

Riverside College Halton

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130622

Name of lead inspector: Andrew Johnson HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. Riverside College Halton is a medium-sized general further education college located in Greater Merseyside. It was formed in August 2006 following the merger of Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College. It was judged to be inadequate overall at its last inspection in November 2008, as were the quality of provision and leadership and management. The college serves the towns of Widnes and Runcorn which have 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 at Astmoor.
2. The college offers courses in all 15 subject areas funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), although numbers are low in agriculture, history, social science and education. The most significant areas of the college's work are in preparation for life and work, visual and performing arts, hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care, and business.
3. The college recruits a high proportion of learners from areas of social and economic deprivation and many learners aged 16 to 18 arrive with relatively low GCSE grades. Two schools in the local area have sixth forms. The percentage of learners from minority ethnic groups is around 4% which is about twice the proportion resident in the borough. Unemployment rates are similar to national averages but more people have been unemployed in the long term and many have poor health.
4. A new Principal was appointed in February 2009 and a new management structure established in May 2009. Three new strategic objectives were established: to be first choice for school leavers, adults and employers; to provide outstanding learning experiences to enable learners to reach their full potential; and to engage those who traditionally do not participate in education.
5. Riverside College Halton provides training on behalf of the following provider:
 - Halton Local Authority (pupil referral unit)
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of Riverside College Halton:
 - David Campbell Event Management Ltd (National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in sport, recreation and allied occupations)
 - Myerscough College (Units of the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) National Diploma in animal management)
 - YMCA (basic construction skills)
 - Personal and Community Development Learning

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09 |
|--|--|
| Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 | 214 part-time learners |
| Further education (16 to 18) | 2,139 full-time learners 158 part-time learners |
| Foundation learning | 403 full-time learners 82 part-time learners |
| Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+) | 815 full-time learners 1,868 part-time learners |
| Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships | 1,675 learners 88 apprentices |

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 2 |
|------------------------------------|---------|

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|---------------------|---------|
| Capacity to improve | Grade 1 |
|---------------------|---------|

| | Grade |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| Quality of provision | 2 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |
| Safeguarding | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | 2 |

| Subject Areas | |
|--|---|
| Health, care and public services | 2 |
| Engineering and manufacturing technologies | 2 |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | 2 |
| Performing arts | 2 |
| Business administration | 3 |

Overall effectiveness

7. The college's overall effectiveness is good. It has demonstrated that it has an outstanding capacity to improve outcomes for learners and the quality of provision. Remarkable progress has been made in remedying the many inadequate outcomes and areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Outcomes have improved at all levels for all groups of learners. Learners develop good personal, social and employability skills. Attendance and punctuality have improved and are good. Many learners move through levels of study and move on to higher education. In the last two years the proportion of learners who drop out of their courses early has declined rapidly and is now well below average. Learners make at least satisfactory progress on most General Certificate of Education (GCE) A-level courses and good progress on most vocational courses. Learners say that they feel very safe and that the

atmosphere in the college has improved. Learners and employers have a good opportunity to make their voice heard in the development of the college. Feedback is collected from learners although it is not always used as well as it could be to influence the strategic direction of the college. Many learners participate in community events.

8. Strategies introduced to improve the quality of teaching and learning have been highly effective and most lessons are now good. However, in a few instances more able learners are not sufficiently challenged by their work. The quality of provision in three of the subject areas previously inspected improved from inadequate to good, and in another to satisfactory.
9. The college has regained the confidence of a wide range of partners including local schools, employers and community groups. It provides a broad range of courses to meet the diverse needs of the community. The college's self-assessment and strategic plan acknowledge that further work is needed to rebalance the academic and vocational elements of the curriculum. Learners enjoy lessons and value the good quality support and advice that they receive from staff.
10. The new Principal and senior leadership team have had outstanding success in bringing about positive change. They have been well supported by middle managers. The much needed change of culture identified by the Principal, to focus staff on core priorities, has been achieved. Performance management is rigorous and supportive. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good and the improvements made have added to the college's ability to offer an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good and improving quickly. Long course success rates improved in 2008/09 across all levels for all groups and were comparable to, or better than, those found in similar colleges. The in-year retention rate has improved significantly and is very high.
- Outcomes for learners on employer-based courses improved significantly in 2008/09. Achievements on advanced apprenticeships are high and on apprenticeships much improved to around average levels. Outcomes on Train to Gain programmes are mostly good but have recently been adversely affected by redundancies at some employers.
- Continuous assessment records show that progress has improved in most subject areas. Most learners make the progress expected of them compared to their prior attainment and an increasing number exceeds expectations. However, the number attaining high grades in advanced level examinations remains low. Employers praise apprentices' maturity and attitude to work. Learners feel safe in the college and behave sensibly.

