

Inspection of Cheshire College - South & West

Inspection dates: 22 to 25 October 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
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

Cheshire College South and West is a general further education college based in Cheshire. The college has three main sites in Cheshire. At Ellesmere Port and Crewe, leaders offer a range of courses for adults, apprentices, learners with high needs and learners aged 16 to 18. These include business, health and social care, engineering, construction, hair and beauty, hospitality, ESOL, travel and tourism, sport and public services. In addition, leaders offer 30 A levels at the Crewe site. At the Chester site, leaders offer visual and performing arts, art and design, science, business, digital, English mathematics and English as a second language (ESOL) for adults and learners aged 16 to 18. There are 34 apprentices that study apprenticeships in business, health and social care and the motor vehicle sectors. Leaders provide part-time provision for 22 young people aged 14 to 16. This provision was out of scope for this inspection.

At the time of the inspection, there were 4,663 16-to-18-year-old learners on education programmes for young people. Learners were enrolled on a range of academic and vocational courses, in most subject areas, from entry level to level 3. Just over half of young people study courses at level 3. These included T levels in

education and childcare, management and administration, digital production, design and development, building services engineering for construction, design, surveying and planning for construction, design and development for engineering and manufacturing, maintenance and installation and repair for engineering and manufacturing. Over half of 16-to-18-year-olds study at the Crewe campus, around one quarter study at Ellesmere Port, with the remaining learners based at the Chester campus.

There were 1,551 adult learners studying courses from pre-entry to level 3. Most adult learners study courses in ESOL and English and mathematics. The next highest enrolments are on hair, construction, engineering and level 3 access to higher education (HE) courses.

There were 650 apprentices following apprenticeship standards from levels 2 to 4, of which 172 are aged 16 to 18. Most apprentices study at levels 2 and 3, with the highest enrolments in health, construction and engineering.

There were 412 learners for whom the college received high needs funding. Leaders work with one subcontractor who provides study programmes for 113 learners with high needs. Just over half of learners study across vocational areas. The remaining learners follow courses to develop independence and employability skills.

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

Most learners and apprentices are motivated and keen to learn. In practical areas, they demonstrate positive and professional behaviours. For example, professional cookery learners work alongside Michelin star chefs where they swiftly develop their professional behaviours and skills. They produce dishes such as fruit bavarois and risotto to a high standard and take responsibility for tasks willingly, such as cleaning down and ensuring equipment is stored correctly. All learners wear their uniforms with pride and enjoy their time in the working environment.

Staff set clear expectations for attendance and punctuality. Most apprentices and learners attend regularly. However, in a few programmes for young people, attendance is not consistently high.

Learners and apprentices build their confidence and resilience because of the training that they receive. Most autocare apprentices develop confidence in themselves and the tasks that they complete at work. For example, apprentices can confidently explain the maintenance procedures they have completed on high-value and high-powered supercars. ESOL learners organise parties throughout the year to mix and talk to learners with various levels of English skills.

Most young people participate in a wide range of activities that extend beyond the curriculum. They access a range of clubs such as sports, chess and art activities, and can become student mentors. Learners on the scholars' programme benefit from a range of talks from guest speakers to support them with their Oxbridge university applications. They attend twilight workshops, where they develop their debating skills and academic thinking. Learners take the initiative to start their own clubs and societies linked to their interests. Following international women's day, learners set up a feminist group, which is supported by a local employer who provides guest speakers.

Adult learners learn new knowledge, skills and behaviours that prepare them well for their next steps and improve their personal lives. For example, access to HE learners develop their study skills in preparation for university. They receive training and support from library staff on using Harvard referencing. This helps them to develop their academic writing skills. ESOL learners develop their English and employability skills to be able to integrate within their communities. However, a few ESOL learners do not have sufficient understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Autocare technician apprentices do not benefit from an effective personal development curriculum. Although staff direct apprentices to appropriate resources, they do not routinely monitor apprentices' engagement. These apprentices do not develop a deep enough understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and the meaning of fundamental British values.

Learners with high needs talk enthusiastically about how their time at the college is supporting them to gain confidence and develop skills such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving. This helps learners to greet unfamiliar people

and advocate for themselves. For example, learners in music make their own industry contacts independently to gain experience in the music industry.

Learners and apprentices feel safe across all college sites and in the workplace. Young people benefit from tutorial sessions where they learn about a range of topics such as healthy relationships, personal safety, healthy eating and mental health and well-being. Health and social care learners have developed a peer signposting network, 'ear4You.' They are trained in mental health guidance and provide peer support through a facilitated scheme. Learners and apprentices feel comfortable to talk to members of staff to seek support.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work highly effectively with stakeholders to provide a curriculum that meets the priority needs of the local and regional area. Leaders play a key role on a wide range of boards. They use information from these boards to develop programmes that meet regional skills shortages. For example, Skills Bootcamps have been developed in the engineering and rail sectors to provide a pipeline of staff to rectify skills gaps. Leaders are developing courses in hydrogen and low carbon energy to meet the priority needs of the region.

