

West Cheshire College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130618
Name of lead inspector: Vivien Shipley HMI
Last day of inspection: 23 April 2010
Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: Handbridge Centre
Eaton Road
Handbridge
Chester
Cheshire
CH4 7ER

Telephone number: 01244 677677

Information about the provider

1. West Cheshire College, a large general further education college, specialises in vocational education and training and is the largest provider in the area. The college has three main campuses; Ellesmere Port, Chester and Capenhurst, and also provides courses for employers and in community venues. In Cheshire, South Wirral and Wales there are 18 secondary schools within easy travelling distance of the college that offer post-16 provision. The college's mission is to provide 'access to opportunity'. Its aim is to close the skills gap in the local area through making learners employable and work ready, and supporting employers to achieve their business aims and improve their productivity.
2. Almost half of the college's learners come from areas identified to be in the highest 20% on the index of social deprivation for England. Most Welsh learners come from Flintshire which has one of the highest rates of free school meal take up in Wales. Nearly half of all adults in Ellesmere Port and over a third of those in Chester have no level 2 qualifications. Almost a third of adults in Ellesmere Port have no qualifications at all. In 2008, 42% of adults in Chester and District, 47% in Ellesmere Port and Neston and 48% in the Wirral had literacy levels at or below level 1. The proportion of pupils in West Cheshire schools achieving 5 GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics has been below the national average for the last four years. In 2008/09, only 5% of full-time learners at the college had GCSE grades C or above in English, mathematics and information technology (IT). Over half of all learners aged 16 to 18 receive educational maintenance allowances.
3. The college offers provision from foundation level to higher education in 13 of the QCA 15 subject areas, for 14 to 19 year olds and adults. Provision for employers includes apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships, Train to Gain and bespoke training. It also provides tailored provision for unemployed people through Jobcentre Plus. The college is an associate college of the University of Chester. It was one of the first providers to achieve the Training Quality Standard. It has an Investors in People Bronze Award, the Matrix Award, a National Skills Shop and holds a Beacon Award for Practical Teaching and Practical Learning.
4. At the time of the inspection the college was implementing a major capital development across the two main sites in Chester and Ellesmere Port, due to be completed in stages during 2011.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following provider:
 - Cheshire West and Chester Council (adult and community learning)

6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:

- Princes Trust (certificate in personal, teamwork, community and wider key skills)
- Bridge Foyer (self-development through learning)
- Neuro-Muscular (certificate in graphic design)
- Nail Training Company (nail services)
- Business Impact (engineering and business improvement)
- Epoch 2000 Ltd (business improvement)
- International School of Beauty (beauty and holistic courses, anatomy and physiology)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	10 full-time learners 223 part-time learners 72 Young Apprentices
Further education (16 to 18)	1,847 full-time learners 416 part-time learners
Foundation learning	975 full-time learners 116 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	791 full-time learners 4,848 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	2,675 learners 390 apprentices
Informal adult learning:	61 PCDL direct contract

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 1
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	1
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	
Health, care and child development	2
Engineering and motor vehicle	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Visual and performing arts and media	2

Overall effectiveness

- West Cheshire is a good college with outstanding capacity to improve. Learners enjoy college and make good progress. The proportion of college-based learners completing their courses successfully has improved consistently and is satisfactory. Rates of improvement vary between subject areas but the college has appropriate plans to resolve this. On provision for employers, including Train to Gain and apprenticeships, very high proportions complete their programmes successfully. College-based learners and employers are able to choose from a very wide range of vocational courses that respond to local skills shortages and national priorities. Opportunities for work experience and activities to enrich the curriculum are very well planned and are extremely effective in helping to raise learners' aspirations, preparing them for employment and progression to higher education. Learners receive outstanding care, guidance and support that are highly effective in helping them to achieve their targets. A high proportion of full-time learners progress to employment

