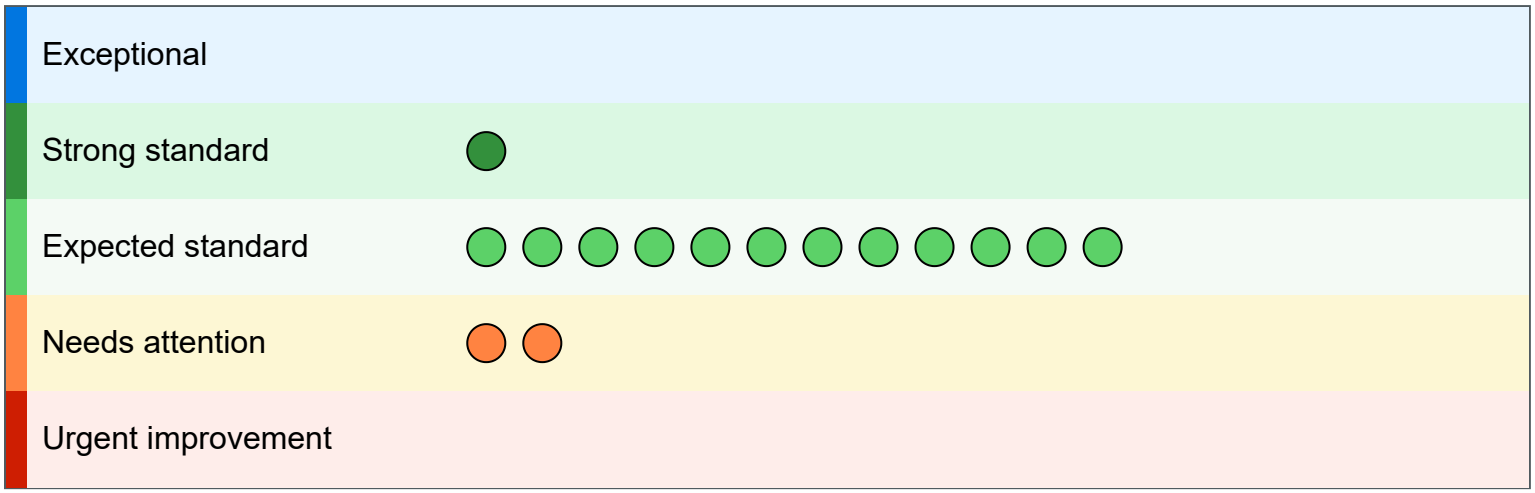
Wirral Metropolitan College

Address: Conway Park Campus, Conway Park, Europa Boulevard, Birkenhead, Merseyside, CH41 4NT

Unique reference number (URN): 130493

Inspection report: 27 January 2026



Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, learners are made safer and feel safe.

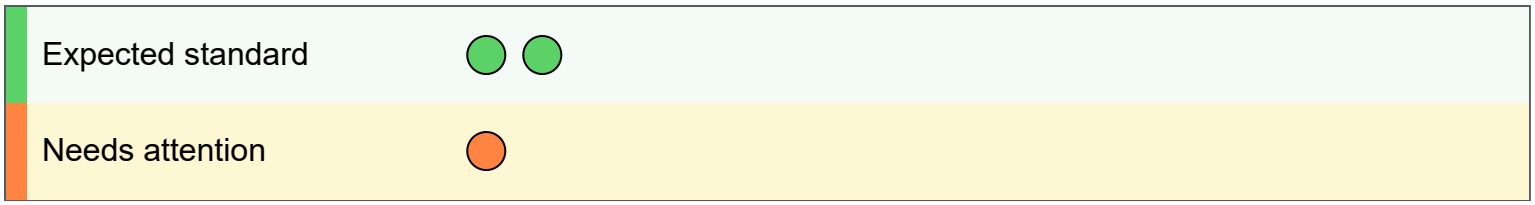
How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect providers for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The provider has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The provider has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

1. Inclusion, leadership and governance, and contribution to

meeting skills needs



Expected standard

Contribution to meeting skills needs

Expected standard

Since the previous inspection, leaders have amplified their work with stakeholders, which enables them to be instrumental in identifying skills needs and regional priorities. Leaders work closely with employers in growth industries such as green technology, dementia care and leisure so that students and apprentices are best placed to benefit from opportunities created by regeneration in the region. Leaders work with school leaders to identify the skills needs of local residents and contribute to forums for key industries. Several initiatives are in their infancy, and it is too early to measure their impact.