- Attendance and punctuality have improved and are good. A high proportion of learners enjoy their studies. Practical skills are well developed. Most develop good basic literacy and numeracy skills and are capable in the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Many learners advance through the different levels of courses available.
- Teaching and learning are good. Most learners are on track to meet or exceed their learning targets. Learners enjoy taking part in practical activities in most subject areas and develop good vocational skills. However, activities in a minority of lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for more able learners.
- A broad range of courses is offered. This has been reviewed and made more appropriate to meet the needs and interests of learners. Further changes are planned to achieve the correct balance between vocational and academic programmes. A wide range of extra-curricular and community-based activities is offered, although the participation rate of some groups of full-time learners is low.
- Partnerships have been re-established with organisations that had lost confidence in the college's ability to deliver high quality education. Many organisations now trust the college and add to its ability to support learners effectively. The collection of employers' views has improved although the level of participation and usage varies between subject areas.
- Learners receive appropriate advice and guidance to ensure that they make the right choice of course. Induction arrangements are good and drop out rates are extremely low. Learners' progress is tracked meticulously during tutorials. Learners' views are collected but, in the main, actions taken as a result are limited to minor practical aspects of the college's provision.
- The Principal and his senior team provide excellent leadership. Curriculum and cross-college managers support them very well. The governors have a good overview of the strengths and areas for improvement of the college. Plans are ambitious and well focused.
- The use of data by senior managers has improved and is now accurate. Staff comply with the improved and rigorous college systems. However, the use of data to monitor the progress of individuals and groups taking into account their starting points is not always analysed sufficiently well in GCE A-level programmes.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good; systems are in place to monitor the progress of different groups of learners. Action has been taken to close any gaps in achievement. The college provides an inclusive and supportive environment where learners feel valued and respected.

What does Riverside College Halton need to do to improve further?

- Sustain and improve pass rates and the progress that learners make in the small number of underperforming courses. Increase the use of data to evaluate

the progress that GCE A-level learners make in their learning and achievement compared to their prior attainment and ability.

- Improve the small number of lessons where learners are not sufficiently challenged by their work. Use questioning in lessons that develops learners' understanding more fully. Ensure that more able learners achieve the high grades of which they are capable.
- Increase the participation of full-time learners in enrichment programmes to widen their broader learning experience at the college.
- Build upon existing work to ensure that the level and type of programmes offered will more closely match the needs and interests of learners. Consistently use learners' and employers' views more effectively to review the range and quality of programmes in all areas, so that their perspective informs the future direction of the college.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- accessible senior staff who are visible around the college and promote a safe and friendly environment
- approachable and supportive teachers and support staff
- the enjoyable nature of their lessons
- the advice they receive about applying to university
- the absence of favouritism and everyone being treated fairly
- the library and learning resource centre.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the general social facilities at Astmoor construction centre
- the range and quality of food offered
- the range of social events to celebrate the achievement of learners
- the adequacy of common room facilities
- the punctuality of some college buses.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the improvements that have been made to the leadership of the college
- the better channels of communication that keep them well informed about the progress of learners
- the appropriate range of courses that meet the needs of their employees
- the expertise of staff and relevant industrial expertise.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the breadth of the courses offered
- the opening times of the college to include weekends
- the help from the college in accessing alternative forms of funding for their learners
- the courses developed under multi-agency contracts
- the details about the college's contact for employers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

11. Based on the very rapid rate of improvement since the last inspection and the impact of excellent leadership, the college has an outstanding capacity to make further improvements. The college has remedied successfully all of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. It has improved attendance, punctuality and retention rates significantly for all current groups of learners.
12. The quality of provision has improved from inadequate to good and the majority of learners are now making good progress in lessons. The system to monitor the quality of lessons is used to identify areas for improvement accurately and to put in place effective support for teachers.
13. Self-assessment is rigorous and accurate. The college sets ambitious but realistic targets and is making excellent progress towards meeting them. Partnerships with employers have been rebuilt and plans are in place to extend the curriculum further to ensure that it matches the needs of learners and employers even more closely.
14. Senior leaders have a clear vision for the future development of the college, focusing firmly on outcomes for learners. The management of the performance of staff has improved and is based on high expectations. Governance has been strengthened and governors provide good support and effective challenge to college leaders. The college's financial position is sound and appropriate investment has been made in enhancing the college's resources.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

15. For learners aged 16 to 18, success rates on long courses improved in 2008/09 to around the national average. At foundation and intermediate levels they rose to above the national average and at advanced level they were broadly in line. For learners aged over 19, long course success rates improved at all three levels. At foundation and intermediate level they were well above the national average and at advanced level they were broadly in line. Retention and pass rates both improved significantly last year although at intermediate and advanced levels for learners aged over 19 the retention rates remain below average. College data for courses ending in 2007/08 could not be relied upon to provide an accurate picture of the college's success rates but inspectors judged data for 2008/09 to be reliable.
16. In-year retention rates have improved significantly on all courses at all levels and for learners of all ages. Attendance and punctuality have improved and are good. The college has a robust monitoring and tracking system in place and has begun to close the gap in performance between different groups.

