

# Wirral Metropolitan College

## Inspection report

---

Unique reference number: 130493

Name of lead inspector: John Dunn HMI

Last day of inspection: 21 May 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: Carlett Park Campus  
Eastham  
Wirral  
CH62 0AY

Telephone number: 0151 551 7777

## Information about the provider

1. Wirral Metropolitan College is a general further education college with a high proportion of students from areas of high deprivation. The college is the third largest employer on the Wirral and operates from three main sites: Carlett Park Campus, Eastham; Conway Park Campus, Birkenhead; and Twelve Quays Campus, Birkenhead. In addition to the main sites the college has two neighbourhood centres, a town centre Learning Shop and Trades Union Education Centre in Liverpool and a number of community venues.
2. The college provides mainly vocational programmes and offers provision in 14 subject areas. It also offers apprenticeships and Train to Gain provision in a number of subject areas. About 6% of the college's students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to a Wirral average of less than 2%. The college has increased the percentage of students from areas of high deprivation from 27% in 1998/99 to 53% in 2008/09.
3. Wirral is the 14th most deprived district in the country and contains five of the top 100 most deprived wards. Approximately 22% of the adult Wirral population are categorised as having long-term illness and the area has a high percentage of claimants for incapacity benefit. In September 2009, 9.2% of the young people aged 16 to 18 in Wirral were not in education, employment or training.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
  - ATG Training
  - Construction Industry Skills
  - CSkills
  - JTL Ltd
  - North West Training Council (NWTC)
  - REMIT
  - Scientiam
  - Technical Training Enterprises (TTE)
  - Total People
  - Veolia
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
  - Tranmere Community Project
  - CPL Training Ltd
  - UKLC Southport

Type of provision	Number of enrolled students in 2008/09
Provision for young students: 14 to16  Further education (16 to18)  Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	194 part-time students  1,601 full-time students 421 part-time students  199 full-time students 486 part-time students
Provision for adult students: Further education (19+)	2,815 full-time students 4,002 part-time students
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	1,736 learners 52 apprentices

## 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 2
---------------------	---------

	Grade
Outcomes for students	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	2

Subject areas	Grade
Health and social care	2
Public services	1
Science and mathematics	2
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	3
Preparation for life and work	2

## Overall effectiveness

6. The college's overall effectiveness is good. The college has demonstrated that it has good capacity to improve outcomes for students and the quality of provision. The proportion of students achieving their qualifications has improved consistently and significantly since the last inspection and is now high in many areas. Most students make good progress when compared with their prior attainment.
7. The college has made good progress with the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The college's promotion of equality and diversity is good and its procedures for ensuring that students are safe are satisfactory. Most students have good access to information technology to support their learning. The quality of classrooms, the resource centre and workshops is good.

Not all students have clear learning goals or academic targets and the college still needs to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning.

## Main findings

- Outcomes for students are good, having improved significantly and consistently in all areas since the last inspection. Retention of 16-18 year olds at level 2 remains an area for improvement.
- The proportion of learners achieving their qualifications within the agreed timescale on Train to Gain programmes is outstanding.
- Students make good progress and develop good skills required for work.
- The college provides a very welcoming environment. Students feel safe in the college and at work.
- Teaching and learning are good. Students enjoy their studies and develop good skills. Lessons are well planned and executed and many make good use of technology to help students to learn more effectively. However, not enough attention is given in the college observation arrangements to recognising outstanding performance in teaching and learning.
- Assessment is broadly satisfactory but the quality of feedback given to students is too inconsistent as is the quality of academic monitoring. In a minority of areas teachers take too long to return assessed work to students.
- Partnerships are outstanding. Highly effective partnerships with the local authority and community groups have contributed to reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training. Partnerships with schools and employers have directly benefited students.
- Personal support and advice and guidance for students are good but the college needs to improve its tutorial arrangements. Additional learning support is particularly good and has a positive impact on students' outcomes.
- Leaders and managers share a clear vision, an appropriate strategy and a strong ambition for improvement. However, formal strategic and operational plans are not sufficiently clear.
- Governance is good. Governors are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and have complementary skills and experience that help them to scrutinise management reports and challenge managers.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff and students have a good understanding of equality and diversity issues. Managers make good use of data to monitor the performance of different groups of students. There are no significant differences in achievement between any of these groups.
- Quality assurance arrangements are good. The college has a range of well-established and effective procedures to assure and improve the quality of its provision. Managers make good use of students' and employers' views to bring about improvements. Self-assessment is self-critical and accurate.

