

# Riverside College, Halton

Inspection report

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body and where appropriate the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management
- specialist provision in: health, care and public services; science and mathematics; engineering and manufacturing technology; construction; hairdressing and beauty therapy; visual, performing arts and media; literacy and numeracy and business, administration and law.

## Description of the provider

1. Riverside College, Halton is a medium sized general further education college (GFE) located in Greater Merseyside. It was formed in August 2006 following the merger of Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College which had been judged to be inadequate at its last inspection. The college serves the towns of Widnes and Runcorn with a combined population of around 120,000. It operates on four main sites; Kingsway, Cronton (The Sixth Form Centre), Runcorn and a specialist construction centre. In the local area there are two schools with sixth forms.
2. In 2007/08 the college enrolled 2,839 full-time learners and 2,200 part-time learners. Around 80% of current full-time learners are aged 16 to 18. The college offers courses in all 15 sector subject areas, although numbers are low in agriculture, history, social science and education. The most significant areas of the college's work are in visual and performing arts, hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care and business. Around 60% of learners study on level 3 provision, 25% on level 2 and the remaining 15% on entry and level 1 courses. Work-based learning is delivered in engineering, construction, business, hairdressing and information and communication technology (ICT). There are around 60 Apprentices, 400 Train to Gain learners and 150 students studying foundation degrees. Around 200 students aged 14 to 16 study at the college, mostly on construction and hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. The college recruits a high proportion of students from areas of social and economic deprivation and many students aged 16 to 18 come from schools with relatively low GCSE pass rates. Around half of the students studying on level 3 courses have not achieved a grade C or higher in either GCSE English or mathematics.
3. A new management structure was established in April 2008. The college's new mission is 'The College that motivates, inspires and encourages achievement'. The eight strategic objectives are based on the four themes of quality, provision, resources and equality and diversity.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Inadequate: Grade 4
Capacity to improve	Inadequate: Grade 4
Achievement and standards	Inadequate: Grade 4
Quality of provision	Inadequate: Grade 4
Leadership and management	Inadequate: Grade 4
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Satisfactory: Grade 3</i>

### Sector subject areas

Health, care and public services	Inadequate: Grade 4
Science and mathematics	Inadequate: Grade 4
Engineering and manufacturing technology	Inadequate: Grade 4
Construction	Inadequate: Grade 4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Good: Grade 2
Visual, performing arts and media	Inadequate: Grade 4
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Business, administration and law	Inadequate: Grade 4

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Inadequate: Grade 4

4. The overall effectiveness of provision is inadequate. Six of the eight curriculum areas inspected were judged to be inadequate. Provision was good in hairdressing and beauty therapy and satisfactory in literacy and numeracy.
5. Achievement and standards are inadequate. Success rates on long courses at levels 1 and 2 have increased at rates that are at or below the national rate of improvement and declined at level 3, where there are most learners. Success rates at all levels, except that of adults on level 1 courses, are below the national average. Retention, pass rates and the progress of students on General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A2 courses are poor. Success rates on short courses and key skills have improved and are satisfactory. Apprentice achievement is low and most work-based learners do not complete the framework in the expected timescale. Pass rates and progression of students aged 14 to 16 are good.
6. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The standard of students' work is satisfactory overall and many develop relevant vocational skills. Many teachers are newly appointed. The college has invested well in staff development and arrangements to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Most lessons are well planned but not all are implemented well and too many do not meet the needs of all the learners in the group. The use of information learning technology (ILT) has improved. There remains too much uninspiring and a small but significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching.
7. The college provides a broad range of courses. However, they do not adequately meet the needs of all learners as too few students achieve their qualification and progression rates are low. Provision for students aged 14 to 16 from local schools is good. Educational and social inclusion are satisfactory. The college encourages participation and works well with partners to provide programmes that meet the needs of the high proportion of young people in the area who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Good links with special schools provide a smooth transition to college for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A number of projects have engaged a wide range of hard to reach learners including asylum seekers, travellers, excluded school pupils, young carers, teenage mums and the long term unemployed. However, the number of learners enrolling on full-time courses and work-based learning has declined.
8. Guidance and support are inadequate. Changes to entry criteria and enrolment procedures in September 2008 have improved how students are guided onto the right course but these are not yet consistently applied across all areas. Support services are used well by learners and additional learning support is effective. However, support for learners to help them achieve, particularly those

on AS and A2 courses is unsatisfactory. Target setting and one-to-one reviews are not yet effective in monitoring students' progress.

9. Leadership and management are inadequate. After a sustained period of instability and a difficult history a new and committed management team is in place. Governors recognise their responsibility for the slow progress made in appointing the senior managers for the merged college. Curriculum management is inadequate as many new managers have not yet had sufficient time to improve learners' outcomes. There now exists at all levels a clear focus on improvement and raising standards. Communications and the college's financial position have improved significantly. New procedures for monitoring the quality of provision have improved. However, performance monitoring and target setting is not yet sufficiently robust. Arrangements to improve the quality of teaching and learning have had a positive impact. Self-assessment is detailed but lacks clarity and inspectors did not agree with many of the college's grades.