17. Continuous assessment and examination results show significant improvement in learners' attainment and the levels of progress that they are making. More than half are exceeding the minimum target grade that they have been set and the majority of the rest are on track to achieve their target grades. However, the proportion of learners achieving high grades remains low.
18. The apprenticeship success rate has improved and is around the national average. Advanced apprentices' success rates are above the national average. Train to Gain success rates have improved and are around the national average despite having been adversely affected by large numbers of employees being made redundant.
19. Success rates on short courses have improved and are now above the national average. The performance of different groups of learners is monitored closely and, where gaps have been identified, plans have been put in place this year to close them. Success rates for all groups are improving at a very rapid rate.
20. Learners aged 14 to 16 make good progress and a high proportion achieve their learning aims. The progression rates between levels of courses have improved and are good in most areas. The progress that learners make in key and basic skills has improved and learners become better equipped for further education or employment. Key skills at level 3 is no longer offered as a discrete qualification but has become embedded within GCE A-level subjects. Success rates for key and basic skills qualifications at levels 1 and 2 have improved and are significantly above national averages.
21. Learners feel safe and say that the college provides a secure and welcoming environment. They like the high profile of managers around the college, who check ID badges and ask about their welfare. Learners feel reassured by this hands-on approach. Good safety practice is covered comprehensively in induction and throughout the tutorial programme. Standards of health and safety practice are checked at employers' premises and work placements.
22. Learners make well-informed choices about their health and well-being. A range of healthy food options is available in most refectories although some learners criticise its variety and quality. Fresh drinking water is readily available. Healthy eating is promoted through themed weeks and through the Commit to Fit promotion which is well received by learners. Sexual health is promoted in a wide variety of ways and anti-smoking cessation clinics are held regularly.
23. Learners make a positive contribution to the college and the local community and participate in a range of community events including community policing initiatives which support the elimination of anti-social behaviour, sustainable communities projects, and the development of a local history web site. Beauty therapy learners provide valuable support to local cancer care groups.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

24. Teaching and learning are good. The college has invested significant management time, staff development and resources to improve the quality of learners' experience in the classroom and these have been effective very quickly. The proportion of good or better lessons has improved and there has been a reduction in the amount of inadequate teaching. Managers have communicated clearly the high standards expected in the delivery of lessons.
25. A new team of college observers has been well trained and a robust system includes moderation of grades. In joint observations, inspectors agreed in the main with the college's observers about the strengths and aspects of lessons that could be improved. College observations are focused on priority subject areas where concerns are raised by learners or where previous outcomes are below expectations. Inspectors found that many areas for improvement identified through observations had been addressed successfully.
26. The majority of lessons are well planned to meet the needs of the range of learners although plans are not put into practice effectively in a minority of lessons. Well-qualified teachers provide good support but some more able learners are insufficiently challenged. Learners develop a good range of vocational skills in practical lessons and these are often linked well to theory. The pace of lessons is generally good. Most teachers use questioning techniques effectively although some miss opportunities to develop learners' understanding through direct questioning. Learners' feedback on the quality of lessons is very good. Learners work hard in a productive and supportive environment, they enjoy lessons and are well motivated. The use of technology to support learning has continued to improve and is good.
27. Assessment processes and practices have improved significantly and are now good. A programme of independent study and regular homework is well planned across all courses. Many vocational assignments prepare learners well for the world of work although there is insufficient use of industrial links in business and engineering. In employer responsive provision the monitoring and review of learners' progress has improved although targets in care reviews are not sufficiently specific. Teachers provide detailed feedback to learners on how to improve the quality of their work to meet external standards.
28. The provision satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of learners. A review of the curriculum offer has increased significantly the proportion of courses available at foundation and intermediate level. The delivery of courses on each of the sites has been remodelled effectively and some unsuccessful courses have been withdrawn. In the sixth form centre a range of vocational courses has been introduced alongside a broad range of GCE AS and A-level courses, which provide good choices for learners. The college recognises that improvements need to be made to the proportion of learners progressing to advanced level hairdressing and engineering and from GCE AS to A-level courses. In its commitment to the local community, the college has developed

programmes for young people who are not in education or employment and the long-term unemployed. Provision for learners aged 14 to 16 is good; the college leads on the delivery of the new diploma in construction and the built environment and recently introduced the young apprentice scheme in hairdressing.

