year-old students.

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

Students and apprentices enjoy their time at Reaseheath College. Most are motivated and display positive attitudes to their learning, particularly in practical lessons. Most teachers have clear expectations for students' and apprentices' behaviour. Students and apprentices attend regularly and are punctual.

Students on education programmes for young people who remain in learning are prepared effectively for their next steps in education, training or employment. They are developing detailed vocational knowledge. However, in some classroom-based lessons, students are disengaged. A minority display low-level disruptive behaviour that is not consistently challenged by teachers. A few students do not adhere to the college policy on the safe use of tools and equipment.

Adult students follow courses that help them to progress their careers or move into higher-level study. Teachers plan and sequence learning effectively. On access courses, teachers start by teaching fundamental topics, such as cell biology, before they move on to organisms and animal structure. However, teachers do not check students' understanding carefully enough. Too many students on functional skills mathematics repeat their examinations several times before they are successful.

Apprentices develop useful new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Level 3 land-based service engineering technician apprentices work methodically to isolate and identify faults in machinery and master fault-finding techniques. Most apprentices benefit from undertaking additional qualifications. For example, apprentices on the bus and coach engineering technician apprenticeship complete additional training in high-voltage awareness, abrasive wheels and first aid. Apprentices make an effective contribution to their employers' businesses.

Students with high needs increase their confidence and resilience. Teachers encourage students to participate and share their answers confidently in lessons. However, teachers do not use the goals that managers derive from education, health and care (EHC) plans to inform curriculum activities and to help students make progress. As a result, not all students develop the wide range of skills identified in their EHC plans.

Most students and apprentices work constructively with employers. Guest speakers from relevant vocational sectors, such as farming and construction, attend the college to talk to students about possible career routes. Leaders arrange for most students to undertake work placements early in their course so that they can develop their practical skills. However, in other cases, such as on the second year of the T level in onsite construction, students do not yet know when they will be participating in a work placement.

Students and apprentices feel safe. They say that incidents of poor behaviour are rare and that, when encountered, they are dealt with swiftly by college staff. Residential students are taught how to keep safe in the local area and about the dangers of walking on rural roads.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

College leaders work effectively with a range of stakeholders to understand the skills needs in the land-based and associated sectors. They identify specific skills gaps and plan appropriate curriculums. Leaders actively engage with the local authority to extend local provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to ensure students can access college provision. Leaders work closely with a higher education partner to ensure there are clear progression routes for students and apprentices. Leaders work collaboratively with local colleges to plan a cohesive curriculum. They use this forum to review curriculum specialisms and to avoid duplication.

In the majority of curriculum areas, leaders involve employers in the design of the curriculum effectively. As part of the trailblazer group designing the land-based service engineering technician apprenticeship, leaders consulted with large employers, who made suggestions on resequencing the curriculum to include more fundamentals at the start and to include additional learning, for example in welding and fault finding. On the bus and coach engineering technician apprenticeship, staff worked with a national employer to design the curriculum. Leaders work with the employer to review the content annually to ensure it meets industry needs. However, the involvement of employers and stakeholders in the design and implementation of curriculum areas such as T levels is less well developed.

Leaders have a sound understanding of local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) and where they can contribute to meeting identified priorities. College leaders engage with civic partners to ensure they understand the local and regional skills needs and priorities through LSIPs. As a result, they ensure that they offer programmes to address skills priorities, such as in construction, science and engineering. Leaders have built cross-cutting themes into programmes including digital, with examples such as robotic technology in dairy farming.

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

Leaders are proud of the heritage of the college and their success in preparing students and apprentices for further training and employment in the farming, agricultural and horticultural industries. This includes a wide offer of T-level courses in agriculture, environmental and animal care.

In 2022/2023, there was a significant decline in the number of students who completed and achieved their qualifications. Leaders implemented a series of

initiatives that increased the number of students who achieved their qualifications last academic year. However, the quality of teaching remains too variable, particularly on education programmes for young people, including for those students with high needs.

Leaders have selected appropriate curriculums to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that students and apprentices need to prepare them for their next stage in education, training or employment. Teachers plan curriculums effectively so that students and apprentices can build on previous teaching and learning and develop the new knowledge and skills they need. In most practical lessons, teachers use their sector experience to provide appropriate demonstrations and help students to master practical skills. However, in too many classroom-based lessons the pace is too slow, and teachers do not engage students effectively. Students are too passive and lose interest in the topic being taught.

Leaders do not ensure that all students benefit from sufficiently ambitious curriculums. Teachers do not check students' prior learning sufficiently, and too often they accept students' basic descriptions and definitions of key terms. Students complete tasks that are not sufficiently demanding and do not enable them to apply their knowledge and deepen their understanding. Although teachers of adult students set them appropriate work, they do not check students have completed this work and understood the topic. Teachers design curriculums for students with high needs to develop their English and mathematics skills and to facilitate access to further study or work. However, a few courses are heavily qualification-driven and lack vocational learning.