Capacity to improve

Inadequate: Grade 4

10. The college's capacity to improve is inadequate. The college's new governing body and senior managers have successfully changed the culture to one focused on all staff taking responsibility for improving standards. Systems for improving the quality of provision have been radically improved. It is too early to judge the impact of the actions implemented by the new curriculum managers. Quality assurance and actions previously taken to improve learners' success rates have been ineffective. Insufficient progress has been made to rectify the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspections. Target setting and the performance monitoring of staff are insufficiently challenging. The self-assessment process is inclusive and well planned. Inspectors found the college's grades too optimistic; too much significance is placed on actions the college has taken and not the outcomes for learners.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

11. Insufficient progress has been made with the issues identified at the inspections of the previous colleges. Overall learners' achievement remains below the national average. At the last inspections of the predecessor organisations success rates on GCSE, AS and A2 courses were low and levels of attainment on some vocational course were low. Despite the efforts the college has taken to raise success rates these remain low. Actions to improve retention have not been effective.
12. The quality of much provision including some which was adequate at the last inspection of Halton College is now inadequate. The quality of provision of the former Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College has not improved sufficiently; much remains inadequate and in some areas standards have declined further. Inspectors judged six areas of learning and work-based learning as inadequate. Recent actions to improve attendance and punctuality at the college have had some impact. Information advice and guidance have improved recently and the number of learners on inappropriate courses has reduced but is still too high.

Teaching and learning have improved but there is still too much satisfactory and uninspiring teaching. Quality improvement activities have recently improved and are more rigorous but there is still insufficient evidence of their impact. Performance monitoring of staff has improved but remains insufficiently challenging. The newly established senior management team and curriculum managers, have implemented a rigorous schedule of activities to bring about improvement; it is too early to judge if these actions will be effective.

### Key strengths

- high pass rates and progression of students aged 14 to 16
- good provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy
- sound financial position following the merger
- clear focus by staff at all levels on improving learners' outcomes.

### Areas for improvement

#### *The college should address:*

- the pace of actions to improve learners' chances of success
- inadequate provision in six of the areas inspected and most GCE provision
- the quality of teaching and learning
- ineffective one-to-one reviews and tracking of students' progress
- the rigour of advice and guidance
- the accuracy and clarity of self-assessment and quality improvement
- the rigour of performance monitoring and target setting to bring about improvement.



## Main findings

Achievement and standards

Inadequate: Grade 4

*Contributory grades:*

*Train to Gain*

*Satisfactory: grade 3*

*Learners aged 14 to 16*

*Good: grade 2*

13. Achievement and standards are inadequate. This disagrees with the college's self-assessment of satisfactory. College data shows that the overall success rate remained constant in 2008 and is below the national average for 2007. The success rate on levels 1 and 2 increased slightly in 2008 and are now satisfactory at level 1 but still below the 2007 national average on level 2. On level 3 courses the success rate for students aged 16 to 18, the most significant group of learners, indicates no improvement in recent years. The success of these learners declined in 2008 and is too low. Success rates on short courses are satisfactory.
14. Retention did not improve in 2007/08 and is below the national average for all ages and levels except adults at level 1. Pass rates on levels 1 and 2 improved in 2007/08 and are at or above the national average. Pass rates on level 3 courses declined for students aged 16 to 18 to well below the national average and for adults they improved significantly to well above the national average.
15. The retention and pass rates on GCE A2 and AS course have not improved in the last two years and are significantly below the average for sixth form colleges. Students on level 3 courses make poor progress relative to their prior attainment. The high grade pass rate at GCSE improved in 2007/08 and is above the national average. However, the high grade pass rate in GCSE mathematics is low.
16. Key skills success rates improved significantly in 2007/08 and are above the national average at all levels with good achievement for adults at all levels and learners aged 16 to 18 at level 1. Success rates on apprenticeship frameworks are inadequate; on Train to Gain they are satisfactory. Most work-based learners do not complete their qualifications within the expected timescale. Achievement of students aged 14 to 16 is good.
17. The college recognises there are significant variations in learners' outcomes across curriculum areas. No group of students from a particular ethnic background succeeds significantly differently from any other. Male students are less successful than female students. Success rates of students receiving additional learning support are slightly higher than the college's average.
18. Students enjoy college and they feel safe. The standard of students' work is satisfactory overall but variable. Attendance has improved since September 2008 and is satisfactory but variable. Progression rates to higher level courses in college and to higher education are low.

Quality of provision

Inadequate: Grade 4

*Contributory grades:*

*Train to Gain*

*Satisfactory: grade 3*

*Learners aged 14 to 16*

*Good: grade 2*

19. The quality of provision is inadequate which does not agree with the college's self-assessment. Teaching and learning are satisfactory which agrees with the college's self-assessment. The proportion of good or better teaching is too low and there remains a small but significant minority of unsatisfactory teaching. Recent investment in management time and resources has led to improvements in the arrangements for the quality assurance and standards of teaching and learning. College observers have been trained well and in most cases they accurately identify the strengths of the lesson and what teachers need to do to improve. More thorough arrangements to help individual teachers improve have been recently introduced. Support from advanced practitioners, subject learning coaches and structured opportunities to share best practice have been effective in improving students' classroom experiences. Most lessons are well planned. However, not all are implemented well and teaching does not always meet the diverse needs of the learners.
20. In the best lessons teachers use a variety of learning resources and activities that support and challenge students. In these lessons students develop new skills and make good progress. The use of ILT has improved. However, some dull and uninspiring teaching remains. Assessment practice is satisfactory. On GCE AS and A2 courses, feedback on assignments is not sufficiently detailed to help students improve.
21. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is inadequate. Provision covers all sector subject areas from entry level to level 3 with a growing number of foundation degrees. The curriculum is responsive to the needs of the local community and national priorities but too few learners actually achieve the qualification they start out on. The college and its partners make an effective contribution to reducing the high numbers of NEETs in the local area. A recent review of the curriculum has improved the range of courses in most areas but progression rates are low at all levels and declining from levels 2 to 3. The range of apprenticeships is very narrow; much of the provision in this area has been withdrawn due to poor performance.
22. Managers have not accurately evaluated the effectiveness of the enrichment programme. Participation is low at the Kingsway and Runcorn centres. The use of work experience to enhance students' learning is variable and too many are not prepared well for the world of work. Subject enrichment is more effective. The quality of key skills provision is satisfactory.
23. The college is proactive in its work with local schools; provision for learners aged 14 to 16 is good and many progress to college or other local providers on leaving school. It is lead partner in the new diploma in construction and the