and higher education when they leave college. High priority is given to safeguarding learners and to promoting equality and diversity and these aspects of the college's work are good. A culture of respect and tolerance permeates the college. A very active student union, supported by the college, represents learners' views well at governors' meetings.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on long courses have improved consistently and are satisfactory. Pass rates are high. At the time of the inspection, retention had improved and was high.
- Success rates on provision for employers are outstanding. On Train to Gain, success rates are very high. On apprenticeship programmes, success rates have improved consistently and are high.
- Learners enjoy college and make good progress. They acquire good vocational skills that help them to secure employment or progress to higher education. Their personal and social skills and self-confidence improve significantly. They learn to treat each other with respect and tolerance. Learners informed inspectors that they feel safe at college.
- On foundation and intermediate level programmes learners' progress is better than predicted from their prior qualifications. At advanced level most learners make the progress expected of them. However, as identified in the college's self-assessment, success rates and the proportion of high grades vary between courses and are low in public services, IT and business. Success rates were low on short courses in 2008/09.
- The college makes a significant contribution to improving the literacy, numeracy and language skills of adults from the communities it serves. Success rates on Skills for Life courses are high. Most learners aged 16 to 18 make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills at foundation and intermediate level. However, too few have the opportunity to develop and attain advanced level qualifications in communication and number.
- Learners' economic and social well-being are outstanding. The college's focus on developing work skills and work readiness is extremely effective. All full-time learners benefit from very well planned work experience placements. A high proportion of learners obtain employment or progress to higher education at the end of their courses. Work-based learners develop skills and knowledge appreciated by their employers.
- Learners make an outstanding contribution to the wider community; many participate in voluntary work and fundraising activities for charities. Learners receive good support to help them make informed choices about their health and well-being, including advice on mental health, healthy eating and substance abuse.
- Teaching and learning are good. The majority of lessons are well planned to include motivating and stimulating activities that are vocationally relevant and prepare learners well for employment. In less effective lessons activities are not

sufficiently practical and varied to interest and challenge all learners. Training and assessment for work-based learners are very good.

- Learners have access to a broad range of relevant learning resources on the college's intranet that enable them to study at times to suit their individual circumstances and extend their learning outside of formal lessons. A high proportion of learners make effective use of these materials.
- Partnerships and collaborative working are outstanding. The college is highly proactive and responsive to employers' needs. Employers are extensively involved in the design and delivery of the curriculum. The college works with a wide range of community groups, resulting in increased participation in learning and social inclusion. Partnerships with schools are effective and lead to high progression into further education, training or employment.
- Guidance and support are outstanding. Arrangements for identifying learners who need additional help and for providing personalised support are highly effective in removing barriers to learning. Work-based learners and those on work experience are provided with high quality individual support from apprenticeship co-ordinators and job coaches which ensures that they are well prepared and benefit fully from employment. The tutorial programme is highly effective in improving retention and supporting learners to progress to the next level. College learners are provided with individualised support and excellent pastoral care from staff at all levels of the college.
- Leadership and management are good. Governors use their expertise well to set the mission for the college, to support senior managers and challenge performance. The Principal provides strong and energetic leadership and has been instrumental in ensuring that the college's provision meets the needs of the wider community and employers very well. Ambitious targets for raising standards and ensuring that learners develop high quality employability skills are mostly achieved.
- Staff place high priority on the promotion of equality and diversity. They work together very well internally, and with external partners, to ensure that barriers to learning are removed wherever possible. Data are analysed to identify differences in the achievement between, for example, males and females, and the small proportion of minority ethnic students. However, the college does not scrutinise fully the differences in the performance of other groups of learners.
- The college supports a very active student union that is highly effective in increasing understanding of issues that impact on learners' lives, such as mental health. This has a significant effect in improving learners' respect and tolerance for each other.

What does West Cheshire College need to do to improve further?

- Monitor and evaluate the impact of current strategies to improve retention and introduce new actions where appropriate to ensure that the high rates seen during the inspection are maintained.

- Develop a curriculum for learners with prior intermediate level qualifications so that they have the opportunity to develop further their skills in communication and number.
- Continue to implement strategies to improve teaching and learning to ensure that all learners benefit from the well-planned, vocationally-focused active learning observed in the best lessons.
- Extend further the analysis of success rates so that managers have a fuller understanding of the differences in performance between groups of learners.
- Prioritise and enhance further the performance management of courses where progress in improving success rates and the attainment of high grades have been slower.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the active student union that represents their views at governors' meetings and arranges student events
- the opportunities to study additional courses that help them to prepare for employment
- that the courses offered build their confidence and help them to progress within college and to higher education
- the friendly, supportive and encouraging teachers, tutors and learning support staff
- the personal challenges and additional activities that develop the skills to be independent in college and future life
- that staff treat learners equally and fairly
- the effort the college takes to ensure that learners feel safe
- the peer-to-peer mentoring and support from other learners that help them deal with personal and health issues.