29. A broad range of enrichment opportunities available to learners has been developed well in response to learners' feedback and participation has improved to a satisfactory level. The college supplements weekly activities with events such as team building and themed weeks on health issues and equality. A good range of additional qualifications is available in most subject areas except care.
30. Partnerships are used effectively to develop the provision and meet learners' needs. Senior leaders have worked hard to re-establish relationships and improve partnerships in the local community and the college is now a recognised player and is represented on key groups. Relationships with local schools and the local authority are good. Employers value the new arrangements for developing courses to meet their employees' specific needs. Train to Gain provision has continued to develop well since the last inspection with much repeat business. However, the number of work-based learners on apprenticeship programmes remains low.
31. Guidance and support for learners have improved significantly and in-year retention rates are very high. Alongside the revised personal tutorial programme, a well-designed system to monitor learners' attendance and attitude to their work at college is used very well to check closely on their progress. Any learner identified as underperforming is given a pastoral support worker with whom they set weekly targets for improvement. Learners speak positively of these processes and the significant impact on their learning. Teaching staff are clear about how the systems should be used and their purpose as a tool to improve success for learners. The new electronic monitoring 'STAR' system integrates the many learning targets and support initiatives that have been developed.
32. A broad range of academic support sessions and revision classes improved significantly the GCE AS and A-level learners' preparation for the recent January examinations. Diagnosis of additional learning support needs is prompt, and effective support is put in place very quickly. The success of learners in receipt of support is at least as good, and in some cases better, than that of other learners. The college works very well with a number of specialist agencies to ensure that learning support is of a high quality. Parents are well informed about learners' progress.
33. Initial guidance is supportive and rigorous; realistic entry requirements are now implemented more consistently. Induction ensures that there are appropriate opportunities for learners to transfer between courses. Improved guidance has increased the proportion of learners on more appropriate advanced vocational

programmes rather than GCE AS and A-level courses, and drop-out rates have fallen.

34. The personal tutorial system is well managed and the tutorial curriculum has a significant impact on learners' enjoyment of their time at college. Learners say that they have very helpful discussions in their individual tutorials.
35. Careers advice and guidance are highly effective. Visits and support for university applications have led to almost all of the current advanced level learners applying to higher education and successfully securing a place. The tracking of learners' career options and progress is very good; learners' progress is monitored and every effort is made to ensure that they enter their chosen further education or employment.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

36. Leadership and management are good. The new Principal quickly carried out a frank assessment of the college's position and launched a change of culture and new beginning. An excellent strategic plan, developed in consultation with staff and governors, sets a clear direction and challenging targets. The Principal quickly made considerable progress towards rebuilding confidence within the college and with external partners. The new senior team provides outstanding leadership. An ethos of high expectations, high standards and well-founded ambition is now evident. Judgements made during this inspection justify the hard work and dedication of staff, managers and governors. Inspectors agree with the college's accurate, confident and ambitious self-assessment. Of the five subject areas inspected, three moved from inadequate to good and one from inadequate to satisfactory.
37. Curriculum management is good in most subject areas. Managers set demanding targets, monitor them carefully at all levels using new and robust systems, and most targets are met. All college plans are linked to the strategic plan and priorities. Monitoring systems are sophisticated but easy to operate. Any exceptional performance, outstanding or inadequate, is identified and reported to the Principal and senior managers. All actions required are followed up by a manager without exception.
38. Governance is good. Governors worked closely with the Principal to re-align the strategic direction of the college. Carefully chosen new governors have increased the range of skills and they have contributed to the improved monitoring and more robust challenging of college's performance. Governors fulfil their statutory duties on safeguarding. The governors' self-assessment is robust and self-critical. Governors have identified the need to improve attendance on some sub-committees. The inadequate arrangements for appointing learner governors, identified at the previous inspection, are resolved.
39. The arrangements for quality improvements are outstanding. They contribute to the significant and sustained improvements in learners' outcomes and the

quality of provision. The self-assessment process is very effective and all staff make a valuable contribution. The use of learners' and employers' views to promote improvement is generally good, although more could be done in a minority of subject areas to focus on making improvements as a result of feedback. Feedback is collected in a variety of ways, which helps to increase response rates. The self-assessment report is accurate, clearly written and contains appropriately weighted judgements, clear supporting evidence, accurate grades and data. The arrangements for observing teaching and learning are robust and have contributed to the improved teaching and learning in many subject areas in a very short period of time.

40. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college provides a safe environment where staff, learners and employers are treated with respect. Bullying and harassment are not tolerated and the very rare instances of such behaviour are dealt with quickly and effectively. The college has an appropriate range of policies, procedures and codes of practice. All are reviewed regularly and subjected to a rigorous assessment of their impact. The college's equality and diversity committee has been strengthened and is highly effective. The inclusion of work-based learning managers on the committee has given them access to good practice and helped them to improve the formerly inadequate arrangements in this area. Clear targets are set, monitored and met in all aspects of the college's work, including the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons. Data are used effectively to monitor any differences in achievement between groups of learners. No significant differences exist within the college other than those that are common nationally, although the college is beginning to close those gaps. Arrangements for handling complaints are highly effective and result in the speedy resolution of most issues.
41. Performance management is particularly good and is valued by managers and staff. Dealing with underperformance is a key strategic priority. Managers have been trained in all aspects of managing performance. A significant number of capability and disciplinary procedures have been effectively resolved. The system is rigorous and rewards good performance as well as quickly addressing poor performance.
42. The college has made significant recent investment in the estate, which is satisfactory and much improved. Careful and well-chosen investments have been made in staff development. Examples of sustainability good practice are evident throughout college. Facilities management makes a valuable contribution to raising learners' awareness of environmental considerations as part of their enrichment activities. A new sustainability policy is awaiting approval by governors. Financial management is good. Improved learners' outcomes represent an increase in value for money, which is good.

Subject areas

Health, care and public services

Grade 2

Context

43. The college offers courses from entry level to advanced level in childcare, teaching assistant, health and social care and counselling qualifications. The majority of the 695 learners are aged 16 to 18 and attend full time. Around a fifth are aged over 19 and are part-time learners. Learner responsive courses are offered across two sites and the Train to Gain programme is delivered on a one-to-one basis to 66 learners in the workplace. The majority of learners are female and of White British heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates have improved rapidly and most are above national averages. In-year retention and pass rates are very high on all full-time courses. Attendance is good. The majority of learners are on target to complete their full award. On Train to Gain, overall success rates are around average; timely success rates have been low but are much improved this year.
- Learners develop a good range of work-place skills. Many learners start their course with low levels of prior attainment and significant barriers to learning. Their social skills develop strongly and their self-confidence increases. Learners are highly motivated and develop good work ethics. The range and take up of progression opportunities to higher-level courses in college, higher education or related employment are good.
- Teaching and learning are good. Learners' interest is engaged and sustained. Good teaching methods are used to promote and extend learning. The pace of learning meets individual needs and teaching materials are effectively used. Key learning points are reinforced well and regular checks made that learning has taken place.
- Assessment practices are satisfactory although learners' progress reviews on Train to Gain provision have insufficient measurable targets. A satisfactory range of full-time courses meets the needs and interests of learners. However, short courses such as first aid and manual handling are not available to develop learners' skills. Partnerships with employers are used well to promote learning and employability skills.
- Care, guidance and support are good and have had a significant impact on improving retention and attendance. Staff have a good range of current occupational experience and skills. They provide sensitive support to learners to overcome social and personal barriers. Learners value the support that they receive and recognise that it helps them to stay on programme and achieve.
- Curriculum management is good. New curriculum managers have increased the number of permanent staff and introduced effective processes to develop

teachers' skills. Resources are used well. However, there is insufficient sharing of good practice between the employer and learner responsive provision. Opportunities to integrate work in areas such as sharing provider placements, standardising recording documents and developing short course provision are not used sufficiently.

- The promotion of equality and diversity and procedures for the safeguarding are good. A culture of mutual respect and tolerance enables the many learners who have previously been disengaged from education and training to settle in quickly and achieve well. Staff understand equality, diversity and safeguarding issues and have received appropriate training. However, equality and diversity are not always adequately explored with learners during their progress reviews.

What does Riverside College Halton need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates, particularly on full-time health and social care programmes, and timely success rates on the Train to Gain programmes by monitoring closely and evaluating the recently implemented strategies.
- Improve the quality of the employer responsive review process to ensure that learners' targets are realistic, their progress is appropriately evaluated and sufficient emphasis is given to exploring their understanding of equality and diversity issues.
- Develop communication channels and systems to share good practice across the employer and learner responsive provision.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Context

44. The college has 476 learners on full-time and part-time courses in mechanical engineering and motor vehicle engineering. Programme levels range from entry to advanced. Of the learners currently enrolled on full-time programmes, 65 are foundation, 46 are intermediate and 32 are advanced. An additional 269 learners are on Train to Gain programmes in motor vehicle and engineering studies. Currently the subject area has 25 apprentices and 43 learners aged 14 to 16 on entry level provision. The vast majority of learners are male and of White British heritage.