built environment. The college is responsive to the needs of local employers from small enterprises to several blue chip companies. Much training and assessment is flexible and delivered on employers' premises.

24. Guidance and support are inadequate which does not agree with the college's judgements about the provision. Radical changes to the entry criteria and enrolment system in September 2008 have improved the information potential applicants receive about AS and A2 courses. The number of early leavers and course changes have reduced so far this year but they are still too high. Arrangements are in place to ensure appropriate entry criteria are being applied to vocational courses for current applicants. Links with special schools, parents and carers are effective in providing a smooth transition to college for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
25. Student support services, including counselling and financial advice are good. Initial assessments are used effectively to identify those who need extra support but they are not yet used consistently to guide learners onto the right programmes. The provision of one-to-one and small group specialist learning support is well managed. Support is provided quickly for students identified to be in need. However, support to ensure that all learners make the progress they should, particularly those on AS and A2 courses, is unsatisfactory. The college has accurately identified this issue and is taking appropriate action to provide additional revision sessions, workshops and one-to one support. Support for work-based learners is unsatisfactory. The college does not carry out sufficiently detailed analysis and evaluation of the impact of additional learning support.
26. Tutorial provision is inadequate. A broad range of useful materials for group tutorials, linked to the Every Child Matters themes, are available on the college's virtual learning environment. These are not used consistently by personal tutors. The quality of one-to-one reviews is mostly poor. The use of individual learning plans (ILPs) to set students' targets and to monitor their progress is weak. Targets are often too vague and actions to achieve them are insufficiently specific to help learners to make progress. Parents and carers receive regular information from the college. However, the reports they receive are not sufficiently detailed.

Leadership and management

Inadequate: Grade 4

*Contributory grades:*

*Equality of opportunity  
Learners aged 14 to 16*

*Satisfactory: grade 3  
Satisfactory: grade 3*

27. Leadership and management are inadequate. After a sustained period of management instability, during which the governors pursued the merger of the two colleges, there is now a new and committed senior management team in post. The recently strengthened senior team provide a clear direction focused

on all staff taking responsibility for improving standards. Communications have improved significantly; the principal is highly visible. Staff are aware of the key challenges of the college; are more confident about the future and the ability of managers to successfully lead the college and to bring about improvement. Curriculum management and the management of work-based learning are inadequate. Many curriculum managers are recently appointed and have not yet had sufficient time to bring about improvement.

28. The college has introduced many measures designed to improve retention and pass rates. Whilst these have not yet improved learner success rates, in the three months since the start of term attendance has improved and the number of early leavers and students changing courses has reduced. Performance monitoring and target setting for staff to improve learner outcomes are insufficiently challenging.
29. Financial management is good. Resources are broadly satisfactory, well maintained and with a suitable replacement policy. Much work has taken place to improve accommodation. Investment in ILT has been significant and a range of e-learning initiatives are being developed by staff. In the context of low success rates and a significant proportion of inadequate curriculum areas, value for money is inadequate.
30. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. They are well supported by managers and peers, including mentors. Staff development is satisfactory and has led to improvements in the quality of teaching. A key priority is a management training programme for the many new middle managers. In 2007/08 many students' learning was disrupted by a lack of continuity of teachers. Managers have successfully taken action to reduce the proportion of teaching delivered by agency staff in 2008 but at 23% of taught hours this is still high. The college judges the quality of teaching by agency staff to be lower than that delivered by teachers employed by the college.
31. Quality assurance and self-assessment have been unsuccessful in raising learners' outcomes. Systems for improving the quality of provision have been radically improved but those for work-based learning remains inadequate. The college identified that the previous quality system while identifying appropriate areas for improvement did not bring about improvement quickly enough. The new quality system is still evolving and is not yet fully coherent, or well understood by all staff. The quality team has identified aspects where the evidence is not sufficiently robust and areas which are not monitored sufficiently rigorously. Plans are in place to make further changes. The views of learners and stakeholders are analysed and used to bring about improvement. Where the college takes action learners receive clear feedback on actions the college has taken to address their concerns. The most recent self-assessment report is inclusive. However, many aspects are too descriptive and the college has placed too much significance on actions it has taken and not the outcomes of the actions. Inspectors found that the college had over graded its overall performance, including leadership and management and many of its curriculum areas.