What they feel could be improved:

- limited activities and social spaces on some college sites
- some of the equipment in catering, media and games technology that is not 'industry standard'.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like about the college:

- that it is a well-run college with professional staff and high standards
- the flexibly-arranged provision
- the partnership approach to developing and delivering courses
- the regular visits by staff to monitor learners' progress

- the provision developed to meet the needs of 'hard to reach' learners
- the effective communications
- the courses and ways of working that are examples of good practice and national organisations are able share with other providers.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the regularity of reports that provide employers with information on their employees' progress and grades.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

8. Through dynamic leadership the Principal and senior managers have transformed the college into one which is ambitious and where expectations are high. Success rates on long courses have improved consistently since the last inspection, at a faster rate than seen nationally, and are now satisfactory. Success rates on provision for employers have also improved and are outstanding on Train to Gain courses and high on apprenticeships. Pass rates are high in most subjects and learners make good progress. Retention has improved and is high. Robust monitoring of learners' progress by senior managers and their relentless focus on improving teaching and learning hold staff at all levels of the college to account for their performance. Outstanding guidance and support are highly effective in raising learners' attainment. A rigorous process for quality assurance and accurate self-assessment trigger clear actions for improvement which are reviewed regularly.
9. Very strong financial management and thorough transition planning for the new accommodation, due for completion in 2010, have ensured that the college is strategically well positioned to continue to achieve its high ambitions.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. The overall success rates on long courses for learners have improved consistently over the last four years and are satisfactory. Pass rates are high on most qualifications. Retention has improved consistently over the last four years as a result of managers' and teachers' strong focus on monitoring the performance of individual learners. In 2008/09, the overall retention of learners aged 16 to 18 was high; for adults it was satisfactory. At the time of the inspection, retention was high at all levels. Success rates on short courses were low in 2008/09.
11. On provision for employers success rates are very high. On Train to Gain courses success rates are outstanding and on apprenticeships they are high. Progression to higher education from work-based courses is high in engineering. Employers are highly satisfied with the quality of the provision the college provides for their employees.
12. Success rates and the pace of improvement vary across subject areas. Performance is high in a number of subjects including leisure, travel and tourism and preparation for life and work. However, as the college recognises in its self-assessment, success rates on some courses in public services and IT are low. Managers are implementing appropriate improvement plans in these areas to raise standards, but progress has been slow in a minority of courses. Retention and pass rates on programmes for learners aged 14 to 16 are high and almost all progress to further study. For example, in 2009 all of the learners on the young apprenticeship programme progressed to further study.

13. Success rates on Skills for Life programmes for adults are high. For full-time learners aged 16 to 18, although key skills success rates at foundation and intermediate levels are low, a high proportion attain full or partial qualifications in literacy and numeracy that help them to be successful on their main qualifications and to secure employment. Too few learners have the opportunity to develop and attain advanced level qualifications in communications and number.
14. Learners enjoy college and the majority make good progress. Given that a high proportion of learners have poor previous experiences of education and low entry qualifications, it is significant that most make very good progress in improving their literacy and numeracy, and personal and social skills. They develop positive attitudes to learning, their attendance improves significantly and they acquire vocational skills that prepare them very well for employment. Actions to improve their economic and social well-being are outstanding. Within subjects areas, and through the enrichment programme, learners engage in a wide range of activities that develop their enterprise and financial skills. All full-time learners develop their employability skills during very well-planned work experience. Learners' achievements are celebrated and valued, for example, through high quality displays of their work in college social areas, which raises their self-esteem significantly.
15. At foundation and intermediate levels learners make very good progress achieving higher grades than predicted from their prior qualifications. At advanced level most make the progress expected. The college has appropriate plans in place to raise standards on underperforming courses, such as in business, through rigorous target setting and monitoring of learners' progress. Progression between levels of courses within the college is good and a high proportion of learners secure employment or progress to higher education at the end of their programmes.
16. Staff work very hard to remove barriers to learning so that all students can reach their potential. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve at a higher level than similar students nationally and above that of other college learners. There are no significant differences between the performance of male and female learners.
17. Learners informed inspectors that they feel safe at college and in the workplace. Staff work together very effectively to support learners to develop the skills of tolerance and respect for each other. The recently introduced 'Respect Team' is helping to ensure that learners do not tolerate bullying and harassment. Learners' behaviour in and around college is very good. They learn to adopt safe working practices in college workshops and the workplace. Excellent support through the tutorial programme, from guidance staff and external speakers, helps learners to adopt healthy lifestyles and make safe choices, for example, in using the internet. The college devotes significant resources to ensuring that students are able to learn in a secure environment.

