

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP Manchester

Last day of inspection: 22 January 2026

This part of the inspection was carried out by Ofsted inspectors using Ofsted's [Handbook for the inspection of education, skills and work activities in prisons and young offender institutions](#).

Ofsted inspects skills and work in custodial establishments as part of its further education and skills inspection activity. These inspections cover four areas: quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development, and leadership and management. The findings are presented in the order of the learner journey in the establishment. Together with the areas of concern, this is Ofsted's assessment of what the establishment does well and what it needs to do better.

Education, skills and work activities

Expected outcomes:

All prisoners are expected and enabled to engage in education, skills or work activities that promote personal development and employability. There are sufficient, suitable education, skills and work places to meet the needs of the population and provision is of a good standard.

Ofsted made the following assessments about the education, skills and work provision:

Overall effectiveness: Inadequate

Quality of education: Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes: Inadequate

Personal development: Inadequate

Leadership and management: Inadequate

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

Leaders had not rectified the concerns raised at the previous inspection. Leaders did not ensure the prison was able to fulfil its role as a training establishment. Activities in education skills and work (ESW) were closed too often and frequently for prolonged periods. However, there were sufficient activity spaces to meet prisoner need.

Leaders had not developed a curriculum with sufficient breadth to meet the differing needs of prisoners. Too often, work roles covered areas essential to the running of the prison only. Prisoners could not gain qualifications in work and there were very few vocational training courses. Vulnerable prisoners, those isolating and those in healthcare did not have access to as wide a range of work as the main population. These groups were unable to access education at all.

The recently redeveloped process for allocating prisoners to ESW was not effective. This was significantly affected when ESW activities were cancelled, meaning that prisoners waited longer to start in purposeful activity, and too many remained unemployed.

Attendance in ESW was too low with significant closures of education and workshops. Leaders had taken actions to address low attendance in recent months, but these had been unsuccessful. Punctuality in education and workshops was poor. Too many prisoners arrived late and not ready to work.

Leaders and managers did not have any involvement with employers to support prisoners with careers guidance in preparation for release. Consequently, very few prisoners gained employment on release or within 6 months of release.

Leaders provided prisoners with an appropriately planned induction, including information, advice, and guidance at the start of their time at HMP Manchester. They provided prisoners with helpful support from relevant agencies to prepare them for release. The prison

resettlement board met monthly with prisoners providing support on job housing, identification documentation, banking, benefits, and for drug and alcohol issues.

The prisoner pay policy was fair and equitable. Prisoners were not disincentivised from attending education and were paid at a higher rate than for some basic job roles. Prisoners with higher status and/or job roles with more responsibility were paid at a higher rate.

The education provider, Novus, delivered mostly effective teaching in English and mathematics. Teachers were well qualified and experienced for the role. However, due to recent changes in the provision including a reduced curriculum, the number of teachers had decreased significantly and there were unfilled vacancies. Leaders provided prisoners for whom English was an additional language with a well-structured programme of learning. A few prisoners had made significant progress in developing their English skills and achieving entry level qualifications. A few prisoners on the category A wing benefited from a helpful programme of English and mathematics courses. They were keen to achieve their qualifications up to level 2 in these subjects.

Teachers assessed what prisoners already knew and could do on arrival at the prison. Most teachers used this information well to develop individualised learning plans to meet prisoners' specific needs. Teachers in English presented information well when discussing formal and informal language types. They linked these well to topical subjects such as global warming and the ban on social media for young people. Teachers recapped these topics well with prisoners through the facilitation of group discussions and also explored them in more depth.

Most teachers provided detailed oral and written feedback to prisoners. This helped prisoners to understand what they had done well, to identify mistakes and where to make improvements. Most prisoners acted on the feedback and improved their work. However, teachers struggled to provide curriculums that built incrementally on prisoners' development of new knowledge, skills, and behaviours. This was due to the frequent disruption in the regime and education closures. Due to the length of time between sessions, prisoners forgot what they had learned and teachers had to repeat lessons. Prisoners in education and on the previously provided vocational training completed their courses and most gained a qualification. However, due to closures in ESW, over recent months too few had completed courses or gained qualifications.