32. The current governing body has a good range of skills. Governors give freely of their time and expertise. They are well informed about the college; the issues it faces and the progress it is making and provide good support and challenge to senior managers. The governing body recognises its responsibility and that of previous governing boards for the slow progress the college is making and the time it took to appoint senior post-holders. The board made a number of unsound decisions related to the merger and its capacity to steer this through successfully in a timely way. At the time of the merger an interim principal was in post. The benefits to the local community of the merged college have not yet materialised. Few members of the governing bodies of the predecessor colleges remain on the current board. The arrangements for appointing student governors are unsatisfactory.
33. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Appropriate and regularly updated policies are in place that are used effectively to inform practice and ensure all learners are being treated fairly. The college's response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005 and the Equality Act 2006 is good. Data is used to identify trends in performance. Staff promote equality and diversity issues appropriately to learners through induction, tutorials and cross college events. However, they are insufficiently reinforced. The college does not adequately monitor the delivery of the learners' entitlement to equality and diversity training. The promotion and monitoring of equality issues to apprentices is inadequate. The college's response to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is satisfactory. Appropriate checks and training for staff and governors ensures that both understand college procedures. The college provides a safe and welcoming environment for learners and key stakeholders.

## Sector subject area

Health, care and public services

Inadequate: Grade 4

### Context

34. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in child care, health and social care and public services. The full range of levels are not offered in each aspect of the curriculum. Of the 348 learners following full-time courses, 298 are aged 16 to 18. There are 302 learners, mainly adults, on part-time courses including counselling to level 4 and CACHE Teaching Assistants courses at levels 2 and 3.

### Strengths

- good pass rates on most full-time courses
- well prepared lessons
- productive links with employers.

### Areas for improvement

- poor success rates on most courses
- low and declining retention rates on most courses
- much teaching and learning that does not meet the needs of all learners
- narrow range of progression opportunities in public services and health and care
- ineffective target-setting for improvement of low-performing courses.

### Achievement and standards

35. Learners' achievement is inadequate. In 2007/08, success rates were poor on most courses. Though pass rates improved to generally above average, the retention rates declined to well below average on most courses. Conversely, on one course, the CACHE Foundation award in childcare, the results were good.

### Quality of provision

36. Teaching and learning are inadequate. While most lessons are well prepared, many are poorly delivered. In the best lessons, learners work well and make good progress. Resources to support group and individual activities are well prepared. In the weaker lessons there is unsatisfactory management of learning activities. On level 1 and 2 courses, tasks lack challenge. Deadlines for completion of tasks are not set and many learners take a leisurely approach to doing them. Though the group profiles indicate a range of skill levels, all learners complete the same tasks at the same pace and there is no extension work for early finishers. There is little use of ILT. There are insufficient links with the workplace to illustrate complex topics. Attendance is low.

37. There are productive links with employers. Dedicated work placement officers visit learners on placement and liaise effectively with placement providers. On NVQ courses delivered in the workplace, the assessors involve employers in supporting their employees and there are good opportunities to meet course requirements.
38. Overall, provision does not meet the needs and interests of learners. Despite the context of the area and the below average achievement of school leavers, there are no courses below level 2 in public services or health and social care. Internal progression of learners from level 2 to level 3 courses is good. Participation in enrichment is poor. Very few learners on child care and health and social care courses take up either college or curriculum area enrichment activities, though most undertake work placements. Learners on public services courses do fitness training.
39. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners have a weekly group tutorial and regular individual reviews. Good steps are taken to identify learners' additional support needs. Learners on full-time courses at level 1 receive in-lesson support and further individual support as needed. However, not all learners take up the support offered.

#### Leadership and management

40. Leadership and management are inadequate. The recently appointed curriculum manager has had insufficient time to fully address the long standing weaknesses in course performance. Target setting is ineffective. The majority of targets on low performing courses in 2007/08 were not achieved. Communications within the programme areas and across the curriculum area have improved recently and staff feel well informed and supported. The self-assessment report lacks rigour. Inspectors did not agree that there is no inadequate teaching in the area. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory.

## Science and mathematics

Inadequate: Grade 4

## Context

41. The college offers full-time courses to around 700 learners most of whom are 16 to 18 year olds. Courses include GCSE science, mathematics and GCE AS and A2 biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics and psychology and a national diploma in forensic science. GCSE science, mathematics and astronomy are offered as part-time evening classes.

## Strengths

- high and improving retention on GCSE courses
- good teaching and learning
- recent management actions to improve quality of provision.

## Areas for improvement

- low A to C pass rates on GCSE science and mathematics
- low and declining success rates and poor value added on most GCE courses
- ineffective one-to-one tutorials
- ineffective leadership and management actions to improve learners' poor achievement.

## Achievement and standards

42. Achievement and standards are inadequate. Success rates on most GCE A2 and AS courses are significantly below national average and declined sharply in 2007/08. The A to C pass rates on GCSE courses in mathematics and science continue to be well below national average. Retention on GCSE courses is good and improving and on advanced courses is broadly satisfactory.

43. Students on advanced courses make poor progress and value added is below expected levels except in physics. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Skills development in areas requiring manual dexterity, such as dissecting in biology and curve sketching in mathematics is generally good. Attendance is satisfactory.

## Quality of provision

44. Teaching and learning are good as identified in the college's self-assessment report. On psychology courses students benefit from a variety of well conceived and engaging activities to promote learning. On mathematics and science courses teachers facilitate learning by detailed and thoughtful explanations combined with expert coaching and carefully chosen examples to challenge learners of differing abilities. The use of ILT in the classroom is limited. Students' learning is supported by a good range of course materials on the college's virtual learning environment.