18. Learners make an outstanding contribution to the college and wider community through the curriculum and enrichment programmes. Most subject areas plan activities that support the local community and businesses. For example, health and social care learners raised funds to purchase technology to help maintain the health and fitness of clients in local residential homes. Business learners have undertaken market research on customer satisfaction for a sports centre. Public service learners have contributed to the implementation of a 'drink-drive' campaign. Many learners take part in voluntary work and fundraising for charities.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

19. Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are planned effectively, combining a good mix of practical and theoretical activities that motivate and challenge learners. In the best lessons, teachers plan activities and assignments that are based on actual commercial and industrial situations making learning relevant and developing learners' professional and work-related skills. In less effective lessons teachers make insufficient use of formative assessment to check learners' understanding and progress. Training for work-based learners is very good.
20. Teachers are well qualified; many have extensive vocational experience. They value the good range of staff development available to improve their expertise and skills. Learning resources are mostly good. Information and learning technology (ILT) is used effectively to support teaching and learning. Learners appreciate the flexibility the virtual learning environment (VLE) provides, giving them access to good learning resources at times that suit their lifestyles and work commitments.
21. The initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills leads to timely support. An individual and well-planned literacy and numeracy curriculum allows learners to progress at an appropriate pace and to attain full and partial qualifications. Managers are implementing appropriate plans to improve low key skills success rates. In many subjects the development of learners' key skills is now fully integrated into vocational lessons and assignments. Learners enjoy this new approach.
22. Assessment of college-based learners' work is satisfactory. Learners confirm that marked work is returned promptly. Many appreciate the flexibility of being able to submit assignments using the VLE. However, assessment feedback on some written assignments is too general and does not provide learners with sufficient guidance on the skills they need to develop to improve their work. Assessment practice in work-based learning is very good.
23. The college offers provision that makes an outstanding contribution to local and regional skills development. Courses from entry to level 6 are offered on college sites, employers' premises, in local schools and many community venues. Innovative courses are developed to address regional skills shortages, increase participation by providing first steps into education, develop the skills of

employed learners and to respond to the recession. Short courses with flexible modes of delivery have been developed for employers and adult learners in areas such as equality and diversity and mental health awareness. Managers have secured significant project funding to provide redundancy support and re-skilling, and Skills for Life courses. The college is the lead partner in the Cheshire Oaks Retail Academy.

24. Good enrichment opportunities help to widen learners' experience and re-enforce aspects of their chosen vocation. High quality and vocationally relevant visits and external speakers are embedded into the curriculum that raise learners' aspirations. For example, catering learners visit and eat at five star hotels and restaurants.
25. Managers and staff have developed outstanding partnerships that raise skills levels in the local community and contribute significantly to social inclusion. Partnerships with employers are highly proactive and responsive to their needs. The college works with an extensive range of companies to develop and provide bespoke programmes, including major car manufacturers, engineering firms, local authority taxi drivers, care homes and national health service (NHS) trusts. Employers speak very positively about the partnership arrangements and the positive impact on their employees' skills.
26. Partnerships with schools and community groups are very strong. Over 300 learners aged 14 to 16 participate in college courses such as the young apprenticeship programme and 14 to 19 Diplomas. In addition, there is a full-time programme for Year 11 learners. The college's community strategy is highly effective in reaching 'hard to reach' groups in areas of high social deprivation. Learning in the community (LINC) workers liaise with housing groups, children's centres, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions and enterprise groups to encourage learners back into education through a range of activities such as crafts and family learning. Many of these activities take place in local primary schools so that parents become positive role models for their children. In some areas, learning champions, who are current learners facing the same challenges as other members of their community, are recruited and trained. They play a major role in encouraging others to become involved in learning. Progression into more formal learning is good.
27. Learners receive outstanding guidance and support before they join the college and throughout their courses. Learners and employers speak in extremely positive terms about how the advice they receive helps them to move forward in their personal and career development. Excellent pastoral care and tutorial support are a feature of the college. Tutors and mentors are well trained in monitoring and supporting learners to achieve their targets. Arrangements for identifying and providing personalised support for learners at risk of underperforming are highly effective. Staff work together to raise learners' aspirations and to provide advice and help to those who need it. Senior managers monitor robustly the performance and progress of individual learners at risk.