Leaders had implemented a suitable reading strategy. Staff identified non- and emergent readers at induction through suitable screening assessments. Prisoners who were unable to attend education received individualised and much-appreciated support on their wings. These prisoners made steady progress and had learned to read and write since their arrival at the prison. Prisoners benefited from highly appropriate resources to support the development of their reading skills. The library offered a wide range of material, including dyslexia-friendly and easy-read books. Leaders had invested in additional staffing resources to promote reading on accommodation units and to support prisoners to visit the library frequently. The prisoner-led reading club on one residential wing was having a positive impact in helping low-level readers to gain confidence in reading and to develop their reading skills further. However, since the withdrawal of the Shannon Trust provision, prisoners did not benefit from support from trained reading mentors.

Prison work did not enable prisoners to gain new knowledge and skills to prepare them for a career in prison or for release. In our survey, the majority of prisoners said that work they

had been allocated to would not help them when released. When prisoners accessed work, it was mainly to have time out of their cell rather than train them for a worthwhile career. Most prisoners in prison workshops and other work areas took part in low-skilled and unchallenging activities. In about half of prison workshops, the work was mundane and repetitive. Although prisoners were willing to develop knowledge and skills to use in the prison and for release, they were unable to access relevant training or work to help them achieve this. Neither staff nor prisoners valued 'progress in work' booklets. Very few prisoners completed these in workshops or in their job roles.

Most prisoners who had special educational needs and/or disabilities received a tailored support plan that identified appropriate strategies to help them overcome barriers to learning and to succeed. They received appropriate support in education but only limited support in work and industries. Education staff provided appropriate aids to support prisoners' learning, such as fidget toys, stress balls, reading pens and coloured overlays. Mentors supported their peers well as directed by teachers in education. In our survey, most prisoners said they received the support they needed in education.

Most prisoners did not develop their knowledge of how to keep mentally and physically healthy through ESW activities. Leaders and managers had developed an extensive enrichment curriculum working in partnership with a range of arts and creative crafts providers, prison gym instructors, and the education provider. However, most off-wing activities in areas other than the gym were too often cancelled due to regime challenges. There was very little on-wing enrichment activity despite a few resources being provided, such as keyboards and guitars for music making.

Most prisoners did not have sufficient access to the Virtual Campus. However, the few prisoners on Open University (OU) and distance learning courses benefited from group sessions where they accessed learning resources on prison laptops.

Leaders and managers conducted appropriate checks to assure the quality of ESW. They used the results to plan improvement actions. However, due to the significant closures in ESW, quality improvements had been minimal.

Leaders and managers provided helpful training and development to staff in ESW. Staff kept their subject knowledge and skills up to date through frequent training. Teachers in education kept their teaching and assessment skills fresh through regular training. However, leaders and managers did not provide further training in teaching and assessment for prison instructors once they gained training qualifications.

Learning environments were calm and conducive to study. Teachers and prisoners shared a mutual respect and had developed positive working relationships. Prisoners were well-behaved and respectful. Their attitudes to learning were mostly positive and they were keen to learn. However, prisoners had become very despondent due to the constant closures of education activities, which disrupted their learning and progression. Prison instructors did not set or reinforce safe working practices in workshops. Prisoners did not wear correct personal protective equipment in industries workshops and instructors did not enforce sanctions to address this. Education staff felt supported with their workload and wellbeing.

Prison instructors reported that the closures in ESW and the uncertainty this caused had an impact on their workload and wellbeing. Prisoners did not receive sufficient information to

help them to understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Prisoners stated they had received no awareness training or sufficient information to help them understand the risks. Prisoners did not receive sufficient development of their understanding of British values, other than for a few in education.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concern

Leaders did not ensure the prison was able to fulfil its role as a training establishment. Activities in education skills and work (ESW) were closed too often. Leaders had not developed a curriculum with sufficient breadth to meet the differing needs of prisoners. Vulnerable prisoners, those isolating and those in healthcare did not have access to as wide a range of work as the main population and were unable to access education at all.

Priority concern

The recently redeveloped process for allocating prisoners to ESW was not effective. When ESW activities were cancelled prisoners waited longer to start in purposeful activity and too many remained unemployed.

Priority concern

Attendance in ESW was too low and punctuality in education and workshops was poor.

Key concern

Leaders and managers did not have any involvement with employers to support prisoners with careers guidance or to prepare them for release. Very few prisoners gained employment on release.

Key concern

Prison work did not enable prisoners to gain new knowledge and skills to prepare them for a career in prison or for release. In about half of prison workshops, the work was mundane and repetitive.