Key findings

- Success rates on NVQ programmes are high. New programmes were introduced last year and so far no learners have dropped out of these. Advanced apprenticeship success rates have improved and are high. The success rates on Train to Gain programmes are very high. The success rate on the National Diploma programme, although around average, did not increase last year; in-year retention is satisfactory.
- Learners develop good practical skills and produce work of a high standard, particularly in welding and motor vehicle. Learners feel safe at college and demonstrate safe working practices in workshops. Attendance and punctuality have improved and are generally good. However, during the inspection week attendance levels dropped and were low on the National Diploma course.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lesson plans are appropriate and teachers share objectives with learners. A wide variety of activities is used to stimulate learners' interest and promote enjoyable lessons. The recently introduced lesson observation scheme ensures that lessons are of a good quality. Information and learning technology (ILT) is used to good effect to support delivery and stimulate learners' interest and interaction.
- Partners, including schools and employers, discuss regularly the training provision and curriculum development opportunities. Although there are few vocational programmes at advanced level, employers confirm that the college is very responsive and meets their needs. Work experience opportunities are insufficient for full-time learners.
- All learners receive accurate initial assessment during a comprehensive induction and are advised about additional support. Vocationally qualified staff provide good additional support for learners. All learners benefit from well-planned tutorials that include a range of guest speakers from local industries and charities, who add value to the learning process.

- The accurate self-assessment report identifies strengths and areas for improvement and results in a well-focused quality improvement plan. Targets are monitored rigorously and updated regularly by the programme director.
- Effective management improves the performance of teachers. Scheduled meetings between managers and curriculum teams are used to monitor the success of courses in meeting their targets. Improved use of tracking data allows staff to identify areas for improvement and devise targeted action plans.
- Classrooms are well equipped with digital projectors and supporting ILT facilities. A wide range of information and safety posters is displayed on walls. Workshops are clean, tidy and well organised with a good range of tools and equipment; although some motor vehicle equipment is old it is still fit for purpose.

What does Riverside College Halton need to do to improve further?

- Determine the cause of the recent low learners' attendance rate; introduce appropriate actions to reinforce current college attendance policies and procedures.
- Improve success rates on the National Diploma programme. Ensure that current learners stay on course and that the quality of provision continues to meet their needs and interests.
- Increase the range of advanced level provision to allow vocational progression opportunities for craft-based learners and an alternative to the current academic programmes.
- Provide work experience opportunities for all learners to improve their employability skills and prepare them for future employment.

Service enterprises, hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

45. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses from entry to advanced level in hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapy. The subject area has 329 full-time and 186 part-time learners. Of these about half are aged 16 to 18. The vast majority of learners are female and of White British heritage. Currently the subject area has 20 apprentices and 43 learners aged 14 to 16, including nine learners enrolled on the Young Apprenticeship programme.

Key findings

- Learners' achievements are good. Success rates are very high on many courses. Success rates for apprentices are high and achieved within the planned time. Success rates on NVQ levels 1 and 2 beauty therapy are below the national average, largely due to low retention rates. Effective action to improve retention has led to in-year improvement. The standard of learners' work is good. Assignments are well presented and learners take pride in their work.
- In practical sessions in the salons, learners demonstrate a high level of awareness of health and safety. They gain the necessary knowledge and understanding to enable them to make informed choices about their health and well-being. Learners benefit from external speakers on topics such as cyber bullying and sexual health. Advanced beauty therapy learners began a 'Commit to get fit' campaign which was extended across the college.
- Learners are encouraged to become involved in a variety of community-based development activities; for example, many attend a local Cancer Support Centre and carry out a range of treatments and services to promote relaxation and well-being to cancer sufferers.
- Most lessons are delivered at a good pace and challenge learners with a variety of enjoyable activities. However, in a few lessons teachers did not set challenging objectives and activities, particularly for the more able learners. Underdeveloped questioning techniques did not extend the more able learners' thinking or extend them sufficiently.
- Assessment is well planned; learners' progress is carefully tracked and monitored and discussed at individual tutorials. Constructive feedback supports and guides learners towards good skills improvement. Feedback on written work corrects spelling and punctuation and is linked to learners' additional skills for life qualifications.
- The range of programmes is developed carefully taking into account the views of learners and employers. In response to learners' requests, a wider range of extension activities and an extra salon workshop now enrich their learning experience and improve success in additional qualifications. In response to local

employers' needs the area extended the curriculum delivered in beauty therapy to include microdermabrasion, spray tanning and hair extension training.