28. Support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is provided by specialist support staff and a large team of learning assistants. College support services are enhanced through extensive external links and partnership arrangements with, for example, the NHS consultant psychiatrist in behaviour management, the Youth Offending Team and drugs and alcohol services. Very good support is provided for employed learners and for those on work experience. Learning support assistants are specially trained as 'job coaches' using the supported employment model of 'place and train'. This innovative approach developed with employment services is nationally recognised as a model of good practice.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

29. The Principal and governors provide strong leadership and have set a clear strategic direction for the college. The Principal, supported by an experienced and highly committed senior management team, leads the college with vision and energy. They have established a culture which is focused on raising the expectations and ambitions of staff and learners. The college sets and meets challenging targets, underpinned by core values based on increasing the employability of learners. It makes a significant contribution to the economic and social regeneration of the local area. Senior managers have developed outstanding relationships with a wide range of partners and have improved significantly the college's reputation for delivering high quality provision that responds to local and national priorities. The management of provision for employers and learners aged 14 to 16 is outstanding. The management of college-based courses is good.
30. Governors have a good range of skills which they use very well to hold staff to account for the management of the college. They are steering the college successfully through major accommodation developments that support the college's objective to provide high quality vocational learning leading to employment. Governors monitor closely the progress made in achieving strategic objectives and key performance indicators.
31. Governors and managers place high priority on safeguarding learners. Governors review and update the safeguarding and child protection policy annually. They receive regular reports to ensure that they fulfil their legislative duties in this area. Arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff are robust. Vetting checks are carried out on all staff and the college has thorough records to monitor compliance with legislation. Checks cover agency staff, sub-contractors and work placements. Additional policies, such as for bullying and harassment, internet safety, and wider health promotion, cover all issues relating to the safety of learners at college and in the workplace. Regular training for staff and governors and a detailed action plan support the implementation of the college's policies.
32. Staff from across the college work together well to identify learners who are vulnerable and at risk. They devote significant resources to provide personalised support that helps learners resolve personal and other often significant barriers

to learning such as homelessness, mental health and emotional issues. Managers have developed good links with external agencies, such as social services and Primary Care Trusts, to enhance the extensive college support services. Arrangements for health and safety are implemented thoroughly and monitored by governors. The college provides a safe and supportive environment that has been maintained during the major building programme on the two main sites.

33. Equality and diversity are central to the college. The Principal, senior managers and staff are committed to providing opportunities for learners who might not otherwise participate in education or training so that they improve their life chances. An atmosphere of respect and tolerance permeates the college. The college has appropriate policies and action plans to meet its duties with regard to race, disability and gender. The equality and diversity group reviews these regularly and monitors action plans closely. Assessments to determine the impact of college equality measures are thorough.
34. The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment is good. Learners' achievements are monitored and analysed by gender, race and disability and are integral to course reviews. However, the college is aware that a more detailed breakdown of learners' achievements by, for example, socio-economic grouping, is an area for further development.
35. Arrangements for quality assurance and self-assessment are implemented rigorously and are effective in improving the quality of provision. Observation of teaching and learning is accurate in identifying what teachers need to do to continue to improve. Managers use data routinely to monitor and identify underperforming courses. A range of strategies, including rigorous monitoring of learners' performance, and robust performance management have improved attendance and retention. Nevertheless, progress in a few subject areas has been slower.
36. Engagement with learners to support and promote improvement is good. They are represented on the governing body and through course representatives. Learners are very proud to represent their peers and value highly the training they receive to carry out their roles effectively. An active student union is very well supported by the college. Student representatives attend focus groups and regular meetings with course tutors and other staff to provide both positive feedback and to raise concerns about their courses. Good progress is being made in ensuring that learners receive feedback on the impact their views have had. However, the college is aware that more could be done to involve students more widely in decision-making processes.
37. Financial management is very strong. Managers have prioritised investment wisely to support improvements in teaching and learning and in existing accommodation pending the completion of the new buildings. Resources are managed well and further efficiencies will be secured from sustainable features incorporated in the new accommodation. Outcomes for learners have improved and are good. The college provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Health, care and child development

