

Inspection of Warrington and Vale Royal College

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 November 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Warrington and Vale Royal College is a general further education college operating from two sites in Cheshire: Warrington and Winsford. Leaders provide a wide range of vocational and technical courses and apprenticeships. They are expanding the curriculum offer at the new Institute of Technology and the Life Sciences Academy at Winsford.

At the time of the inspection, around 1,840 students were studying education programmes for young people, with just over 400 studying at entry or level 1, around 650 at level 2 and over 750 at level 3 and above, including on 14 T levels. The largest numbers of enrolments are in high-priority skills areas in construction, engineering, health and social care, advanced manufacturing and creative and digital skills.

There were just under 1,000 students on adult learning programmes, studying from entry level to level 4. The largest areas are English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), counselling, access to higher education, construction, engineering, English and mathematics.

There were 698 apprentices enrolled across 38 programmes from levels 2 to 5, with most studying at level 3. The largest numbers are in installation and maintenance electrician, plumbing and domestic heating technician, maintenance and operations engineering technician, business administrator, and carpentry and joinery. There were 91 students for whom the college receives high needs funding.

Leaders subcontract a very small proportion of their provision to two providers which offer specialist provision including The King's Trust programmes, sports coaching qualifications and apprenticeships for firefighters.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students and apprentices enjoy coming to the college. Staff have created a highly positive and respectful culture that permeates the college. Students and apprentices feel welcomed, well supported and cared for. They develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their next steps in an exceptionally supportive and nurturing environment.

Students and apprentices have highly positive attitudes to their learning and attend well. They are well motivated and strive to do their best. Students and apprentices contribute enthusiastically and productively to lessons. They represent themselves, their college and their employers exceptionally well. Students' and apprentices' behaviour is exemplary.

Teachers provide plentiful opportunities for students and apprentices to practise and hone their new knowledge and skills. Students and apprentices develop confidence and expertise in a range of new topics and practical skills. They are proud of what they learn and achieve. In bricklaying, students practise picking up mortar with the trowel until this becomes natural to them. They become competent in using spirit levels, to ensure their work is plumb, and gauge staffs on increasingly challenging builds such as a return corner. Adult students on ESOL courses practise their reading, writing and speaking skills to become confident and fluent. Students with high needs benefit from working in a professional kitchen, making food to industry standards to serve to customers. Most students and apprentices achieve their qualifications, and progress into further learning, training or employment.

Students, notably those on education programmes for young people, benefit from an extensive range of enrichment activities linked to their curriculum, next steps and personal development. They routinely participate in very high-quality course-related enrichment activity, including workshops, competitions and visits. Students on culinary courses volunteer and cook on site for Cheshire Search and Rescue. In travel and tourism, students visit Manchester Airport and Disneyland Paris.

Adult students develop the new knowledge and skills that they need to be successful at work and in their communities. Students on ESOL courses, including refugees and asylum seekers, learn the language skills they need to integrate successfully into their community. They develop confidence in their daily lives to make medical appointments or apply for jobs.

Apprentices receive a challenging and demanding apprenticeship that enables them to acquire significant new knowledge and skills for work. In addition to learning about their specific trades and industries, they benefit from workshops on how to set up their own business. Apprentices learn about branding, communication, accounts, teamwork, aspirations and customer service skills and enter World Skills competitions. This prepares apprentices well for work and their next steps.

Students with high needs thrive in a supportive and inclusive environment. Most students increase their self-esteem and build resilience. Many confidently speak out

in class and attempt to answer questions, giving them numerous opportunities to improve their communication skills and increase their social interaction with peers and staff.

Students and apprentices feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe physically, mentally and online. They understand the importance of protecting their digital footprint, not sharing personal information and how to look out for phishing emails. If they have concerns about their safety or welfare, students and apprentices know who to contact. They are confident that they will be listened to and helped. Teachers link fundamental British values to their industry sectors, making them real and relevant to students and apprentices. Apprentices develop and demonstrate a tolerant and inclusive approach at and beyond college. They enjoy harmonious relationships with peers, staff and visitors. Bullying and harassment are not tolerated.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers engage extensively with stakeholders to understand and respond to the priorities of the Warrington Skills Commission, local skills improvement plans and regional and national priorities. They set a clear direction for 'careers not courses' and use this to shape their curriculum offer to meet the skills needs of employers and industry.

Leaders have invested in sector-specific academies with industry-standard resources to develop much-needed vocational skills. Staff in construction work with housing associations to develop retrofit training in the run-up to becoming Net Zero. Leaders in health and social care partner with the NHS to provide preceptorship training to support newly qualified staff to transition seamlessly into social care settings.

Leaders and managers ensure that an extensive network of relevant stakeholders contribute very effectively to design and implement curriculums that prepare students and apprentices very well for future education, employment and work. Business and partnership managers secure a strong link between businesses and curriculum teams. Students benefit from working on live client briefs and employer case studies to develop and apply their skills in realistic scenarios that benefit businesses. Graphic design students designed a book on the history of Warrington Town Hall, which is sold locally.

Employers routinely provide guest lectures and skills sessions to students. They run workshops to update apprentices studying electrical installation on the use of modern solar battery systems. Speech and language specialists and occupational therapists work with students on the T-level health course to develop their understanding of how to work effectively with adults and children with complex needs.