What does Wirral Metropolitan College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve retention rates at intermediate level for students aged 16 to 18 by further developing and implementing the retention strategy.
- Improve tutorials by better monitoring of tutorial activities and better academic monitoring and target setting for students.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning by further developing the observation process.
- Bring together self-assessment reports, development plans and strategic plans to ensure a more coherent approach to improvement.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- the help and support from staff
- the enthusiasm of the tutors
- the enrichment opportunities and additional activities
- the good learning resource centre and information and learning technology resources
- the supply of water for consumption in the classrooms
- the cleanliness of the college
- the small group sizes.

What students would like to see improved:

- the availability of car parking
- the badly sited bus stops for the Carlett Park campus
- the time taken to return marked work
- the amount of time allocated in the learning resource centre on computers
- the uncertainty of continued funding of some courses
- the overcrowded canteen
- the limited social areas.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the fact that college staff listen to their needs
- the operational flexibility of the college
- the open and innovative approach
- the efficient and friendly telephone operators
- the visits to the workplace.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the insufficient information on equality and diversity
- the insufficient information on literacy and numeracy support
- the insufficient information on students' progress.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. The college has a good capacity to improve. The Principal was appointed just before the previous inspection. Since then, staff have been energised by the new approach to leadership. They welcome the ambitious plans and targets for improvement that he and the governors have set. Managers place a particular emphasis on improving outcomes through a better approach to teaching. A more rigorous system for the observation of lessons has been established. Self-assessment procedures involve all staff and the outcomes of self-assessment are accurate. Senior managers work well with highly skilled governors who act in a self-critical and supportive fashion. Taken together, these changes have had a significant impact on outcomes for students and the quality of provision.
9. The college has worked very well to improve a number of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 are now above the national average for similar colleges. The quality of provision in all curriculum areas inspected was at least satisfactory and in most was good. Managers and governors have successfully steered the college through an uncertain period, particularly when it was encouraged to develop an ambitious strategy to redevelop its estate. Despite the withdrawal of this funding at a late stage the college has maintained its financial stability and ensured that the quality of facilities has not been detrimentally affected. The college is beginning to review its ambitious strategic and development plans and acknowledges that there is still work to do to ensure that there is greater coherence between these plans, the self-assessment report and performance indicators.

### Outcomes for students

Grade 2

10. Students' attainment of qualifications and learning goals is good. Overall success rates on long courses across the college have improved substantially year on year at all levels and for adults and young people. Success rates at advanced level are significantly above the national averages and are particularly good. Success rates at foundation level have improved from significantly below the national average in 2005/06 to clearly above the national average in 2008/09. At intermediate level, success rates have improved to marginally above the national average in 2008/09 from well below in 2005/06. Retention of students aged 16 to 18 at intermediate level remains an area for improvement. College data indicate a marked improvement in retention in the current year. Attendance is generally good and students enjoy their studies.
11. Success rates for most minority ethnic groups compare favourably with the college average as do those for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Most students make good progress given their relatively low prior attainment. The college recruits a large number of its students from areas of high deprivation. College data show that these students achieve at least as well as other students. The college is closing the achievement gap in many areas.

12. The number of students on apprenticeships is very low but framework success rates are particularly high. The success rate of learners who complete in the agreed timescale on Train to Gain programmes is in excess of 90% and is outstanding.
13. Students' development of the skills necessary for employment is good overall. In most subject areas students develop useful employability skills and satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills. Progression of students to higher levels of study is generally good.
14. Students report that they feel safe and secure in college and know where to go for help and support. It is made clear during induction that the college does not tolerate bullying and students say that the few incidents of bullying and harassment are dealt with promptly. Safe use of the internet is included in the induction programme and aspects of safety are followed up throughout the year as part of the tutorial programme. Students have a good awareness of health and safety in workshops and on employers' premises.
15. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well around college, in tutorials and as part of some courses. Students are aware of the importance of staying hydrated and eating a healthy diet. Student representatives were involved in the procurement process for refectory services and they continue to monitor menus and make suggestions for improvement. The college uses outside agencies well to support the promotion of healthy living and learners are very well informed about safe sex and issues around drug and alcohol abuse.
16. Students' contributions to the decision-making processes of the college are very good and they make very valuable contributions to local community events. For example, they provided the hospitality and catering services plus the entertainment for 400 guests at Wirral's Mayor Making Event. Students participate in a wide range of fund-raising activities which support local, national and international charities.