Grade 2

Context

38. The subject area offers full- and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level. Of 1,974 college-based learners, 381 are aged 14 to 19 and 1,093 are adult learners. For employers, the area offers Train to Gain courses from intermediate to level 4; 286 learners are enrolled on this provision.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall. Success rates are high on most programmes. They are outstanding on access courses and the foundation certificate in health and social care. Pass rates are very high on most courses. Retention was low on the advanced course in health and social care in 2008/09. The college has implemented effective improvement strategies and at the time of inspection retention was high.
- Learners on courses for employers attain high standards. Success rates on Train to Gain courses are very high. However, on some short courses success rates were low in 2008/09 as a consequence of lack of employer support to allow their employees to complete the programmes.
- Learners make good progress in relation to their starting points. In employer responsive provision they achieve qualifications within good time. Learners develop good personal, social and professional skills which enable them to improve their social and economic well-being.
- Progression to employment and other levels of learning are very good. In most courses all learners achieve their aspirations. Progression from access courses to higher education is high. The college has developed good links with University of Chester, guaranteeing learners an interview for acceptance on foundation degrees or first degree programmes.
- Learners enjoy learning and work well in large and small groups. They develop good team-working skills that are essential to health and social care practice. Learners complete work to a high standard. They informed inspectors that they feel safe at work and in college. They value highly the support they receive from the college staff 'Respect Team' and the strategies the college implements to ensure the campus is secure.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers have very good vocational expertise which they use to prepare high quality learning resources that promote good standards of professional practice. Learners develop a good understanding of the requirements of childcare and health and social care

professions that prepare them well for employment. Teachers' assessment of learners' work helps them understand what they need to do to improve.

- The curriculum meets the needs of learners and employers exceptionally well. The broad range of courses allows learners to choose units of qualifications which closely match their roles at work. Employers value how well learners are prepared for work. Learners on the extensive Train to Gain programme have been given more responsibility at work as a result of college courses. Many become key workers for their clients.
- Staff have developed strong links with employers to plan Train to Gain courses which meet the needs of their employees. These links have been built upon to provide high quality work-experience placements for college-based learners.
- Support for learners is good. Results of initial assessment are distributed to teachers who use them to plan and prepare lessons that meet learners' individual needs. Effective additional support is provided promptly for those learners who need it, helping them to stay at college. Additional individual sessions are held weekly to support learners with a range of additional academic and pastoral needs.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff review the quality of provision rigorously and take prompt action to secure improvement where needed. Learners' views about the quality of courses are sought and acted upon. The college's procedures for observation of teaching and learning are used to identify and support teachers to continue to improve. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report for the subject area.
- Equality and diversity are promoted very well. This essential aspect of health and social care practice is integrated well in most lessons. Teachers and learners treat each other with respect. Health and social care learners offer peer mentoring to students from other subject areas and the community. They promote safe lifestyles, informing others about, for example, the adverse effects of tobacco and alcohol.
- The promotion of safeguarding is excellent. The safeguarding officer monitors the application of college and work placement procedures comprehensively. College safeguarding training for teachers is also offered to adult learners from the subject area. Safeguarding is embedded in all courses, preparing learners very well for employment.

What does West Cheshire College need to do to improve further?

- Monitor, evaluate and revise current retention improvement strategies to maintain the high standards seen during the inspection.
- Ensure at induction that employers are committed to supporting their employees to attain the full qualification.

Engineering and motor vehicle

Grade 2

Context

39. The subject area offers full- and part-time courses from foundation to level 5. Of 316 college-based learners, 190 are aged 14 to 19 and 126 are adults. For employers, the area offers Train to Gain courses from intermediate to advanced level; 187 learners are enrolled on this provision and 90 are apprentices.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates have improved significantly and are good on most college-based courses. On the intermediate certificate in engineering and courses for employed learners, success rates are outstanding. Success rates for apprentices and Train to Gain learners are very high. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 are good and a high proportion progress to further study.
- Learners make good progress overall. On national certificate courses learners make very good progress achieving higher grades than predicted from their prior qualifications. Technician apprentices study at higher national certificate level (HNC) or foundation degree in engineering as part of their programmes. Taxi drivers on Train to Gain courses develop good employability skills through the wide range of additional options that are available.
- Learners produce high standards of portfolio work and they adopt safe working practices in college and the workplace. Learners informed inspectors that they feel safe at college. Teachers ensure that learners wear appropriate personal protection equipment at all times. Staff are diligent in ensuring that students learn in a secure environment.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Most teachers plan lessons well with clear learning objectives that are carefully explained to learners. They use a variety of tasks that stimulate learners' interest and promote enjoyment of the subject. In weaker lessons teachers' use of question and answer techniques to check learners' understanding and progress is not sufficiently effective.
- The progress of apprentices is monitored rigorously during review meetings which involve employers. Good assessment feedback develops learners' underpinning knowledge and promotes their high levels of attainment successfully. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and health and safety is developed well during reviews. However, the wider aspects of learners' personal and social development, such as how to make safe choices and adopt healthy lifestyles, are not covered sufficiently.
- The wide range of provision meets the needs of learners and employers well. College-based courses are offered from entry level to level 5. A high proportion of learners successfully progress between levels. Teachers make effective use of trips, guest speakers from industry and small design projects to enrich the curriculum and ensure that learners are prepared well for employment.