Leaders have nurtured highly successful relationships with local authorities, communities and councils. Leaders and staff have worked with the local council to support asylum seekers and refugees as part of a resettlement programme. ESOL learners benefit from courses that enable them to gain qualifications that will support them in seeking work. Leaders respond to the needs of the community to devise training courses for volunteers. For example, training courses in recognising domestic abuse have been taught at a local charity for women and girls' health and well-being. Leaders provide employability courses to support those furthest away from the job market back into further training or employment.

Leaders work exceptionally well with employers from across the Cheshire regions. Employers sponsor rooms at the college to provide industry standard resources to equip learners and apprentices with the future skills that they will require. Leaders co-construct curriculums with employers to meet local needs. They have introduced the dual fuel smart meter installer apprenticeship with a large employer to develop the skills of the workforce and meet the net zero strategy. Construction learners benefit from working on historic buildings to consider how to improve their energy efficiency.

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

Learners and apprentices benefit from learning from qualified and knowledgeable teachers in their vocational areas. Teachers use their skills effectively with relevant examples from industry to engage learners in lessons. Business teachers discuss

palm oil usage, which supports learners to develop a wider understanding of the world such as ethics, sustainability and global trade.

Teachers plan curriculums in a sensible order. Health and social care learners develop their knowledge and skills of communicating effectively and understanding the requirements for confidentiality, before moving on to discussing ethics and end of life care. Business administration apprentices learn about types of organisations and their structures. They progress to using business models such as 'pestle' to understand the effects that market forces have on their business.

Most teachers use information gathered on students with high needs or young people's starting points to effectively plan their lessons. However, teachers of adult learners and apprentices do not use this information consistently to set a challenging and individualised learning programme. This means that a few adult learners and apprentices do not develop their knowledge and skills as swiftly as they could.

Teachers use their teaching skills effectively, so that learners and apprentices readily grasp key concepts and develop fluency in their skills. Teachers in brickwork use demonstration effectively so that learners are taught how to complete various bonds such as stretcher, English and Flemish bonds. Learners practise this skill and develop their skills to move on to more complex tasks such as rectifying faults in the brickwork. Medical science teachers create visual models to help learners understand abstract concepts such as enzymes.

Most teachers use skilful questioning and assessment strategies effectively to check learning and rectify misconceptions. In GCSE mathematics, learners complete quizzes and use peer assessment to check understanding of concepts in probability such as mutual exclusivity. T-level construction learners complete roleplays to present design concepts to clients. Dental nurse apprentices complete worksheets and group activities on hazards and risks. They use this information to identify a range of hazards and risks in the workplace such as needlestick injuries and risks of cross contamination. However, in a minority of instances, questioning is not effective. In these cases, teachers do not check that learners understand what they have been taught.

Most learners and apprentices receive useful and developmental feedback from their teachers. Adult hairdressing learners use their feedback to improve the aftercare advice to clients. They discuss confidently specific guidance to treat clients' hair and scalp, such as the use of coconut shampoo to moisturise dry hair. Learners and apprentices increasingly improve their practical skills and improve their technical vocabulary in their written work. However, in a minority of programmes for young people, feedback is less effective. Learners do not always know what they need to do to improve their work.

Learners and apprentices receive well-planned, unbiased careers advice and guidance. They participate in careers fairs where they learn about a wide range of employment opportunities, university courses and apprenticeships. Adult learners discuss career opportunities during curriculum sessions. For example, adult

hairdressing learners discuss the different sectors they can join such as film and television, bridal and self-employment. Learners and apprentices benefit from individual support to practise interview skills, write their CVs and complete university applications.

Leaders do not have a sufficiently thorough understanding of the progress that apprentices make on their apprenticeships. They do not quickly intervene when apprentices are making slow progress to help them to catch up, or provide additional support to help apprentices to achieve their potential on their apprenticeship.

Leaders have in place suitable processes and procedures to monitor the quality of education at their subcontractors. Leaders visit subcontractors frequently to meet with staff and undertake quality assurance processes such as lesson visits. Subcontractor staff value the opportunity to share college resources and complete professional development activities. As a result, the quality of education for learners with high needs at the subcontractor has improved.

Governors are appropriately qualified with relevant experience in a range of sectors, including further education and skills. They receive useful reports that provide them with information on the college's strengths and areas of improvement. Governors take an active role in providing support and challenge to leaders and managers. They meet with managers to carry out learning walks and hold focus groups with learners. Governors understand most of the strengths and areas of improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Strengthen quality assurance and improvement processes for apprenticeships to ensure that all apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.
- Improve the use of starting points for adult learners and apprentices so that they develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours swiftly.
- Strengthen the personal development curriculum for apprentices and ESOL learners.

Provider details

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Address	Dane Bank Avenue Crewe Cheshire CW2 8AB
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Website	www.ccsw.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jasbir Dhesi, OBE
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	12 to 15 November 2019
Main subcontractors	Petty Pool Vocational College Utilita Energy Cheshire Fire and Rescue

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, 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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