## The quality of provision

Grade 2

17. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now good in the vast majority of lessons. Lessons are well planned and include a good variety of activities. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support learning by many teachers but the use of interactive whiteboards is not sufficiently developed in some subject areas. Teachers have good subject knowledge and many use past industrial experience to enliven and inform their teaching. Vocational staff take advantage of the good opportunities to update their vocational skills annually. Learning support assistants work closely with teachers and provide effective support.
18. The lesson observation system benefits from effective collaboration with local colleges to moderate judgements and share best practice. Findings from observations inform staff development, and learning and teaching champions

have worked very successfully to improve the quality of teaching by providing targeted training opportunities and individual support where necessary. The current observation system does not distinguish between good and outstanding teaching so is not providing any incentive or sufficient information to make good teaching outstanding.

19. Assessment is fair, accurate and reliable. The quality of feedback given to students to help them improve their work is good in some subject areas but variable in others. Arrangements for moderating assessments are sound. However, the quality of academic monitoring varies too much and there is no common system across the college, but there are pockets of good practice. Students in these areas have challenging individual targets based on their prior attainment, and progress is reviewed regularly, spurring them on to achieve the best possible outcomes that they can.
20. The college offers courses in a wide range of subject areas from entry level to level four, with clear progression routes to higher level study and employment. The range of provision in most curriculum areas is good. The curriculum offer complements the offer provided by schools and the local sixth form college, providing vocational pathways to a range of careers for young people. Adult students, who represent the majority of the college's students, are able to access Skills for Life and Work, reflecting the needs of the Wirral community and aiming to improve employment prospects. The college has been responsive to the effect of the recession and is providing programmes for people who have become unemployed
21. Links with employers, schools, the local authority and a range of community groups are outstanding and continue to develop. The college works closely with a wide range of partners to ensure that provision meets national and local priorities including that of personal and community development learning, and targets its provision in areas of high deprivation.
22. Very effective partnerships, especially with the local authority, Connexions and community groups have contributed to decreasing the number of those not in employment, education or training. The work with schools has resulted in improved progression routes onto vocational programmes at the college and an alternative curriculum for students aged 14 to 16, including new 14 to 19 Diplomas and Young Apprenticeships. Compact arrangements with higher education institutions provide progression routes to higher education. The college is highly responsive to local community demand and successful partnerships have resulted in some innovative projects aimed at particularly disadvantaged groups. The college's approach to engaging employers is excellent and has informed and shaped the curriculum offer, helping businesses to recruit appropriately skilled employees and develop their existing workforce. The college plays a key role in supporting this agenda and works closely with the local authority and the Wirral Investment Network.
23. Students receive good initial advice and guidance, which prepares them well for their courses and subsequent progression. A centralised pre-entry assessment

centre for full-time applicants allows the majority of students to be assessed carefully to ensure that their course matches their abilities and aspirations. All applicants for full-time courses are screened effectively for literacy and numeracy before being invited for an interview with the subject area staff. The assessment of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly effective. For school leavers the transition arrangements and communication with their schools are very good, especially for those joining from special schools.

24. Additional learning support is comprehensive, is well coordinated and has a positive impact on students' success and progression. Once identified, the support on offer is extensive and includes dyslexia support, mental health support, counselling, visual and hearing impairment support, and a range of pastoral support. Good use is made of assistive technologies and the virtual learning environment. Literacy and numeracy support is provided in subject areas by appropriately trained learning support assistants, many of whom have expertise in the vocational areas in which they are based.
25. The tutorial process is satisfactory; an appropriate framework is in place which is used across college, however, it is inconsistently applied and processes to improve it are insufficiently rigorous. The setting and monitoring of students' targets for attainment, attendance, behaviour, motivation and meeting deadlines are good for full-time students.
26. Targets are not always specific and measurable, or sufficiently challenging, and are not linked to achievement grades and therefore students' full potential is not always realised. In Skills for Life and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) target setting is very effective and appropriate for the students. Attendance is monitored carefully and parents and employers receive regular and helpful reports on progress.
27. Students are prepared well for employment and university. The student support team runs comprehensive courses that prepare prospective higher education students well for university life. Good links with employers in many subject areas lead to work placement opportunities and employment for a number of students. However, in some curriculum areas there is insufficient opportunity to develop work-related skills through work experience.