- Partnerships to meet the needs of the local community and enhance learners' experiences have been developed well. A partnership with the local YMCA provides hairdressing programmes aimed at young people who are not in employment or education and those from the travelling community. The area works with local schools to provide a Young Apprentice hairdressing programme.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are highly effective and contribute to high attendance and retention rates. Most learners with identified learning needs take up the support offered. Learners are well supported by personal tutors and vocationally qualified support workers. Part-time and work-based learners particularly value the support that they receive. Tutorials are well planned; group tutorials emphasise the importance of equality and diversity and health and safety.
- Good channels of communication, a proactive management approach and intervention strategies ensure a prompt response to issues of concern. Staff are set challenging targets for improvement and these are rigorously monitored. A mentor system is provided for all new staff and the peer observation process is used by all staff. The self-assessment report is largely accurate and course reviews are sufficiently evaluative.
- Equality and diversity are well promoted and embedded in lesson activities; however, male learners remain under-represented in the department.

What does Riverside College Halton need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on NVQ levels 1 and 2 beauty therapy courses by setting and monitoring challenging targets for retention and achievement. Ensure that the actions already taken to improve the quality of provision are embedded across all courses.
- Improve the minority of lessons that lack challenge for the more able learners. Develop teachers' ability to set challenging objectives to promote pace and activity for all. Ensure that they utilise effective questioning techniques to challenge more able learners.
- Improve the participation rate of male learners. Review the impact that recruitment and marketing processes have on the recruitment of male learners; use learners' views more effectively to enhance recruitment practices.

Performing arts, media and communication

Grade 2

Context

46. Courses are offered from entry to advanced level to 446 learners. The majority of learners are aged 16 to 18 and are on full-time programmes at advanced level; some 55 learners are on part-time courses. The majority of learners are female and the vast majority are of White British heritage. Crafts, creative arts and design programmes are also offered within the department, although these courses were not examined in as much detail by inspectors.

Key findings

- Learners' achievement rates on advanced vocational programmes have improved and are at or above national averages. The success rates on the National Diploma performing arts, National Diploma music and First Diploma performing arts courses are well above average.
- The department has an inclusive recruitment policy and many learners enter programmes with relatively low levels of prior attainment. Learners make satisfactory progress on most GCE AS programmes. Pass rates are around average on GCE A-level media studies, film studies and music technology although few learners gain high grades. The success rate on GCE A-level dance is around average although on GCE AS courses it is slightly below average.
- Better advice and guidance processes have been introduced. In-year retention rates have improved and are now high. Attendance rates have improved and are high.
- Learners understand the importance of health and safety and feel safe and secure in college. They take part in many community-based projects beyond the classroom that enable them to relate their training to employment opportunities.
- Learners make good progress in most lessons. They are enthusiastic and enjoy their work. Activities are varied and use contemporary themes to stimulate interest. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve. Lessons are differentiated to cater for learners of different abilities. However, the tracking of individual learners' progress on some GCE A-level programmes is not sufficiently focused.
- Teachers use ILT extensively in lessons, which enables learners to extend their learning and take part in research activities. Teaching has improved due to better programme management and a more focused observation system.
- The range of programmes offered is very broad and although this offers learners a very wide range of choices it means that some group sizes are small and this occasionally has a limiting effect on group activities. The development

of the Foundation Degree programme has made learners' progression to higher education more accessible.

- Tutorials provide good support for learners; a more robust approach and higher expectations with regard to attendance and punctuality have had a very positive impact. Arrangements to support learners with additional learning needs are good.
- Managers share responsibility for different specialist areas and this ensures that support for staff and learners is well targeted. Accurate self-assessment and planning has brought about substantial improvement. However, the use of data to evaluate learners' progress on GCE A-level courses is insufficient. Specific targets are not always set to improve GCE A-level success rates.
- Rigorous monitoring has resulted in improved success rates on advanced vocational programmes. Increased sharing of good practice by teachers has improved the quality of lessons. Resources are well managed.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is given a high priority. An excellent project developed in the department has been used to promote awareness of equality throughout the college. Targeted support has resulted in significant improvements to the success rates of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds.

What does Riverside College Halton need to do to improve further?