Leaders involve employers in planning and informing the curriculum in most curriculum areas. Employers provide live briefs for students studying art. A local university provides students studying on access to higher education courses with relevant health care experience. On a very few apprenticeships, however, employers do not contribute to teaching.

Students and apprentices largely acquire the subject-specific skills that they need for employment or further study. Students studying T-level computing become proficient in using software prominent in industry. Dental apprentices use zoning in decontamination rooms to prevent cross-contamination and ensure effective infection control.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders have built a supportive culture of inclusion. They quickly identify students' and apprentices' individual needs at the start of their course. Teachers skilfully plan and provide tailored support for students and apprentices to help them overcome barriers to their learning.

Leaders have introduced a bespoke course for students who are at risk of dropping out of education in order to enable them to overcome their barriers to learning. These students improve their attendance and develop positive behaviours and the skills to work with their peers. Students mostly progress to positive destinations, such as further study or an apprenticeship.

Teachers benefit from comprehensive training that helps them to support students and apprentices, including those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders consistently review students' and apprentices' support plans to reflect their changing needs. For example, in most instances they reduce the use of learning support assistants as students and apprentices become more independent.

Leaders work seamlessly with agencies such as local authorities to support students and apprentices who are, for example, care experienced or who have SEND.

Leaders carefully analyse data to monitor the progress and retention of students and apprentices. Students and apprentices who are disadvantaged or have SEND achieve in line with their peers.

Needs attention

Leadership and governance

Needs attention

Since the previous inspection, leaders have strengthened strategic leadership and governance. They now have a clear understanding of their strengths and priorities for improvement, including those in the subcontracted provision. Leaders have developed a culture and staffing structure that promotes greater accountability and puts the student experience at the heart of decisions and actions for improvement. This has led to improvements across much of the provision.

Leaders' strategies to improve education programmes for young people, where a high proportion of students need to achieve qualifications in English and mathematics, have not been swift enough. Leaders rightly acknowledge that provision for young students need to improve further, particularly in English and mathematics.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have refreshed the governing body. Governors now use their expertise across education, safeguarding and finance to challenge leaders to make improvements and hold them to account for their actions.

Teachers benefit from comprehensive training to improve their teaching skills and to maintain their subject expertise. Teachers who are new to the college benefit from a rigorous induction, mentoring and bespoke teacher training programme.

Leaders are mindful of staff workload and welfare. Staff have access to wellbeing facilities and an employer assistance scheme that includes financial and welfare support, counselling and physiotherapy. Staff mostly feel supported and valued.

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2. Education programmes for young people

Expected standard	
Needs attention	

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum, teaching and training. They have placed a considerable focus on improving teaching and learning, which has had a positive impact. Leaders ensure that provision meets the principles of 16 to 19 study programmes.

Leaders have ensured that the curriculums are relevant to local, regional and national priorities. For example, the aspiring shipbuilder's course meets skills needs in the local shipbuilding industry.

The curriculums are well designed and sequenced appropriately, enabling students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and barriers to learning, to develop their knowledge and skills and make progress.

Teachers mostly use assessment techniques effectively to provide constructive feedback so that students know what they need to do to improve their work.

Teachers are knowledgeable and well qualified, with relevant industry experience. They typically use a range of teaching strategies to teach interesting and enjoyable lessons that help students master new knowledge and skills. In carpentry and joinery, teachers use demonstration well to introduce students to different types of joints.

In a few GCSE mathematics lessons, teachers provide insufficient opportunities for students to develop and practise skills, which means that students do not develop their problem-solving skills quickly enough.

Leaders ensure that the curriculums are inclusive. Teachers use teaching techniques such as scaffolding to support students to develop their answers effectively. Over time, teachers reduce this support to develop students' independence and confidence.

Participation and development

Expected standard

Staff at all levels create calm, respectful and supportive environments in which students feel safe and welcome. Students develop positive attitudes to learning and most attend well. However, attendance at GSCE mathematics and English lessons is lower than at vocational and technical lessons. Leaders rigorously analyse attendance data to identify students who do not attend lessons well enough. They intervene quickly and use a range of strategies to support students to improve their attendance and catch up with their work.

Students value the inclusive culture, where they feel free to express their identity. Behaviour in lessons is generally positive. Students mostly participate fully in activities and display professional behaviours.

Students receive helpful careers guidance to help them to understand the next steps available to them. They benefit from employer talks, trips and visits that support their studies.

Most students take part in appropriate work experience or work-related learning, such as working on live briefs from employers to help them to develop and practise their skills and to prepare them for their next steps and future employment. Students in some curriculum areas participate in work experience abroad. For example, early years students visit nurseries and creches in South Africa.