Teachers are knowledgeable and experienced in their vocational sectors. They bring relevant and current industry expertise into their teaching. However, in a few cases, staff are new to teaching and lack the experience required to teach students effectively, particularly in classroom-based contexts.

Teachers do not consistently enable students to understand key concepts through presenting information clearly and checking students' understanding. Teachers do not routinely rectify mistakes and misconceptions in students' work. In a few cases, students provide incorrect answers in worksheets and do not write in the correct answers. Teachers do not use peer assessment effectively to help them to identify and correct students' misconceptions. Students are not aware of whether they have correctly learned the course content.

Leaders do not ensure that the quality of learning support for students with SEND and students with high needs is good enough. Learning support staff often work independently of teachers, offering help and support where they think it is needed, rather than being proactively directed by teachers. Although most students benefit from well-trained support staff who understand their barriers and provide effective support, a minority receive ineffective in-class support.

Managers do not ensure that students and apprentices benefit from a consistently high standard of assessment and feedback. Tutors provide constructive feedback on

students' practical work so that students know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. This helps students to develop their practical skills during the course. However, in GCSE English, teachers give limited advice to students on how to improve their written work. They do not consistently correct routine spelling errors, so students' spelling and general technical accuracy are slow to improve.

Apprentices receive meaningful verbal feedback on written work, which guides them how to improve. However, written feedback does not always contain sufficient detail and is often too focused on what students have done well. Some teachers do not correct apprentices' spelling and grammatical errors, and apprentices continue to make the same mistakes in their work. In most cases, apprentices are aware of the requirements of their final assessment. However, level 2 general farmwork apprentices have no understanding of what they will need to do for their final assessment or when it will take place.

Teachers prepare students well for their next steps in education, training or work in land-based sectors. Learners benefit from high-quality resources and facilities. They become skilled in the use of equipment that is currently used in the industry. For example, learners and apprentices learn about dairy processing in an industry standard milk processing plant. Most apprentices remain in employment following their apprenticeship. Most 16 to 18-year-old students enter full- or part-time employment or continue with further education or training. A smaller number progress to higher education or take a gap year before higher-level study.

Students' successful completion of the qualifications depends on the course they study. Achievement for young people on entry level courses, and for young people and adults on level 3 courses, remains too low. Students' achievement varies considerably across different courses. Most adults who complete their access course progress to higher education to study degrees in wildlife conservation, zoo management or marine biology. However, too many students leave their courses early. Apprentices achieve well and just under half gain merit or distinction grades.

Leaders provide a variety of opportunities for students to broaden their interests and develop their social skills. This is particularly effective for residential students who live at the college. The student union is well attended and active. It provides activities, clubs, societies and fundraising for students to take part in. Leaders and the student union arrange for students to become involved in activities that raise significant amounts of money for their chosen charity each year.

Most students and apprentices receive useful careers advice and guidance during their course. Students have numerous opportunities throughout the year to discuss their future plans and receive advice and guidance to support their next steps. However, a few students with high needs are directed to move on to a generic employability course, rather than the next level of the vocational course that they are studying.

Leaders have designed an effective pastoral programme, which progress coaches deliver to young students. This includes mandatory topics, such as fundamental British values, knife crime and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Students agree in their groups which other topics they would like to cover, such as healthy sleeping patterns, managing finances and young driver safety. This helps students to find out more about topics that are important to them. Apprentices and adult students are not always able to recall their learning about the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Leaders have worked hard to stabilise their teaching workforce. In areas where they have struggled to recruit staff, they now over-recruit to ensure that there is sufficient time for staff to shadow more experienced staff and undertake training to develop their basic teaching practices. However, it is too early to see the full impact of these measures, and the quality of teaching in classroom-based lessons is inconsistent. Although teachers and support staff welcome the increase in staffing in the last year, many report that their workloads are too high.

Leaders do not evaluate the quality of teaching effectively enough. They focus too much on systems and processes rather than the quality of teaching in lessons and the standard of teachers' assessment and feedback. In too many instances, leaders do not know that the curriculum is not ambitious enough for students.

Governors are knowledgeable about the reasons why students' achievement declined last year and the negative impact that teacher turnover has had on the quality of education. They recognise that retention on level 3 courses is still too low and that there are long-standing concerns in curriculum areas such as agriculture. However, governors do not provide sufficient challenge to leaders or hold them well enough to account.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in theory lessons, and ensure students benefit from suitably ambitious curriculums.
- Increase the number of students who stay to the end of the course and achieve their qualifications.
- Improve the quality and consistency of learning support for students with SEND and high needs.
- Make sure all apprentices are aware of the requirements of their final assessment, how to prepare for it and when it will take place.
- Ensure students adhere to the college policies and procedures, including health and safety, and the expectations around their conduct in lessons.

- Improve quality assurance processes so that they enable leaders to accurately evaluate the quality of education and intervene swiftly to bring about improvements.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Marcus Clinton
<b>Provider type</b>	Specialist further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	4 to 5 December 2019
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	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 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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