## Leadership and management

Grade 2

28. After the previous inspection the Principal, with full backing from governors, initiated a full scale review of the college's leadership and management practices. A culture of open communication and transparency in management has grown from this together with a strong ambition for improvement, a clear vision and an appropriate strategy to continue improving the college. However the current suite of strategic and improvement plans are not sufficiently clear as they are not aligned sufficiently well. The reputation of the college in the local community has improved significantly.

29. Governance is good. Governors use their wealth of experience and broad range of skills in business and education to provide effective challenge and support to senior managers. They acknowledge that the governing body could sharpen even further some of its procedures and are in the process of reviewing current structures.
30. The promotion of safeguarding of students is satisfactory. The college meets all of its legal obligations in connection with the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. Policies for the safeguarding of students are comprehensive and reviewed regularly. The college has good links with a range of external agencies. Where issues have arisen they have been dealt with quickly and appropriately by the college. Several staff and managers are designated child protection officers and have received the appropriate training to local children's safeguarding board standards. All staff have had training in safeguarding. The college carries out Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on staff and has a single register of all staff employed directly.
31. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. A single equality scheme and action plan is in place and equality impact assessments are thorough and effective. The ethnic heritage of staff reflects that of the local population, but there is a much higher proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The governing body is seeking to address the current over-representation of White British male governors. Students' achievements are analysed thoroughly by gender, race and disability, as are other aspects of college life. This information is used effectively when formulating self-assessment reports and course reviews and specific action to address underperformance by different groups has been put in place. Recent initiatives have addressed the gender imbalance in students' participation in some subject areas and a small but significant change is beginning to take place in areas such as hairdressing and beauty therapy, child care and engineering. Staffs' and students' understanding of equality and diversity is generally good. Staff are updated with appropriate training. College procedures are reviewed regularly and publicity materials are monitored to ensure that they reinforce inclusivity and that all are welcome. The college recruits extensively from areas of deprivation and monitors the performance of students from these areas carefully. Managers from the college are working with the local authority in an innovative project concerned with measuring and closing the achievement gap between different social groups of pupils.
32. The college's student involvement strategy is effective. The election of course representatives takes place on most courses. These representatives form the student council. Staff respond to students' and employers' recommendations, for example by making changes to course timetables and the purchase of resources. The student union media group plays an important part in promoting the college and its members act as ambassadors. Employers' needs are met very well. The establishment of the employer services unit has had a very positive effect and ensures effective communication. Employers value the college's provision and believe that it has improved significantly in the last three years.

33. Self-assessment and quality assurance procedures are good. Judgements in the self-assessment report are accurate and key strengths and weaknesses are identified. Strengths are not overstated and areas for improvement are clearly defined. Staff at all levels make good use of data. The quality of course reviews is much improved. Course teams produce comprehensive reviews with detailed action plans. However the college development plan is not linked sufficiently well to the self-assessment report. Parts of the plan lack specific targets to drive forward the areas for improvement identified. Other more detailed and effective action plans are in place. A particularly good example of this concerns the engagement of employers, which is very well thought out, and cohesive. The curriculum plan and the move towards encouraging students to enrol on courses bearing in mind their career objectives has proved to be very effective in improving retention rates. The college's 'Vision 2012' has been extremely effective in serving its purpose of pushing the college forward at a good rate. The college has correctly identified that a revised strategy is now needed to ensure that momentum is not lost and is well on the way to producing this.
34. The college's evaluation of teaching and learning is accurate, although there is a lack of clarity about the criteria used to differentiate between outstanding and good practice. Clear targets for improvement and effective staff training are in place. Systematic procedures for recording and monitoring the impact of staff development are in place and the new director for human resources is looking at ways to link all aspects of professional development in a more coherent and effective way.
35. The college provides good value for money. The college was encouraged to embark upon a significant project to develop plans for new buildings. It did this but at the same time took a very sensible approach to risk management. As a result of the national issues in funding such projects the college wasted significant time and resources. However this did not have an impact on outcomes for students. College staff are well qualified and offered appropriate development opportunities, although this is not always the case when the college employs temporary staff. The college takes full account of measures to improve energy efficiency and manage resources in a sustainable manner. Financial controls and administration are good. Leaders and governors have already begun to plan for cost savings if faced with a potential reduction in the funding of the college.

## Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 2

### Context

36. The department of childhood studies has 107 students, mostly aged 16 to 18, on a range of full-time programmes from entry to advanced level. Some 234 students aged over 19 are studying National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in children's care learning and development at levels 2 and 3. NVQ play-work has 22 students. The department of health and social care has 151 students on full-time programmes from foundation to advanced level and 18 students on part-time Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) awards. The Young Apprenticeship programme has 22 students aged 14 to 16 working towards intermediate health and social care. The society, health & development 14 to 19 Diploma is offered at foundation level. Some 52 students attend access to health or social work programmes. Counselling courses at intermediate and advanced levels have 42 adult students.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good. There is good progression to further study and relevant employment. In 2007/08 retention on the advanced level childcare programme was poor at 43%. Current retention has improved significantly to 95%. A significant number of students gain higher grades. Achievement of key skills is good. Success rates of learners who complete in the agreed timescales on Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes are high.
- Students develop a range of skills essential for work in this vocational area. These include a respect for individual differences, communication and research skills. Teachers encourage students to reflect on their own progress and professional practice. Students gain in self confidence developing the ability to devise and review specific and measurable targets to improve their learning.
- Teaching and learning are good. Students make good progress in lessons. However some lessons present insufficient challenge to encourage the more able. Assessment is well planned with constructive feedback to help students to improve. Students use the internet for research, appropriately recording the full web address but not always the date of access. The embedding of equality and diversity in the classroom is satisfactory.
- The subject area has strong and productive links with a wide range of employers. Strong links with voluntary, private and statutory organisations provide opportunity for collaborative activity enhancing learning and progression. These links also provide opportunities for teachers to update their industrial knowledge and skills.
- Personal support for students is responsive and good. A review of selection and recruitment has refined the pre-course advice and guidance ensuring placement on appropriate programmes and levels. Early identification of potential barriers to learning ensures that support is made readily available. Close monitoring

through students' reviews and liaison with other agencies aid personal development and academic progress.

- The use of academic targets in tutorials is insufficiently developed to help and encourage students towards improving their performance.
- A wide range of enrichment activities enhances learning and personal development. Teachers negotiate with students to plan a range of activities including team building activities and fund-raising for the community. Visits and speakers raise awareness of health and safety. Student representatives are actively involved in encouraging peers to reflect on the quality of their college experiences.
- Leaders and managers provide a clear focus for improvement. Teachers value the improved communication across departments. Motivation to provide a high quality service is underpinned by ownership of the data to plan and monitor provision at all levels.
- Course team reviews lead to a detailed and evaluative self-assessment report and development plan. The teams are fully committed to the safeguarding and inclusion of students. However there is insufficient sharing of some of the best practice in the subject area.

What does Wirral Metropolitan College need to do to improve further?

- Further develop higher level knowledge and skills on full-time programmes by using minimum target grades more effectively to plan teaching and learning. Develop a wider range of assessment feedback methods to challenge and extend all students appropriately.
- Further improve the embedding of equality and diversity in lessons by auditing teaching resources, for example handouts and PowerPoint presentations, ensuring that they reflect a diverse society. Further encourage students to consider diversity when choosing images to illustrate their assignment and display work.
- Develop students' confidence and competence in the use of learning technology to enhance the career prospects of students aspiring to work with children. Teaching should include regular opportunities for students to explore the diverse learning opportunities that information and learning technology now provides on a daily basis in the education of young children.
- Formally share best practice through closer links with other areas of the college including with public service teachers. Build on the teaching squares to review creative ideas for student-centred activities and assessment.

## Public services

## Grade 1

### Context

37. Of the 237 students on pre- and public service programmes, 216 are aged 16 to 18, 75 are female and almost all attend full time. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is small at less than one per cent. Full-time courses include the national diploma and first diploma in public services, and NCFE in pre-uniformed services from foundation to advanced level.