45. Advanced teaching practitioners and subject learning coaches make a valuable contribution to staff training and support, particularly for newly qualified teachers. Assessment is fair, accurate and reliable. Robust arrangements are in place for standardisation and cross marking.
46. Support for learners is inadequate. Individual tutorials for learners are ineffective. The recently introduced tutorial framework is well designed and planned but not properly implemented. Target setting is poor, with targets often not followed up.
47. Initial advice and guidance has been ineffective for some time and has failed to impact on low success rates. Improved advice, guidance and initial assessment were introduced in September 2008 and early indications are that more learners are staying on programme and making better progress.
48. The range of provision to meet the needs of learners is satisfactory. The college offers an appropriate range of A2 and AS courses. Vocational courses in forensic science and the GCSE in astronomy add breadth. Enrichment and links with local schools are satisfactory.

#### Leadership and management

49. Leadership and management are inadequate. Managers have previously failed to make any impact on low and declining success rates. However, the new management team has taken action to introduce appropriate arrangements for quality improvement. New subject monitoring arrangements provide an effective overview of learners and course performance. A new student tracking sheet compares their progress in assessments against target grades. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Self-assessment is accurate, inclusive and has identified many of the strengths and areas for improvement identified by inspectors. The quality improvement plan is comprehensive and has initiated appropriate actions. Managers set challenging and realistic targets for improvement. Most of these arrangements were introduced in September 2008 and have not yet impacted on the very low success rates.

## Engineering and manufacturing technology

Inadequate: Grade 4

## Context

50. The college delivers courses at levels 1 and 2 in vehicle engineering and performing engineering operations. At level 3, GCE AS and A2 design and technology and a national diploma in engineering are offered. At the time of inspection, enrolments totalled 275, the majority being full-time learners aged 16 to 18 with 30 learners aged 14 to 16 from local schools.

## Strengths

- high success rate on courses for learners aged 14 to 16 in 2007/08
- good teaching in practical lessons.

## Areas for improvement

- low success rates on most courses
- insufficient emphasis on individual learners' needs in theory lessons
- ineffective progress reviews and planning for learning
- insufficient progression opportunities
- ineffective actions to improve the provision.

## Achievement and standards

51. Achievement and standards are inadequate. Success rates on most courses are low, have not improved and have been consistently below national average. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 are high in 2007/08. Apprenticeship and Train to Gain success rates are significantly below national rates. The progress of students on GCE design and technology is poor.
52. The progression of students aged 14 to 16 is good. The standard of learners' written and practical work is satisfactory. Attendance rates overall are satisfactory. However, attendance on the first year national diploma and vehicle engineering progression award at level 1 are poor.

## Quality of provision

53. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Practical lessons are good, learners agree specific targets at the beginning of the lesson and progress towards achieving these is carefully monitored and evaluated. Tutors use question and answer techniques extensively to establish understanding and develop the topic. In theory lessons, insufficient emphasis is given to the needs of individual learners and many of the activities do not capture their interest. Tutors use a limited range of teaching strategies.
54. Progress reviews are ineffective. Target setting within the tutorial process has little impact on learners' achievement of their main qualification. Assessments at college and in the workplace are satisfactory.

55. The range of provision is inadequate. The current curriculum offers insufficient progression opportunities for some learners. Progression from level 2 practical engineering courses onto the level 3 engineering technician course is inappropriate.
56. Support for learners is satisfactory and strong in practical motor vehicle lessons. Initial assessment identifies students' additional support needs, which are responded to quickly. Learners who received additional support last year achieved higher success rates at the end of the year compared to learners who did not have support.

### Leadership and management

57. Leadership and management are inadequate. A new director has recently been appointed; regular team meetings now take place. Communication has improved, there are now clear lines of responsibility, much change is taking place, but it is too early to judge its impact. Self-assessment is inadequate and identifies many actions that have not been implemented. Course reviews are brief and there is insufficient focus on appropriate actions to bring about improvements and achieve targets. Areas for improvement identified at the last inspection are still present. Resources are satisfactory and staff are appropriately qualified. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory.

## Construction

Inadequate: Grade 4

### Context

58. Construction courses run in trowel trades, wood occupations and plumbing. Around 100 students aged 14 to 16 follow the construction diploma programme. Approximately 150 learners are on full-time craft programmes; most are 16 to 18 year olds on level 1 courses. Construction apprenticeship programmes at level 2 are provided, under subcontract, with North West Training Limited.

### Strengths

- high success and progression rates for 14 to 16 year old learners
- strong links and productive partnerships with local schools
- recent management action to support improvements.

### Areas for improvement

- low success rates on most programmes
- no level 3 provision and narrow range of craft training options
- insufficient enrichment
- ineffective individual tutorial arrangements
- poor use of data and information to inform self-assessment.

### Achievement and standards

59. Achievement and standards are inadequate. Success rates across all long level and apprenticeship programmes have been significantly below national rates for the last four years. Key skill success rates are satisfactory at levels 1 and 2 and have improved over the last two years. Success rates on courses for students' aged 14 to 16 programmes are high in 2007/08. Skills development and the standards of learners' work are satisfactory.