- Staff have developed outstanding partnerships with local employers that support the development of flexible courses which respond very well to the demands of some major companies including Vauxhall, United Utilities and Unilever. The college is the preferred provider for Train to Gain programmes for taxi drivers. Working in collaboration with local schools, the college is delivering the new 14 to 19 Diploma.
- Learners receive good guidance and support that help them to achieve their targets. Initial assessment to identify learners who need additional support is carried out as part of a comprehensive induction programme. Vocationally qualified staff provide additional support for learners who need it during practical workshops. The tutorial programme is well planned. Tutors regularly monitor learners' progress towards their targets.
- Strong leadership and management have successfully improved the quality of the provision. The self-assessment report accurately identifies what staff need to do to continually improve. Team meetings are used effectively to monitor the effectiveness of courses. Managers focus appropriately on raising the quality of teaching and learning. Robust arrangements for observing teaching and learning lead to support for those with satisfactory or lower grades.
- Staff make good use of learners' and employers' feedback to improve the quality of the provision. Employers confirm that the college is very responsive to their needs. College staff meet regularly with employers to discuss curriculum development opportunities and to respond to their comments.
- Learning resources are generally good. Workshops are clean, tidy and well organised with a good range of tools and equipment. Learners benefit significantly from sponsorship from a national employer who has provided the college with new motor vehicles. This ensures that learners' training is realistic and up-to-date. The use of the open-plan learning centre disrupts some lessons as a result of background noise and the use of the area as a thoroughfare.

What does West Cheshire College need to do to improve further?

- Monitor, evaluate and revise current strategies to improve retention on advanced programmes to ensure that success rates improve.
- Review and revise arrangements for apprentices' progress reviews to support the wider development of their personal and social skills.
- Pending the completion of the new accommodation, review the use of the open-plan learning centre at the Capenhurst site and take action where possible to minimise disruption to lessons.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

40. The subject area offers full- and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level. Of 434 college-based learners, 201 are aged 14 to 19 and 233 are adults. For employers, the area offers apprenticeship programmes to 38 learners.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall and are outstanding on apprenticeship programmes. On college-based programmes, success rates are good on intermediate and advanced level hairdressing courses. At intermediate level, success rates on beauty therapy and nail services courses are low. Pass rates are consistently high. Retention rates were low on a number of programmes in 2008/09. Successful strategies have improved retention significantly during 2009/10.
- Learners develop good skills for employment. Teachers raise learners' aspirations successfully and they make good progress in developing skills and standards that meet industry requirements. Learners wear their uniforms with pride and adopt safe working practices. Learners on all levels of courses develop the communication skills needed to have a professional rapport with their clients.
- Learners informed inspectors that they enjoy college and that tutorial and other activities help them to make safe choices. They enjoy and value the opportunity that key skills lessons give them to develop their number and literacy skills within the vocational context. Learners aged 14 to 16 from local schools thoroughly enjoy their time in college.
- Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons teachers' effective classroom management and their use of an appropriate range of learning activities maintain learners' interest. In these lessons learners make good progress. Most teachers place high priority on developing learners' understanding of health and safety practices, including sterilisation and sanitisation. Learners benefit from good access to clients available to support regular assessment.
- The college-based training for apprentices is closely linked to their roles at work, making their learning relevant and motivating. Close monitoring and tracking of their progress in reviews and at college help them to make progress and meet their targets.
- Learners are provided with a good range of courses at intermediate and advanced level that prepare them well for employment. Progression between levels within the college is good. Opportunities to visit employers and to participate in competitions enrich the curriculum and raise learners' aspirations. For example, one advanced level nail art learner was awarded first place in the Regional Skills Challenge.