### Key findings

- Students' outcomes are outstanding. Success rates are very high on most courses. Significant improvements in success rates have been made since the last inspection across all courses. Most courses now have success rates well above the national average. Success rates for key skills for the current year are high at 81%.
- Students' written work is well presented and demonstrates very good knowledge and understanding of the vocational area. Students take pride in their work and use their information technology skills well to include explanatory diagrams to enhance their work further. Punctuality and attendance are excellent.
- Students feel particularly safe in and around the college. Students are reassured by the presence of security staff, who patrol the grounds in a discreet manner.
- Students have an excellent knowledge and understanding of relevant issues to be able to make informed choices about health and well-being. The college conveniently offers a 'breakfast club' free of charge for students. This is well used by students and ensures that they have a proper meal prior to performing physical activities, which form a significant part of all courses.
- Curriculum enrichment is excellent and improves students' employability. Students benefit from many enrichment opportunities including guest speakers, visits and charity fund-raising, all directly related to their vocational specialism. Students on public service courses help run and organise team-building sessions for students from other curriculum areas, and this activity significantly enhances the students' self-esteem and credibility amongst other students.
- Teaching and learning are good. Tutors plan interesting and relevant tasks and activities that provide challenge for many students. Particularly good use is made of role-play exercises to embed learning in a practical setting. In a few lessons, teachers missed opportunities to challenge more able students. Some rooms were too hot or had too much noise from adjoining rooms.
- Tutors have effective relationships with students that foster respect and trust, and build confidence. The behaviour of students is excellent and their attitude to learning is very positive. Assessment is good and tutors' feedback on written work is evaluative and clearly identifies the ways in which students can make progress towards their target grades.

- The college has a good range of courses and levels in public services, with a very strong focus on vocational training. Managers work exceptionally well with external partners to ensure that the college provides clear progression routes to higher education or entry into employment. Managers ensure that very effective reviews check the viability and appropriateness of each course.
- Partnership working is outstanding. Exceptional communication with employers such as the police and local fire service as well as the army and other armed forces helps to ensure that qualifications offered at the college meet the needs of those organisations very closely and that employers are familiar with what is being taught in college.
- Students receive excellent individual and personal support. Students make very good use of individual support and advice on practical issues to help them to access and complete their course. Arrangements for individual support in and out of lessons are very well coordinated. Students receive comprehensive initial information and advice to help them to choose the most appropriate course.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Significant positive improvements to the provision have taken place, resulting in outstanding outcomes for students. The curriculum is planned and monitored very effectively. Tutors are well qualified and experienced. There is good continuous professional development for all staff involved in the programme.
- The safeguarding of students is given a high priority and students report that they feel safe.
- The management of equality and diversity is good and students demonstrate good understanding of ways in which this can be promoted effectively in their vocational area. The promotion of equality and diversity in most lessons is good including some good examples of equality and diversity issues raised in lessons. Students are confident when discussing equality and diversity.
- The college effectively monitors the recruitment profile of students. Currently less than 1% of students on programme are from minority ethnic groups and all are making progress in line with other students, although in previous years there has been a gap in their success rates.
- Leaders and managers place a high value on students' feedback to improve the provision. Students report that their views are listened to and that the response is prompt. All staff and students contributed to the self-assessment report, and all provided feedback effectively during the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and has appropriate action plans to continue improvements.
- Resources and accommodation are good and well used by the college. However some of the classrooms are extremely hot. Rest areas in the block used by public services are very warm and uncomfortable to be in. Also, in some classrooms used for ICT, the rooms are separated by room dividers which allow too much noise from adjacent classes.

What does Wirral Metropolitan College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students achieve their academic potential by making sure that all lesson plans take full account of the different skills and abilities of students, so that more able students are sufficiently challenged.

## Science and mathematics

## Grade 2

### Context

38. The college offers applied science qualifications at BTEC national diploma, certificate and award levels and first diplomas. Provision also includes access to higher education courses and GCSEs in mathematics and psychology. Some 210 students are currently enrolled on science and mathematics courses, of whom 84 are aged 16 to 18 and 126 are adults. Around 64% of provision is full time and the rest is part time.