### The quality of provision

60. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the more effective sessions students benefit from enthusiastic well organised teachers who work hard to make learning interesting. The less effective sessions have unclear tutor instructions and ineffective questioning does not sufficiently gauge students' level of understanding. The use of ILT to support learning is developing well across the provision. Assessment and verification arrangements are satisfactory.
61. Programmes and activities fail to meet the needs and interests of learners and employers. There are no level 3 progression opportunities and a narrow range of craft training options. Specialist training courses for industry are limited. Employer links and engagement are poor. Links with schools and progression from courses for students aged 14 to 16 onto full-time construction courses are good.

62. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Information, advice and guidance have recently improved. Students are now enrolled onto more appropriate courses; since September 2008 slightly fewer learners have changed or left their course early when compared to previous years. Initial assessments for full-time learners are effective in identifying additional support needs. Specialist support for literacy and numeracy is effective in helping learners to progress.
63. Group tutorials are satisfactory but individual tutorials are not effective in setting students targets or informing their individual learning plans. Curriculum led enrichment activities are insufficient and participation in cross-college events is poor. There are no work-experience or job search training arrangements for full-time learners.

#### Leadership and management

64. Leadership and management are inadequate. Since September 2008 there has been more emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning, more regular monitoring of learners' progress and the introduction of new full-time programmes. These actions have not yet impacted on improving success rates.
65. The use of information and data to inform self-assessment and support quality improvement is poor. The quality improvement process fails to use the broad range of evidence, information and data available to inform its self-assessment judgements. Too much of the data used in the report is contradictory or inaccurate and the report fails to fully reflect and account for learners or employers views.
66. Arrangements for the promotion and development of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity are weak. All learners undertake an induction programme that includes equal opportunities awareness training but there is little further promotion. Resources are satisfactory and good attention is given to health and safety matters.

## Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Good: Grade 2

### Context

67. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapy from entry level to level 3. Short courses include waxing, nails and Indian head massage. The provision has 283 learners aged 16 to 18 and approximately 268 adult learners, most are full-time. Provision for around 50 learners aged 14 to 16 takes place in partnership with 4 local schools and around 20 apprentices.

### Strengths

- good success rates on hairdressing level 1 and 2 and beauty therapy level 2 and 3 courses
- very high pass rates on all courses
- good teaching and support for learning
- broad and responsive course provision
- good response to learners' views.

### Areas for improvement

- declining retention on a minority of courses
- low success rates on apprenticeships
- insufficiently challenging target setting for underperforming courses.

### Achievement and standards

68. Achievement and standards are good. Pass rates on all courses are very high. Success rates on entry level and NVQ1, NVQ2 hairdressing courses and beauty and holistic therapy level 2 and 3 courses are high. However, retention on level 3 holistic therapy is low. The success rate on level 1 beauty therapy declined significantly in 2007/08 to well below national average. Apprentice framework achievement is low. The standard of learners' work is good. Portfolios include a wide range of evidence and good use is made of digital photography. Teachers' feedback on learners' work is good and supports learners in developing good skills. Attendance is good and the few issues with punctuality are well managed.

### Quality of provision

69. Quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Lesson planning is good. Teachers effectively use a detailed profile of each learner to plan a range of activities to meet their needs. In the best lessons, teachers use extension tasks to stretch and challenge more able learners. Active learning strategies maintain learners' interest and they are completed at a brisk pace. Teachers' feedback is thorough; critical analysis of learners' work enables them to develop good skills and industry practice. In satisfactory lessons, question and answer techniques do not fully engage all learners and there is an over reliance on note

taking and work books. Insufficient use is made of the internet for learning and peer assessment. All teachers promote best practice in relation to health and safety during lessons.

70. Learners are placed on an appropriate course from the broad range available. Courses for young people who are NEET, including learners from the travelling community, have successfully engaged them in learning and many learners have now progressed to other courses. Students participate in a wide range of course enrichment opportunities and work experience in a variety of salons and community venues.
71. Guidance and support are good. Students' learning needs are effectively identified at induction using a range of assessment and diagnostic tools. Additional support is effective. Learners value tutorials and recognise their importance in helping them to progress. Group tutorials develop students' understanding of a wide range issues and effectively cover the Every Child Matters themes and equality and diversity. Individual tutorials carefully monitor learners' progress towards their qualifications. However, learners' targets in their individual learning plans are not consistently challenging or agreed in a timely manner.

#### Leadership and management

72. Leadership and management are good. Self-assessment is detailed, inclusive and self-critical, but does not identify weak performance on a minority of courses. However, under-performance is identified in course reviews and clear actions are taken. Course performance targets are not sufficiently challenging. Teachers are well qualified. Learners have many opportunities to give their views, routinely attend staff meetings and many suggestions are acted upon. Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Salons and resources are good. However, insufficient clients are available in a minority of practical sessions.

## Visual, performing arts and media

Inadequate: Grade 4

## Context

73. The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses in art and design, music, media and performing arts at levels 1, 2 and 3 with level 4 provision in drama. Currently there are 396 full-time students; most are aged 16 to 18 with 80 adult students. Many of the 456 enrolments on part-time courses are additional qualifications for full-time learners.

## Strengths

- high success rates on level 2 courses in 2007/08
- wide range of courses and good enrichment opportunities
- good accommodation and resources.

## Areas for improvement

- low success rates on most level 3 courses
- low value added on AS and A2 courses
- teaching that does not encourage sufficiently high standards
- ineffective actions to improve GCE provision.