- Community links are good. Learners host a variety of treatment sessions for a wide range of clientele including those who have health-related conditions. They actively take part in fundraising events that support local charities. Learners felt that induction prepared them well for their course of study and helped them to settle into college quickly.
- Learners value the level of support they receive. Inspectors agree with learners' comments that tutorials help them to progress and meet their targets. Parents and carers receive regular information from the college about how their son or daughter is performing. Advice and guidance help to ensure that applicants are offered a course suitable to their needs and abilities. Specialist additional learning support helps learners to succeed.
- Curriculum management is good and has improved performance. The management of provision for employers is outstanding. Managers are set challenging targets and progress in meeting them is monitored through comprehensive quality reports. Individual staff are set qualitative targets during appraisal; however, these are not sufficiently measurable. Learners' views are used well to inform further improvements. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment of the quality of provision.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good and on Train to Gain courses is outstanding. Teachers make all efforts to identify and remove barriers to learning. For example, two Train to Gain learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities completed their NVO successfully with high quality support from their commercial advisor and college tutors.
- Learners benefit from working in good accommodation and using high standard workbooks. Most salons are well equipped. Ventilation in nail technology classes is not sufficiently effective. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that some class sizes are small and impact negatively on the learning experience.

What does West Cheshire College need to do to improve further?

- Embed fully retention improvement strategies so that rates continue to improve or high standards are maintained.
- Implement actions to improve ventilation in nail technology salons.
- Where appropriate, set measurable targets for individual staff during appraisals to promote further improvement.

Visual and performing arts, and media

Grade 2

Context

41. The subject area offers full- and part time courses from foundation to advanced level in art and design, media, games technology, performing arts (dance), acting, technical theatre, musical theatre, music practice and music technology. The college also offers the foundation studies diploma in art and design. Of 676 learners enrolled on courses in the area, 484 are aged 14 to 19 and 192 are adults.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are high on most courses. Pass rates are high. However, retention has been low on advanced level courses in media, games technology and music technology for the last three years. Successful improvement strategies have been implemented during 2009/10 to address this and rates are now high.
- Most learners make good progress at college. They produce good standards of work on most courses. Standards of work in dance are outstanding. Learners' work is displayed to high professional standards in classrooms and public areas of the college to celebrate their achievement.
- Learners enjoy college. They feel safe and are supported well by teachers and other staff. Their attendance and punctuality at lessons are good. They adopt positive attitudes to their studies. Teachers have high expectations and ambitions for their students who develop the skills needed to take responsibility for their own learning. Learners treat each other and staff with courtesy and respect.
- Progression between levels of courses within the college and to higher education and related employment are good. Learners gain places at prestigious and highly competitive specialist institutions.
- Learners are prepared very well for employment through realistic work experience and live projects that make courses relevant and motivating. Some projects successfully lead to actual employment; others allow learners to make positive contributions to the local community. For example, the work of art and design learners was commissioned and is displayed in a café in the town centre.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers are well qualified; many have current industrial experience which they use effectively to prepare tasks that inspire learners. For example, learners studying technical theatre are able to crew productions at local and distant venues and those on fashion courses are involved in the Chester Fashion Festival for which they design and model their own work.
- A wide range of vocationally-specific courses provides learners with clear pathways to employment or higher education. Well-developed partnerships with local schools, specialist higher education institutions and employers support the development of courses that meet the needs of learners and provide them with

opportunities to practise their skills. For example, learners on performing arts courses tour their productions successfully in schools and care homes.

- Learners receive good support from teachers and learning support staff that helps most to achieve. Initial advice, guidance and induction lack rigour on some courses. Too many learners on the advanced level media and games technology courses do not complete the diploma and are retrospectively credited with an award.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff work together effectively to constantly review and improve the quality of the provision. They focus successfully on identifying and supporting learners causing concern. Teachers are supported well to ensure their industrial experience is current and to continue to develop their skills as a teacher.
- Equality and diversity are promoted well. Teachers plan courses carefully to ensure that barriers to achievement are addressed. For example, learners study and perform demanding texts such as Dr. Faustus and Oh, What a Lovely War! which demonstrate the influence of Bertolt Brecht. These texts successfully raise learners' self-esteem and aspirations.

What does West Cheshire College need to do to improve further?

- Monitor, evaluate and revise retention improvement strategies to maintain the improvements seen during 2009/10.
- Revise arrangements for guidance, interview and induction to ensure that all learners, particularly those on media and games technology courses, are enrolled on programmes that are suited to their career objectives.

Information about the inspection

42. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and eight additional inspectors, assisted by the college's Assistant Principal, Quality and Performance, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, 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.
43. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls, skype and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed lessons, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

West Cheshire College

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					
Full-time learners	2,649	11	1,847	791	-
Part-time learners	8,624	295	416	4,848	3,065
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	1
Capacity to improve	1				
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1				
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?*	1				
Quality of provision	1	2	1	1	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1				
Leadership and management	2	1	2	2	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
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?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010