Needs attention

Achievement **Needs attention**

Students studying GCSE English and mathematics do not make swift enough progress from their starting points. The rate of progress that students make has declined compared with previous years.

Students mostly achieve their vocational and technical qualifications. Leaders work closely with managers and staff to improve the few courses that have low achievement.

Students on most courses make progress from their starting points and develop appropriate knowledge and skills. Students on T-level courses develop their digital skills well, and art students develop their English skills through research and their mathematics skills through costing events. Students' work is typically of an expected standard.

Students are prepared well for their next steps, and they generally progress to positive destinations such as further study, university, apprenticeships or employment.

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3. Adult learning programmes

Expected standard

Expected standard

Achievement **Expected standard**

Students, including those who have barriers to learning, are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, typically achieve well and make appropriate progress from their starting points. Students mostly achieve their qualifications. However, in a few areas, such as construction and health and social care, achievement is below the national rate.

Students develop the intended knowledge, skills and behaviours required for their course and can apply these in practical contexts. The work that they produce meets the standards for the level of study.

Students are well prepared for their next steps and mostly go on to positive destinations that are relevant to their career pathways.

Students achieve their personal goals, build confidence and are prepared for further learning or employment. They develop skills that contribute positively to their communities and are better equipped as parents to support their children's learning.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the curriculum and teaching and training. They rectify weaknesses quickly.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is well designed and builds on what students already know and can do. Students develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to prepare them for employment or further study.

Students follow a well-planned curriculum that is relevant to local, regional and national priorities. Students benefit from an inclusive curriculum that enables them to participate in lessons. This includes those who face barriers to their learning, such as those who are asylum seekers and those who are disadvantaged. Where appropriate, students have individual learning plans and follow tailored learning programmes.

Teachers are appropriately qualified and bring relevant experience and expertise to their teaching. They use suitable teaching activities and strategies during lessons, including group work, research skills and discussion. This helps students to remember and build on what they have learned. Teachers check and consolidate learning during lessons and make sure that gaps in knowledge are closed.

Teachers support students well to develop their vocabulary. In sociology, students accurately use terminology such as utilitarianism in discussions and in their writing.

Teachers generally use assessment and feedback to celebrate what students have achieved and to identify what students need to do to improve their work. In a few instances, teachers do not review students' targets sufficiently to ensure they are swiftly developing their personal, social and employability skills.

Participation and development

Expected standard

Leaders ensure that students feel safe, respected and supported. They respond swiftly and appropriately to any concerns that students raise. Students are confident that staff will deal with any issues or concerns, which further supports the positive learning culture. Teachers prioritise students' wellbeing, particularly for those that have barriers to learning or have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Teachers set clear expectations for punctuality, attendance and behaviour. They monitor attendance closely and put in place appropriate strategies to provide targeted support to help students overcome barriers to learning. Although generally at an adequate level, attendance is low on a few courses.

Students participate in a range of activities that enrich their courses and their lives. They volunteer in health care settings and take part in leadership-related activities. Students develop confidence and demonstrate personal and social responsibility by contributing to their local communities, such as volunteering at their child's school.

Students benefit from well-planned careers guidance. This helps them to broaden their understanding of future career pathways and make informed decisions about their next steps.

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4. Apprenticeships

Expected standard

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Achievement rates across most apprenticeships are high, but on a few, such as level 3 electrical installation, they are too low. Most apprentices achieve their English and mathematics qualifications, but only a fifth achieve these at the first attempt. Approximately a third of apprentices achieve the highest grades possible in their final assessments.

Apprentices typically make good progress from their starting points. Tutors and assessors use assessments that enable apprentices to demonstrate their competence in applying their new technical knowledge and skills, such as correctly identifying technical processes in first and second fix electrical installations.

Apprentices produce work of at least the expected standard because tutors and assessors provide effective, developmental feedback which prepares apprentices well for the next stage in their apprenticeship.

Many apprentices take on extra responsibilities, are promoted or set up their own businesses as a result of their apprenticeship.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders ensure that the principles and requirements of apprenticeships are met. They understand the strengths and areas for development of their apprenticeship provision. Leaders use effective strategies to improve the provision, such as the introduction of an

online learning platform to support the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills.

Leaders have developed apprenticeship curriculums that are responsive to local and regional skills priorities. However, on a few apprenticeships, staff do not fully engage with employers to plan the design and content of the apprenticeships.

Leaders sequence the curriculum logically, helping apprentices build knowledge on firm foundations so that they can contribute effectively to the workplace. They adapt the curriculum skilfully to meet individual apprentice's needs and provide resources, such as laptops, so that apprentices are not disadvantaged.