## Achievement and standards

74. Success rates on most courses at all levels are low and below national average. On AS and A2 courses students make poor progress and success rates on many courses declined further in 2007/08. Students achieve well on A2 performance courses. The success rates on some vocational level 2 and 3 courses improved in 2007/08 to above the national average. However, the foundation diploma in art has a three year declining success rate. Attendance and punctuality is poor.
75. Student work is satisfactory but often pedestrian and dull. On many courses sketchbooks lack experimentation and exploration of techniques and processes; they include a lot of white space and too many secondary images. The first diploma in art contains some very well structured and interesting work.

## Quality of provision

76. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are well planned but delivery is less effective and inconsistent, particularly where class sizes are small. Students work collaboratively but are given insufficient examples of good work to inspire them. Teachers' expectations of students are often too low. Often teachers questioning techniques do not involve all students and fail to challenge or extend students' learning. Some assignments lack imagination and there is insufficient use of ILT. In the better lessons students made good use of first hand research in art, and peer reviews in drama are effective in promoting learning. Assessment practices are satisfactory. Teachers' feedback and advice to students is good.



77. Guidance and support for students are good. Students are set achievement targets based on their prior attainment and progress is monitored regularly. However, interim targets in ILPs are often vague. Learning support needs are identified and appropriate support provided. Tutorial activity is very well delivered and interesting for learners. A wide range of courses gives learners a good choice of progression and enrichment opportunities including the college's own record company 'IndieFire', a radio station and a 'Battle of the Bands' competition. Links with higher education are good.

#### Leadership and management

78. Leadership and management are inadequate. Strategies to improve the quality of GCE provision have been ineffective in raising standards. A range of new initiatives for improvement are now in place following the appointment of a new manager in September 2008. The number of early leavers has fallen so far this year and attendance has improved but it is too soon to judge the impact of the recent changes.
79. Self-assessment reports are robust, honest and mainly accurate in identifying areas for improvement. Many new teaching staff have been appointed. Sharing good practice, across two sites is insufficient. Accommodation and resources are good. Equality and diversity is promoted well with competitions to raise student awareness.

## Literacy and numeracy

Satisfactory: Grade 3

### Context

80. The college offers discrete provision for adults in literacy and numeracy from entry level to level 2 with around 225 learners. Of the full-time college learners, most aged 16 to 18, 771 are studying key skills in application of number and 1,798 are taking communication at level 1 or 2. Basic skills are delivered to 41 employed adult learners.

### Strengths

- high success rates in adult literacy and numeracy at entry level and level 1
- good diagnostic assessment to address individual learners needs
- effective management action to improve performance.

### Areas for improvement

- low success rates for students aged 16 to 18 in key skills level 2 communication and level 1 national literacy tests
- poor individual target setting in key skills
- limited provision in the community and with employers.

### Achievement and standards

81. Achievement is satisfactory. Adult skills for life provision has high success rates at entry level and level 1 adult literacy and numeracy, well above national average. National literacy and numeracy test success rates for adults are high at level 1. Achievement of learners aged 16 to 18 is lower, particularly level 2 communication. Key skills success rates improved in 2007/08 to above the national average. Learners' work is satisfactory and many achieve target qualifications in good time. Literacy and numeracy learners improve their confidence and ability to cope with everyday tasks; many progress to more advanced courses.

### Quality of provision

82. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Initial and diagnostic assessment is thorough and timely, and in discrete provision leads to effective ILPs which are used by staff to link individual learners' needs to the relevant vocational area. Most target setting is realistic but actions are often too vague and do not adequately involve learners in evaluating their own progress. The use of the electronic ILPs is not consistent across all vocational courses.

83. The quality of teaching and learning has recently improved and is good in the discrete provision although there are too many satisfactory lessons in cross-college provision. In the best lessons teachers use ILT well. Learning is supported with a good range of resources on the college's virtual learning environment. Teachers contextualise tasks to link with the groups' interests and vocational area. A variety of strategies are used to engage learners in group,

individual and pair-work. Effective teacher questioning, presentations and web-based resources are used to assess and challenge learners. In a minority of lessons an over reliance on paper based exercises does not meet the needs of all learners. Review of students' progress in lessons is insufficient and they are not always aware of the standards required.

84. Overall the range of provision is satisfactory. Discrete provision has a good range of courses from entry level to level 2. Provision in the community and for employers through Train to Gain is low. Key skills provision is satisfactory but more consistent support is needed for students with level 2 awards to progress to level 3.
85. Support for learners is satisfactory. Teachers understand the needs of their learners and address them well in most classes. Additional learning support is effective. Advice and guidance is satisfactory for both full and part-time learners.

#### Leadership and management

86. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent changes and the appointment of new staff have led to positive review and changes. Communication between staff is good; effective links are now developing between key skills staff and other departments with formal agreements providing a baseline for standards. Opportunities to promote and develop, learners' understanding of equality and diversity, is satisfactory. The self-assessment report is accurate and thorough.

## Business, administration and law

Inadequate: Grade 4

## Context

87. The college offers courses in business, accounting, law and administration from level 1 to level 4. At the time of the inspection 76 learners were studying on full-time vocational courses, 147 on GCE AS & A2 subjects and 19 learners aged 14 to 16 attend the college to study business administration. A range of courses for part-time learners is available in the evening. Courses for employees to study in the workplace are offered throughout the year. The number of apprentices in administration has declined with only 3 apprentices currently in training.