- Improve the levels of progress that learners make on a minority of GCE A-level programmes. Use data on learners' prior attainment more effectively to set realistic and challenging targets at both individual and course level.
- Ensure that the breadth of programmes offered continues to ensure an inclusive approach to recruitment but at the same time provides learners with a realistic assessment of course requirements and their chances of success.
- Develop the management processes that have been used so successfully on vocational programmes to improve GCE A-level provision further.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

47. The subject area has 185 full-time learners; almost all are aged 16 to 18. Some 64 learners are on GCE AS courses in accounting, business studies and law; 43 learners are on GCE A-level courses in these subjects. Another 78 learners follow full-time vocational courses in business studies at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced level. Some 551 learners, mainly adults and some apprentices, work part time towards NVQ qualifications related to their workplace, mainly in business improvement techniques. Three learners aged 14 to 16 attend a vocational course at foundation level. Most learners are of White British heritage. Around half of the learners are female.

Key findings

- Success rates for all GCE A-level and most GCE AS courses improved significantly in the last two years to satisfactory levels. Very low success rates persist on GCE AS law. Rates for vocational courses at foundation and intermediate levels rose over the same period to broadly average. The intermediate level administration course maintained its success rate at 100%.
- Train to Gain learners working towards NVQs in 2009 were making good progress but success rates were badly affected by large-scale redundancies. Timely success rates for administration apprentices were low in 2008 but current learners are all on track to achieve within the agreed timescale.
- In-year retention rates have improved and are high on most courses. Learners attend regularly and participate actively in lessons. The majority of learners make the progress expected of them. Learners clearly enjoy their learning and take pride in the progress they are making.
- Most learners develop good specialist knowledge and understanding that will enable them to progress into work or higher education. Almost half of learners who will leave advanced business-related courses in 2010 plan to study on a business-related subject at degree level. Learners feel safe in college and develop the capacity to make informed choices about their health and well-being.
- Teachers use a range of methods effectively to ensure that learners develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Teaching is particularly good on entry and foundation courses. In good lessons teachers plan well to meet the needs of individual learners. They vary the pace and activity to maintain learners' enthusiasm and they check their progress frequently. Teachers have insufficient opportunities to share good practice.
- Learners' needs for additional support are particularly well met on entry and intermediate courses. Assessment is generally satisfactory. In a few lessons teachers do not check learners' progress effectively and are satisfied with superficial responses.

- Full-time vocational courses provide clear routes for learners to progress. More than half of the learners who completed a course at intermediate level in 2009 have progressed to an advanced level course. The Foundation Degree in business offers an alternative higher education route for local learners. The range of GCE AS and A-level courses gives full-time learners a good choice of business-related subjects.
- Long-standing partnerships with employers have resulted in many opportunities for local employees to improve their skills and qualifications. Large numbers of learners have had their workplace learning accredited and their needs for further support in basic skills identified. Employers are becoming more involved in the delivery of the business curriculum although this remains underdeveloped.
- Attendance, punctuality and retention have improved because learners are assessed on entry and receive better support. Intervention strategies on entry and intermediate level courses ensure that those who are at risk of leaving or of not performing as expected have effective support. For advanced level learners the guidance, tracking of progress and interventions are not as well developed.
- Curriculum management is good and has a positive impact on the quality of provision. Clear expectations of high standards in teaching and a comprehensive structure supports teachers well to improve teaching and learning. Managers set challenging but realistic course targets and monitor their achievement. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate. Although employers' feedback is collected it is not used fully in the development of courses.
- Teachers' promotion of equality and diversity issues in lessons is good. Learners have good awareness of equality and diversity and are confident that the college addresses issues promptly. Equality and diversity feature on all lesson plans. Teachers use lessons and tutorials well to develop further learners' understanding of the impact that equality and diversity issues have on their lives.

What does Riverside College Halton need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on advanced level provision by ensuring that learners are placed on appropriate courses and by monitoring their progress rigorously and supporting them to achieve high grades.
- Improve the consistency in the quality of teaching and learning by sharing good practice.
- Develop the contribution of employers' feedback to the delivery of business courses.

Information about the inspection

48. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and 6 additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's assistant principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local LSC or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
49. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Riverside College Halton

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall | 14-16 | 16-18 Learner responsive | 19+ Learner responsive | Employer responsive |
|--|---------|-------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners | 2741 | - | 2106 | 545 | 90 |
| Full-time learners | 1851 | 181 | 64 | 535 | 1071 |
| Part-time learners | | | | | |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 1 | | | | |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners progress? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 2 | | | | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 2 | | | | |
| Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?* | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?* | 2 | | | | |
| Quality of provision | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users? | 3 | | | | |
| How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners? | 3 | | | | |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 2 | | | | |
| Leadership and management | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 1 | | | | |
| How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?* | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners? | 1 | | | | |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 2 | | | | |

*where applicable to the type of provision

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