Tutors and assessors have suitable qualifications and industry experience. They use their sector and subject expertise to make learning relevant. They explain new content clearly, using demonstrations to support learning. Tutors and assessors check apprentices' understanding through well-designed activities that promote group discussion and application to the workplace. Tutors and assessors introduce technical vocabulary, such as 'steel wire armoured glands' in electrical installation. Apprentices confidently and articulately apply technical vocabulary in professional discussion in college and the workplace.

Tutors and assessors use a range of assessment strategies, such as presentations, quizzes and mock practical assessments, to assess apprentices' knowledge and skills effectively.

Participation and development

Expected standard

Leaders have created a learning environment that is respectful, welcoming and professional. Apprentices listen respectfully to the opinions and views of their peers. They are motivated to succeed in their chosen careers.

Tutors and assessors set high expectations for apprentices' attendance and behaviour. Attendance is generally high, but at off-the-job training sessions on a few apprenticeships it is low. Leaders have strategies in place to improve attendance, but it is too soon to see the impact of these.

Tutors and assessors support apprentices' wider skills development. For example, apprentices complete additional courses in mental health, e-safety and digital skills.

Apprentices know how to stay mentally and physically healthy. They discuss topics such as consent and how these relate to the workplace, for example needing to gain consent before starting dental procedures. Apprentices feel safe. They know how to report any concerns they may have.

Apprentices benefit from effective careers guidance, including masterclasses with employers and stakeholders. This helps them to make informed decisions about the next step in their careers, including further study.

5. Provision for learners with high needs

Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ●

Strong standard ●

Participation and development

Strong standard ●

Leaders set consistently high expectations for attendance, behaviour and positive attitudes for students. Attendance at lessons is very high and students are punctual. Leaders follow up non-attendance swiftly while remaining empathetic to additional health issues, social problems and barriers to learning that students may face.

Leaders create an inclusive environment in which student diversity is actively celebrated. Significant investment in fully accessible college campuses means that students can study and work across all campuses. Leaders ensure that students work in safe environments.

Students are highly motivated and make positive contributions in college and in the local community. They have high levels of respect and empathy for their peers and feel respected, valued and included.

Students benefit from very high-quality careers advice from special educational needs and/or disabilities specialists and industry professionals. This helps students to plan carefully for their next steps after college.

Students develop high levels of confidence and resilience as they participate in a wide and varied curriculum that includes enrichment activities such as volunteering at music events, taster sessions as museum tour guides and packing food parcels for local charities.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Students generally make good progress from their starting points, including in English and mathematics. They develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their lives beyond college. Achievement rates on accredited courses are high.

A few students have been on courses for an extended period and do not develop their skills swiftly enough. These students make slower progress from their starting points.

Students are prepared well for their next stage of training or employment. They produce work and develop skills of at least the expected standard. Supported internship students

learn housekeeping skills in the realistic, hotel chain-sponsored bedrooms at college before applying these at their work placement. Students aspire to secure jobs in hotels at the end of their course.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders typically have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision for students with high needs. Teachers ensure that the curriculums are well sequenced to meet the individual needs of students. Bespoke curriculums mean that students make sustained progress through small, incremental steps of learning.

Leaders work closely with local stakeholders to ensure that work-based programmes, such as hotel housekeeping, meet workforce priorities.

Teachers and trainers are well qualified and have extensive experience of working with students with high needs. They generally use effective teaching strategies, such as the development of skills through repetition and demonstration. Most students understand and remember what they have learned.

Teachers mostly use detailed information about students' academic and support needs to plan learning. In a few instances, teachers do not consistently identify students' support needs, which results in a few students not being able to access the curriculum fully.

Teachers and trainers generally use assessment skilfully to provide students with constructive feedback. However, in a few cases, learning support assistants are too quick to step in and help students without giving them processing time to answer questions. This means that teachers, trainers and learning support assistants do not consistently build on or celebrate the smaller steps of progress that students are making towards their individual objectives.

What it's like to be a learner and/or an apprentice at this provider

Students and apprentices across all campuses value the welcoming and safe environment that is supported by effective security measures, such as the checking of lanyards and security barriers to make sure that unauthorised people are not allowed on campus.

College staff are compassionate and help students and apprentices access the support they need to reduce barriers to their learning. Students and apprentices appreciate the fact that their voices are heard through focus groups and course representatives. They value how leaders respond to their concerns, such as raising the bursary when students were overwhelmed by financial pressures. Leaders and staff provide effective support for students' and apprentices' mental health and welfare. Students and apprentices from the LGBTQ+ community appreciate how leaders listened when they requested gender-neutral bathroom facilities.