## Strengths

- broad range of courses
- good teaching on full-time vocational courses.

## Areas for improvement

- poor success rates on most level 3 courses and work-based qualifications
- low internal progression
- underdeveloped strategies to secure improvements.

## Achievement and standards

88. Achievement and standards are inadequate. On most level 3 courses success rates have declined and are well below national average. Success rates on AS law and accounting are poor and have been for the last three years. Learners who progress to A2 level have better success in accounting and business, though they still underperform in law. Retention on the national diploma in business has been consistently low, though all learners who completed the course achieved the qualification. Success rates on Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) accounting levels 2 and 3 vary significantly each year though are often below national averages and are poor at level 4. Although numbers are low on full-time courses at level 1 and 2, most learners are successful. Apprenticeship and Train to Gain success rates are below national average. Attendance and standards of learners' work are satisfactory.

## Quality of provision

89. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners work well in lessons and receive prompt feedback about how to improve. Assessment and the recording of progress are thorough. Some teachers do not sufficiently vary the style of teaching and learning to stimulate and motivate learners. Activities do not always challenge the more able learners.

90. Teaching on full-time vocational courses is good. Teachers use their commercial and professional experiences to make lessons imaginative and relevant. They are confident in their use of learning technology and use activities which involve research and analysis to help learners apply knowledge and skills. Learners aged 14 to 16 enjoy attending the business administration centre to learn alongside full-time students. The excellent use of praise and encouragement helps learners on level 1 and 2 courses to respond particularly well.
91. The range of provision is satisfactory. A broad range of courses and suitable progression routes are available although internal progression is low. Part-time and work-based courses include AAT accounting, supervisory development, trade union studies and customer care along with foundation degrees.
92. Overall guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Strenuous efforts have improved the initial advice and guidance for AS learners to ensure that they make informed and appropriate choices, though the college recognises that further refinements are still required. Induction is thorough and learners understand who to contact for further advice and support. Tutorials contain an appropriate balance of group work and individual tutorials, though the quality of tutorials is varied.

#### Leadership and management

93. Leadership and management are inadequate. Management strategies to improve retention and achievement have not been effective. Several changes of managers and teachers during the last two years have clouded accountability and have impacted adversely on learners. The self-assessment process completed in 2008 is thorough and well understood. Quality improvement plans arising from self-assessment are very detailed, though important actions are not well prioritised.
94. Curriculum managers have good access to reliable online information about learners, but do not always use it well to monitor performance. Many teachers do not recognise how their courses perform against the national average. Target setting is incomplete. Recent well conceived initiatives have improved the standard of teaching. The impact has not yet translated into better achievement for learners. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory.

## Learners' achievement

\*\* Data only exists from September 2006 following the formation of Riverside College, Halton.

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 long qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2007 to 2008, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
All Long - Level 1	06/07	511	72	73	-1	598	72	71	1
	07/08	504	74			419	76		
GNVQs/ AVCEs	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	07/08	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	06/07	95	86	73	13	68	87	77	10
	07/08	115	85			44	98		
Other	06/07	416	69	73	-4	530	71	70	1
	07/08	389	71			375	74		

\* college data 2007/08

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 long qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2007 to 2008, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
All Long - Level 2	06/07	858	64	69	-5	909	65	70	-5
	07/08	894	68			723	68		
GCSEs	06/07	175	66	71	-5	69	62	70	-8
	07/08	136	63			54	78		
GNVQs/ AVCEs	06/07	26	54	70	-16	21	57	63	-6
	07/08	26	50			21	29		
NVQs	06/07	111	63	66	-3	381	56	71	-15
	07/08	102	69			269	56		
Other	06/07	546	64	69	-5	438	73	70	3
	07/08	630	69			379	77		

\* college data 2007/08

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 long qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2007 to 2008, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
All Long - Level 3	06/07	3159	68	70	-2	534	66	67	-1
	07/08	2910	66			625	68		
A/A2 Levels	06/07	1029	81	84	-3	33	70	77	-7
	07/08	780	83			28	68		
AS Levels	06/07	1684	62	64	-2	62	60	59	1
	07/08	1637	60			69	59		
GNVQs/ AVCEs	06/07	...	...		...	...	...		...
	07/08	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
NVQs	06/07	24	75	75	0	143	60	71	-11
	07/08	12	92			151	57		
Other	06/07	422	57	68	-11	296	70	66	4
	07/08	481	60			377	75		

\* college data 2007/08

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by the college 2005/06 to 2007/08

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
	05/06	overall	0	-	-	-	-
		timely	2	0	34	0	27
	06/07	overall	10	90	64	70	58
		timely	9	78	43	56	37
	07/08#	overall	7	38	69	43	64
		timely	8	25	47	25	42
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	50	20	51	12	39
		timely	66	11	29	8	22
	05/06	overall	98	44	58	36	52
		timely	111	7	38	4	34
	06/07	overall	137	52	65	32	61
		timely	114	27	47	20	44
	07/08#	Overall	28	43	64	46	67
		timely	22	36	48	36	51

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the Individual Learning Record (ILR)

# When available and validated by the LSC

Table 5a

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain NVQ programmes managed by the college 2005/06 to 2007/08

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	19	58
		timely	13	45
	2007/08	overall	262	69
		timely	373	25

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college/provider prior to inspection