Leaders, managers and teachers plan and teach the curriculum highly effectively so that students and apprentices learn the skills that they need for future success. Curriculum teams thoroughly evaluate the curriculum, identifying ways to update and best meet skills needs. Stakeholders rightly commend college leaders and managers highly for their proactive and responsive approach to meeting their skills priorities.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders plan an ambitious curriculum following their mantra of 'careers not courses'. They use extensive labour market intelligence and work with key partners to develop curriculum content. Leaders ensure that students and apprentices learn the most up-to-date knowledge, skills and techniques that employers want and that meet local priorities. On the T-level health course, students receive visits from university staff who teach them how to carry out venipuncture. Students with high needs benefit from work experience placements that prepare them well for independence and employment. Adult students complete social prescribing courses that are vital for healthcare work. Electrical installation apprentices attend 'reconcile and resolution' sessions to enhance their customer-handling skills.

Teachers teach topics in a well-considered order that helps students, including those with high needs, and apprentices to remember what they are taught. Young people studying GCSE English begin by exploring the use of English within the context of important employability skills. They study the techniques of transactional writing and benefit from useful texts such as guides to effective interview skills. Students learn about how English is adapted due to the degree of formality and the context in which it is used. Adult counselling teachers start by teaching key theories around fitness to practice before students start their work placement. Students consolidate their learning by applying their knowledge to working with clients.

Teachers and assessor coaches are highly skilled professionals who continue to work in industry. They use their expertise successfully to teach students and apprentices relevant and current knowledge and skills. Teachers and assessor coaches use regular industry updates and professional development opportunities to maintain currency in their specialist fields. They apply their knowledge to real-world contexts, combining theory and practice to enhance students' and apprentices' understanding and application of key concepts. Students routinely work on employer-led live briefs to link theory to practical application. For example, in travel and tourism, students design a tourist trail around the town centre.

Most teachers use information about what students and apprentices already know and can do effectively to identify gaps in knowledge and skills and to plan interesting learning. They use a range of teaching techniques that engage students and apprentices to make at least their expected progress. Teachers of T-level health courses use association techniques to stimulate students' interest and to help them remember new knowledge. They use the idea of building a semi-detached house to explain how starch is formed through amylopectin and amylase, a necklace to

explain how complex carbohydrates are formed and the analogy of sticky tape to understand how cellulose bonds together. This makes learning memorable. However, in a few instances teachers do not use the information that they collect about the prior knowledge of adult students and students with high needs to plan learning and set appropriate targets for development.

Teachers use a range of strategies to check how well students and apprentices remember and recall what they learn. They use questioning, peer marking, interactive quizzes and written assessment effectively. On counselling courses, adult students recall accurately theoretical concepts such as congruence and transactional models. Students with high needs recall previous learning on synonyms and their use. However, a few teachers do not challenge students sufficiently to develop their responses more deeply. Their questioning is, at times, superficial or oversimplistic, meaning that a few students are not able to demonstrate the full breadth of their learning or identify what they do not yet know.

Most students and apprentices benefit from clear and supportive developmental feedback that they use to improve the quality of their work. Students in graphic design receive extensive written feedback that they act on to produce a greater level of detail in their assignment work. Assessor coaches provide useful feedback to help business administrator apprentices to work towards distinction grades. However, a few teachers and assessor coaches do not leave sufficient feedback to ensure that students and apprentices know what they have done well and what they need to improve and how to make those improvements.

Students and apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills on their courses. Carpentry and joinery apprentices discuss dove tail, bird mouth and half-lap joints as well as how and where they are used. On culinary courses, students are better at approximating portion sizes, having repeatedly practised cutting up chickens. Adult students on ESOL courses develop the language skills they need for work in floristry, information technology and mathematics. Teachers consistently remind students with high needs how to apply rules of grammar and punctuation that they have been practising in English lessons when creating presentations for their vocational coursework.

Students and apprentices are well prepared for their next steps and future destinations. Staff run employer-led talks and events to provide students and apprentices with greater insight into their chosen sector and potential careers. They inform students and apprentices about the possible next steps available to them. Students and apprentices routinely attend college careers events, talking to potential employers to gain advice and guidance about jobs and career opportunities. They know what they want to do next and what they need to do to get there.

Leaders and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the college. They provide an honest and reflective view of the quality of education that students and apprentices receive, including at the subcontractor, and work relentlessly to bring about improvements where required. For example, leaders' actions have resulted in

improvement to the quality of teaching and achievement in apprenticeships since the previous inspection.

Governors are experienced in the further and higher education sectors and relevant industries such as health and construction. They use their experience and expertise effectively to hold leaders to account for the quality of provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that teachers and coaches systematically use information about what students, notably adults and those with high needs, already know and can do to plan learning and set meaningful targets.
- Ensure that all teachers and coaches use effective checks on learning to identify progress and gaps in knowledge and skills accurately.
- Ensure that all teachers and coaches provide helpful feedback for students and apprentices.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130617
Address	Winwick Road Warrington Cheshire WA2 8QA
Contact number	01925 494494
Website	www.wvr.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Nichola Newton
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	8 to 11 October 2019
Main subcontractors	Cheshire Fire and Rescue Rugby Football League

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal: quality and MIS, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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