Students and apprentices are positive about how their teachers are supportive and knowledgeable and go above and beyond to help them to do their very best in a diverse and

inclusive environment.

Students and apprentices typically live in Birkenhead and the surrounding areas. They benefit from leaders' thorough understanding of the local, regional and national skills priorities, including shipbuilding, tourism in Wirral and nearby Liverpool and green technology in construction and engineering. Leaders understand the needs of their local communities, including disadvantage and barriers to learning. Working with stakeholders, they have introduced courses for young students who are aspiring shipbuilders. Young students who are not in education, employment or training benefit from the employability and progression programmes to help them to reengage with education.

Young students develop and apply a wide range of skills that help them to progress to further study, employment or apprenticeships. Students on catering courses make complex mille-feuille pastry confidently and competently in industry-standard, recently refurbished kitchens. Students on carpentry courses use hand tools correctly as they construct mortise and tenon joints in well-equipped practical workshops.

Too many young students do not attend their GCSE English and mathematics lessons. As a result, they do not make the expected progress or improve their grades in their examinations.

Adult students improve their confidence and resilience as they develop and apply the new skills they learn. Those studying on the 'Tomorrow's Women' course learn about practical strategies to help them to manage challenges, take positive steps forward, widen their horizons and realise their ambitions. Students overcome their barriers to learning and many continue with their studies, such as through progressing to access to higher education courses and university.

Tutors, assessors and employers support apprentices effectively. Apprentices develop and practise new skills that they then apply in the workplace. For example, electrical installation apprentices learn about different types of cabling in domestic and commercial properties, how circuits are constructed, considerations of voltage and how to deal safely with hazards such as domestic pets chewing through electric cabling.

Students with high needs are highly motivated and actively participate in college life. They join accessibility and neurodiversity focus groups and committees that positively influence the development of the inclusive and accessible college campuses. Students value the help and support they receive, such as one-to-one sessions with specialist teachers, work with job coaches and designated quiet spaces. They enjoy working with the local community during taster sessions with local museums and fundraising events.

Next steps

• Leaders should continue to focus closely on improving education programmes for young people so that students have a consistently high quality of education.
• Leaders should take action to stem the decline in achievement in GCSE English and mathematics in education programmes for young people so that students make progress and improve their grades in examinations.

• Leaders should improve further the attendance of students and apprentices.
• Leaders should continue to improve the quality of teaching and training to ensure it is consistently high across courses and apprenticeships.
• Leaders should strengthen further their approach to reducing support for students with high needs when appropriate to build students' skills and independence.

About this inspection

Following our updated framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with students, apprentices, parents/carers, leaders, governors, staff, employers and other stakeholders during the inspection.

Wirral Metropolitan College is a general further education college in in the borough of Wirral, Merseyside. The college has five main campuses. In Birkenhead, there are four campuses; Conway Park, Twelve Quays, Wirral Waters and Hamilton. The Oval campus is located in Bebington.

At the time of the inspection, there were 4,452 students and apprentices in learning. Of these, 2,300 were aged 16 to 18, 1,325 were adult students, 556 were apprentices and 271 were students with high needs. The college offers vocational and technical courses across a range of subject areas from pre-entry to level 4. Subject areas include English for speakers of other languages, health and social care, construction, creative arts, engineering and catering. Most apprentices study electrical installation, carpentry and joinery or business administration at level 3. The college subcontracts with Unite the Union, which provides training for taxi drivers.

Principal and CEO: Gill Banks

Lead inspector:
Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, His Majesty's Inspector

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Suzanne Horner, His Majesty's Inspector
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Mark Keen, His Majesty's Inspector
Claire Marsh, Ofsted Inspector
Zoe Ibbotson, His Majesty's Inspector
Jane Young, Ofsted Inspector
Helen Nellist, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

This data is from 27 January 2026

Number of learners

Total learners

4452

Education programmes for young people

2300

Adult learning programmes

1325

Apprenticeships

556

Provision for learners with high needs

271

Percentage of learning aims successfully achieved

Education programmes for young people

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	82	83	Close to average
2022/23	78	81	Close to average
2021/22	77	81	Close to average

Adult learning programmes

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	89	87	Close to average
2022/23	85	87	Close to average
2021/22	88	86	Close to average

Apprenticeships overall achievement rate

Year	This provider	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	64	61	Close to average
2022/23	54	55	Close to average
2021/22	56	53	Close to average

Apprenticeships pass rate

Year	This provider	National average
2023/24	100	98
2022/23	100	97
2021/22	100	98

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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