

# Inspection of Wirral Metropolitan College

Inspection dates:

3 to 6 October 2023

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

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

## Information about this provider

Wirral Metropolitan College (WMC) is a general further education college in the borough of Wirral, Merseyside. The college has five main sites: Conway Park, Twelve Quays, Wirral Waters and Hamilton campuses in Birkenhead, and the Oval campus in nearby Bebington. The newest campus is the Hamilton campus, which opened in 2021.

Leaders offer a range of courses to students of all ages. For students on education programmes for young people, leaders provide vocational and technical courses from pre-entry level up to level 4, with the majority at levels 1 to 3. The highest number of these courses are taught at the Twelve Quays campus covering subjects such as animal management, digital, early years, engineering and automotive, and health and social care. Subjects offered at Conway Park include hair and beauty, hospitality, travel, and tourism. Courses in public and uniformed services, and sport, are based at The Oval campus. Construction and the built environment are taught at the Wirral Waters campus. Business and accounting are provided at the Hamilton campus. Leaders offer T levels and T-level foundation programmes in construction, digital, early years, engineering, health and media.

For adult students, leaders offer higher education, continuing professional development courses, short and online courses, as well as some vocational and technical courses. Leaders also provide courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to students of all ages.

The college provides apprenticeships from level 2 to level 5. Subjects include accounting, animal welfare, automotive, construction, engineering, healthcare, and human resources and management.

Leaders offer preparation for life courses to students with high needs based at Conway Park. These include preparation for work for students with an education, health and care plan and aim to support the development of independence skills and progression in further education, employment and independent living. Leaders also provide supported internships.

Just under 2,190 students study education programmes for young people, with 803 studying programmes at entry level or level 1, a further 769 at level 2, and 618 at level 3 or above. There are 1,457 students on adult learning programmes from entry level to level 4, and 549 apprentices following apprenticeship standards from level 2 to level 5. There are 211 students for whom the college receives high needs funding.

The college does not have Skills Bootcamps, nor does it subcontract any of its provision.

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

Most students are positive about the college and their course. Leaders and managers set clear expectations for behaviour, attendance and punctuality. This is called the 'Wirral way'. Although most students adhere to these expectations, a significant minority of young students do not attend their lessons regularly or on time. Students appreciate that their teachers know them well and help them to succeed. They enjoy studying at WMC. Staff promote a culture of inclusivity, care and support, ensuring that students feel welcome and well supported.

Too many students and apprentices do not achieve their qualifications. In too many curriculum areas, the number of students and apprentices who achieve their qualifications has declined from the previous year. However, most students who do achieve progress on to positive destinations such as employment, apprenticeships or further learning.

Students with high needs and adult students attend their classes regularly and punctually. They are focused and ready for learning. Students interact with each other well and display positive attitudes. They are polite and respectful towards their teachers and peers.

Students with high needs benefit from a highly effective programme of learning. Leaders provide a supportive and inclusive environment in which students with high needs flourish. They ensure that students benefit from high-quality resources, including sensory classrooms and fully equipped adapted kitchens for training. Students with high needs receive regular tutorials to discuss the standard of their work and their progression towards their targets, next steps and long-term goals. They move to positive destinations such as employment, further training or independent living.

Most students improve their confidence, resilience and independence because of their courses. Students and apprentices benefit from effective support for their mental health, childcare, homelessness and financial concerns. Students who take part in competitions, such as WorldSkills, gain valuable learning opportunities beyond the college environment.

Too many students and apprentices do not receive routinely planned careers information, advice and guidance. For example, adult care apprentices do not understand how to access the next stages in their career and are considering leaving the care workforce. Leaders do not provide sufficient information to all students and apprentices to help them make informed choices about their next steps.

Students and apprentices feel safe across all college campuses. They are aware of who to report any concerns to and are confident that issues raised are taken seriously and dealt with quickly by staff. Students learn about healthy relationships, fundamental British values, tolerance and respect. They talk confidently about how to keep safe online, keep their digital footprint safe and be aware of the threats of cyber-bullying and online grooming.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have developed a strategy that considers and reflects the skills priorities identified through local and national industrial, workforce and skills strategies. Leaders work effectively with stakeholders, including the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Wirral Borough Council and other local authorities, to accurately identify the priority skills required in the local area. They work with a wide range of community partners to support students who are not in education, employment or training, or those who are at risk, to remain in education. However, not all curriculum areas include employers and stakeholders to inform the design and teaching of curriculums.

In the most successful programmes, leaders involve employers in curriculum planning. Automotive employers share industry-standard 'health checks', which college staff use in their course teaching. In the education and early years T level, leaders place a greater emphasis on mental health so that students can better support children in their care. Employers provide highly effective supported internships for students with high needs, many of which lead to employment on completion of their placement. To support the green agenda, local employers have significant input into the curriculum for engineering. They help leaders and managers to invest in the equipment and train college staff in the installation of air source heat pumps. However, this is not yet fully consistent across all curriculum areas.

Leaders engage with a range of community partners. They partner with the charity Tomorrow's Women to provide a range of non-accredited courses in subjects including British Sign Language, forensic science, conflict and stress management, resilience, and cookery to socially disadvantaged women.