### Key findings

- Success rates on intermediate and advanced level vocational courses are high. Science provision has been revised and now has a strong vocational pathway focus. This strategy has had a positive impact on outcomes for students. Success rates on intermediate and advanced level vocational courses have improved over the three-year period and now exceed national averages for similar colleges.
- High grade pass rates on GCSE mathematics and psychology courses have improved and are high, being significantly above the national averages for similar colleges.
- Students are very committed and highly motivated. They have realistic career aspirations and clear progression pathways. Retention in the current academic year is high.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and structured with clear schemes of work. Learning activities are appropriately sequenced and well paced in most lessons. Students make good progress. The development of students' practical skills is good and theory is coherently integrated with practical experimental work.
- The use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching is insufficiently developed. Although students are competent in their use of ILT, it could be used more extensively by teachers to enhance teaching and learning. The availability and use of interactive whiteboards is insufficient.
- Assessment of students' work is satisfactory. Students' work is marked thoroughly and most teachers provide clear and helpful guidance to students on how they can improve. There is inconsistency, however, in the time taken for students to receive feedback on their assignments.
- The revised vocational science provision is now appropriate to meet the needs and interests of students. The department offers a range of applied courses which are actively promoted in vocational contexts; this is very evident in course brochures and display material. Students have well defined career goals and are highly motivated to achieve their ambitions.
- The subject area has very strong partnerships with local industries, higher education institutions and schools. The college has a major role in promoting science and technology initiatives in the area. The college has extensive

contacts with industry and these are used innovatively to provide excellent enrichment opportunities in vocational programmes. These benefits extend to partner schools as a range of applied science activities is available for school pupils.

- Tutorial and academic support for students is good and students appreciate the support that tutors give them. Students aged 16 to 18 have regular reviews with their personal tutors. Adult students receive subject-based monitoring and support. Target setting and monitoring is not fully utilised to its full capacity, however, because while it is supportive, the system is more remedial rather than being used to challenge students to achieve their aspirations and achieve their full potential.
- Progression rates into further study, higher education and employment are good.
- Leadership and management are good. The recent changes to the science provision have been well managed through effective strategic leadership and strong course management. The department has successfully used industrial contacts to revise and refocus provision in applied science to meet both the needs of students and skills requirements of local industry.
- Self-assessment is systematic, thorough and accurate. Course teams are fully involved in the process and good use is made of data to improve outcomes for students.
- Resources are good. Laboratories are clean, well equipped and organised well to support learning. Wall displays include students' work and careers material to reinforce the vocational emphasis of the provision.

What does Wirral Metropolitan College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the availability and use of technology to support teaching and learning
- Ensure the consistency of feedback on assessed work so that students receive prompt and punctual guidance on how to improve their grades
- Further develop the target setting and monitoring process to support students to reach their full potential and achieve their aspirations.

## Engineering

Grade 3

### Context

39. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in motor transport (motor vehicle and motor cycle engineering) and in engineering (BTEC qualifications in engineering and manufacturing, performing engineering operations and fabrication and welding). Motor transport has 199 full-time and no part-time students and engineering has 59 full-time and 34 part-time students. In total the area has 110 students at foundation level, 122 at intermediate level and 60 at advanced level. The college has link courses with three schools and has 30 students on the new 14 to 19 Diploma course and 50 on motor vehicle and BTEC courses.

### Key findings

- Success rates are generally satisfactory but there are too many variations across different courses. Engineering success rates have gradually risen over the last three years but are still slightly below the national average. Pass rates are good for students aged 14 to 16 but their retention rates are poor.
- The overall standard of students' practical work and the development of practical skills are good.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of their vocational area. Lessons are well planned and executed. Lesson outcomes are displayed but sometimes are not discussed fully with students. Resources are, in the main, fit for purpose although in the motor cycle workshop they are exceptionally good.
- Insufficient attention is paid to meeting the needs of individual students in the classroom. Teachers make insufficient use of challenging individual targets and extension exercises.
- Assessment practice is broadly satisfactory with pockets of good practice. In these areas, feedback is comprehensive and clear and helps students to progress. Assignments briefs are clear, handed out according to schedule and returned promptly.
- The subject area has a wide range of courses available to meet the needs of industry and of students. In engineering, progression opportunities are from foundation level to higher education. In transport engineering there are good progression opportunities from foundation to advanced level. Most courses have a strong practical element which is most suited to students' abilities.
- The college uses partnership arrangements to good effect. The college is the lead body for the new engineering 14 to 19 Diploma and involves local schools. Major manufacturers run training courses for their staff at college and donate vehicles and parts to the college. Good engineering links have been made with an overseas leisure organisation, which students have visited. There are plans to expand this relationship.