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

Leaders offer programmes that meet local, national and regional needs. For example, the T level in education and childcare is offered to meet the recruitment and retention challenges in the childcare sector, and courses in joinery are designed to provide a pipeline of skilled construction staff to work on the Wirral regeneration project. Leaders provide a range of short courses in the community to support disadvantaged people in the local area. However, not all programmes are taught effectively to ensure that all students and apprentices gain the new knowledge, skills and behaviours that these sectors require.

In many areas, leaders have established positive links with employers to help them plan opportunities such as work experience and masterclasses. In construction, students work on local construction sites. In public services, local police speak to students about topical issues such as gun crime. This helps students to relate theory to practice and gain an insight into their sector.

Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to carry out their roles. They use their industry expertise to introduce students to key terminology and skills. For example, in public services, tutors explain the meaning of broadside and teach appropriate marching techniques, including formation and dressing. In automotive, they demonstrate how to measure tyre depth using a gauge and explain why tyre tread does not wear uniformly around the surface of the tyre. As a result, students are better prepared to work in their chosen industry.

A significant proportion of adult learning programmes lack ambition and purpose, meaning that students do not make as much progress as they should. Too many students in ESOL and hairdressing study unaccredited learning programmes that impede their progress, hinder their progression and delay the achievement of their ambitions. They repeat learning and remain at college instead of progressing swiftly into work.

The majority of tutors sequence their curriculums effectively so that most students and apprentices build their knowledge over the duration of the programme. However, in adult programmes, leaders do not plan the curriculum effectively or track progress to help students build their knowledge swiftly. This hinders students' ability to gain employment or move on to further study quickly.

In practical workshop sessions, most tutors use chunking effectively to break down complex tasks into smaller, more manageable activities. Students practise their skills until they can complete tasks to industry tolerances. However, in too many classroom-based sessions, tutors' selection of activities is either not challenging enough or does not relate to their prior learning. Lessons lack pace and purpose. Consequently, too many students have a limited recall of what they have been taught.

Tutors use support staff effectively in practical sessions to assist students who require additional help or encouragement. Support staff are directed to demonstrate skills and to help students to understand what they need to do next or how to improve their work. They use effective strategies to manage anxiety and promote engagement and interaction in lessons. This ensures that most students receive the support they need to develop their independence and vocational skills.

Too many tutors do not provide helpful feedback to students. In adult access to higher education and apprenticeship provision, tutors do not provide enough constructive feedback following assessment. Feedback is brief and generic. In T-level education and childcare, feedback is vague and does not routinely challenge students to strive to improve their work. Automotive students do not routinely act on the feedback they receive. Consequently, most students do not know specifically what they need to do to improve their practical and written work.

Most students and apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours during their courses. Brickwork apprentices learn to build cavity walls, pillars and arches to industry standards. T-level education and childcare students explain Kolb's theory and how it helps them to become more reflective in their own practice. Automotive

students learn the importance of using rubber mats and gauntlets when working on hybrid vehicles.

However, adult care apprentices do not receive sufficient time within their working hours to enable them to study effectively. Too many apprentices complete training and assessment tasks in their own time, alongside their busy jobs. Many feel overwhelmed and are not well supported to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to work in the care sector quickly enough.

Leaders have not accurately identified all the weaknesses in their self-assessment report. They have recently put actions in place to rectify these weaknesses. However, these actions have not been effective. As a result, too many weaknesses remain.

Leaders recognise that quality improvement processes have not been rigorous or robust enough to quickly identify areas for improvement. They have very recently put in place new quality systems and processes to identify and action underperformance. At the time of the inspection, it was too early to see the impact of these new interventions. Consequently, too many students and apprentices do not consistently benefit from an ambitious, high-quality education.

Governors have appropriate expertise and experience to carry out their roles. They understand most of the strengths and areas for improvement that leaders have identified. However, leaders do not provide them with sufficiently detailed reports to enable them to provide effective challenge and scrutiny on the quality of education that students and apprentices receive.

Leaders carefully monitor the well-being of staff. They are passionate about supporting staff to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. Leaders have put in place mental health first aiders, created a well-being room and have developed a well-being festival. They monitor workload and support staff to work flexibly to promote work-life balance. Most staff are proud to work at the college and feel it is an inclusive and supportive environment. However, in a few instances, staff feel that workload is too high. For example, recruitment challenges in a few curriculum areas impact negatively on teaching workloads.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Increase the number of students and apprentices who remain on programme and achieve their qualifications.
- Improve attendance and punctuality, notably for students on education programmes for young people.

- Ensure that students and apprentices receive routinely planned careers information, advice and guidance.
- Improve the planning of the curriculum for ESOL and hairdressing students.
- Improve the quality of teaching in classroom-based sessions.
- Ensure students and apprentices receive helpful feedback.
- Ensure that all adult care apprentices routinely receive sufficient protected time to study and complete their work.
- Strengthen quality assurance and improvement procedures.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Gill Banks
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	3 to 6 October 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal quality, 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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