- The overall management of engineering is satisfactory. Success rates have increased steadily. Good communications exist between staff through well-recorded weekly meetings with appropriate agendas.
- Performance management is satisfactory. Annual staff appraisals are carried out and appropriate targets are set. Students' views on their course are sought and used to good effect. However there are too many variations in the quality of provision and the outcomes for students across the engineering provision.
- The safeguarding of students is satisfactory. All staff are trained in safeguarding, CRB checks are complete and students are protected from bullying and harassment.
- Health and safety management is satisfactory. The wearing of appropriate personal protective equipment is strictly adhered to in workshops. However, there are shortcomings in risk assessments. For example risk assessments are not always signed and dated and many are written on older templates. The college is aware of these shortcomings and action is being taken to improve the situation.

What does Wirral Metropolitan College need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that students' individual needs are met during lessons.
- Continue to improve retention rates and success rates, especially the retention of school-based pupils by consistently applying the college retention strategy within the subject area.
- Improve the management of aspects of health and safety by more careful monitoring.
- Provide a better quality and consistent learning experience by identifying and sharing good practice within both the subject area and the college as a whole.

## Preparation for life and work

## Grade 2

### Context

40. The subject area has 342 students on ESOL courses, of whom 53 are international or full-cost students. Some 85 students are full-time, of whom 19 are international students. Of the 771 students who study primary basic skills, all of whom are part-time, 504 are classed as learner responsive. Courses range from entry to intermediate levels.

### Key findings

- Achievement data for students within primary basic skills indicate a trend of considerable improvement in retention and pass rates leading to very high success rates.
- Thorough pre-entry assessments contribute to the accurate and relevant placement of students on courses and the outcomes of these assessments clearly link to the content of students' individual learning plans.
- Most teaching is good, with imaginative, interesting and inclusive approaches to learning. Technology is used effectively to promote and support learning in a relevant way and is often used as a vehicle for differentiation of the activities for students at different levels. Students comment on the friendly and supportive approach from tutors.
- Students are highly-motivated, committed to personal development, keen, and enthusiastic about learning. They eloquently express their intention to improve their employment prospects, progress to a career, support their children in their learning or move on to higher education.
- A wide range of courses is available to students. Short courses have been developed for adult students with work or family commitments. An innovative virtual learning environment has been developed to teach literacy and numeracy on line for those who prefer that method. A good range of enrichment activities enhance students' understanding.
- The subject area has made an outstanding range of partnerships to support learning in ESOL and primary basic skills. Many local and national and international organisations have joined with the departments in developing effective contacts, opportunities, innovative projects and provision for students that reduce previous barriers to learning.
- Tutors and specialist staff provide effective ongoing advice and guidance, supportive pastoral care and effective points of reference for any further specialist support that is required.
- The departmental managers provide a clear strategic direction with high expectations that are enthusiastically supported by staff. Staff say that they feel well-informed, fully involved and strongly committed to a transparent team approach in the departments' work and development.

- Staff show a strong and effective response to diverse cultures. Students with disabilities and learning difficulties are assessed effectively for, and provided with, the additional support and relevant curriculum content to support their progress.
- Teachers do not promote sufficient involvement of the students in developing the content of their own learning and learning strategies.
- Students are not sufficiently involved in supporting and promoting improvements. The college recognises this in its self-assessment.

What does Wirral Metropolitan College need to do to improve further?

- Support and guide individual students to take a proactive part in influencing and developing the content of their own learning programmes and learning strategies for the future.
- Develop a strategy to involve the students more actively in the processes used in developing the departments' policies and self-assessment reports.

## Information about the inspection

41. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven 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, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
42. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires students 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)**  
**Wirral Metropolitan College**

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Student 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 Student responsive	19+ Student responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled students					
Full-time students	4416	0	1601	2815	0
Part-time students	6405	194	421	4002	1788
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for students	2	2	2	2	1
How well do students achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do students attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do students progress?	2				
How well do students improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do students feel?	2				
Are students able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do students make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
Quality of provision	2	2	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for students?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support students 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?	2				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	2				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of students?	3				
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 students?	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 students 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 1234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto: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 1234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2010