

# **Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities**

## **HMP Woodhill**

### **Dates of inspection: 2–12 March 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: Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes: Inadequate

Personal development: Requires improvement

Leadership and management: Inadequate

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

Leaders and managers had ambitious plans for the curriculums, but had been hampered in implementing these due to the frequent cancellations caused by the lack of officers to supervise activity areas, as well as prioritising the available officers to help provide safer and calmer residential units. Furthermore, progress was impeded due to staff shortages. This limited the range of courses that could be offered at the time of the inspection. As a result, the recommendations from the previous inspection had not been achieved.

Leaders and managers had provided enough activity spaces to occupy prisoners on either a full- or part-time basis. The allocations process was mostly effective, but prisoners were not always allocated to the full number of available activity spaces which had resulted in waiting lists for most activities. Attendance at activities remained poor and showed little sign of sustained improvement.

Leaders had managed to implement a range of courses that were more suited to the long-term population held at HMP Woodhill. This included courses at level 2 in multiskills, which built on what prisoners had learnt on the level 1 course. They also offered a level 3 education and training qualification that helped peer mentors provide better support in lessons. Plans to further develop the curriculum were in the advanced stages.

Leaders and managers provided prisoners with a helpful induction into education, skills, and work promptly after they arrived at the prison. This helped prisoners to understand the range of education courses available to them.

Leaders and managers had recently planned a curriculum that aligned with the prisons where prisoners were most likely to be transferred to ahead of release. This would allow

prisoners to continue with their courses at their new prison. However, it was too early to determine their impact.

Leaders and managers had recently created a number of education, skills and work pathways which included construction and services industries. They grouped courses, such as health and safety, waste management and industrial cleaning, mulitskills and painting and decorating, into coherent programmes of study. This enabled prisoners to gain skills and experience in interrelated topics, which helped them secure work within the prison and upon release.

Tutors and workshop instructors used the information they had on prisoners' prior learning or the job roles they had completed previously to plan lessons and activities effectively. This contributed to prisoners enjoying their time in education, skills and work and learning new skills.

Prisoners were keen to engage in work. However, too many were not provided with the necessary equipment or skills for their role. Wing cleaners did not have access to sufficient equipment to carry out their work to an acceptable standard. In recycling, instructors did not ensure that prisoners used the correct personal protective equipment, despite it being readily available. Almost half of the food servery workers had not completed basic food hygiene training. A newly appointed member of staff was starting to work through the backlog of prisoners who needed training.

Prisoners in industries and workshops completed a 'Progress to Work' workbook, where instructors could identify the skills prisoners developed, such as teamwork and following instructions. However, instructors did not routinely use these to identify and record the skills that prisoners needed to develop, nor did they set meaningful targets for them. Where instructors did set targets, they were often too vague to be helpful to prisoners in knowing what skills they should further develop. Prisoners whose first language was not English often struggled with using the workbooks and, consequently, did not complete them.

Prisoners working in industries or workshops, including the kitchen, the gardens and recycling, were unable to gain qualifications or recognition for the skills and knowledge they gained. Consequently, when prisoners were released or moved to another prison, they had no record of the skills they had developed.

The Prison Education Service provider, Milton Keynes College, had constructed an effective curriculum that provided prisoners with skills that would help them once released. This included English and mathematics courses for those who needed to improve their skills in these areas, and business courses to respond to the demand from prisoners who wanted to use the practical skills they had learned to start their own business once released. As a result of not having enough staff, the number of courses in English and mathematics and for prisoners whose first language was not English had been reduced resulting in waiting lists. In English and mathematics lessons, prisoners benefited from carefully structured and well-paced lessons that actively involved them. Tutors provided prisoners with sufficient time to discuss topics and practise new concepts individually and in small groups. In these lessons, tutors used questioning and assessments well to check what prisoners knew and built on their knowledge.

Most tutors and instructors provided feedback on prisoners' written work which helped them to understand where they had gone wrong. For example, in gardening, instructors provided helpful feedback on a prisoner's pruning technique, offering encouragement and praise, which helped prisoners improve.

Leaders and managers had recently updated their reading strategy and had relaunched this. There was now a greater emphasis on reading within the prison. Tutors in education had started to focus on reading in their subjects. They did this by providing prisoners with texts related to the topics they taught and asking them to read aloud. Staff across education, skills and work encouraged prisoners to read for pleasure and some reading books were available in residential units. Staff had provided suitable reading materials in workshops.

Prisoners received suitable information, advice and guidance while in the prison. Prisoners benefited from discussions regarding possible careers both within the prison and on release.

There was no systematic approach to supporting prisoners released from prison to go into employment. While individual staff members tried to help as many prisoners as they could gain suitable employment when released, the lack of a dedicated prison employment lead meant that support for prisoners was not available equally to all.

Too few prisoners achieved their intended qualification. Achievement rates were particularly low in English and mathematics, except for entry level 2 English and entry level 3 mathematics, where the majority of prisoners achieved their qualification. A high proportion of prisoners achieved their qualifications in mentoring and cookery.

At induction, staff identified accurately prisoners who had additional support needs. They put support plans in place where needed and tutors and workshop instructors were aware of how to support prisoners and most did this effectively. The neurodiversity specialist had provided helpful training for staff on how to support prisoners with dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism. Staff gained confidence in supporting prisoners and in making adjustments in lessons and workshops. They provided prisoners with tools such as fidget toys, pen grips, and line rulers that supported prisoners to take part in activities.

Prisoners in education and industries had a good understanding of fundamental British values. This was because tutors carefully integrated these topics into discussions in lessons. This contributed to prisoners' understanding of the importance of being respectful and tolerant to their peers and staff.

Staff had created a calm, productive and professional working environment. They did this by setting clear expectations for prisoners' behaviours. For example, in the balloon packing workshop, the demands to meet production targets helped to focus prisoners on the work that needed to be completed.

Prisoners were keen to engage in work. However, too many were not provided with the necessary equipment or skills for their role. Wing cleaners did not have access to sufficient equipment to carry out their work to an acceptable standard. In recycling, instructors did not ensure that prisoners used the correct personal protective equipment, despite it being readily available. Almost half of the food servery workers had not completed basic food hygiene

training. A newly appointed member of staff was starting to work through the backlog of prisoners who needed training.

Prisoners had a positive approach to learning when they participated in activities. Most wanted to attend classes, as they understood the value of participating in learning. However, the frequent cancellation of activities created frustration, which resulted in reduced motivation of prisoners.

Leaders and managers had implemented a pay policy which was effective in incentivising prisoners to continue in education and progress on to higher levels of learning.

Staff used laptops effectively with prisoners, including those in the care and separation unit, so that they could continue with their learning and complete short courses in their cells, such as in food hygiene. Leaders and managers were in the process of expanding the range of courses accessible through the laptops to provide better access to education to prisoners. Ongoing problems with access to the Virtual Campus in cells had hampered how effective prisoners could use it.

Leaders and managers had provided prisoners with a limited range of activities that helped them to explore their interests and hobbies, which included book clubs. The range of options was too narrow, and too few prisoners participated in these activities. This, coupled with frequent cancellation of activities, resulted in prisoners becoming increasingly demotivated.

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

### **Priority concern**

Too many activity sessions were cancelled which meant that prisoners could attend their allocated education or work activities.

#### **Concern**

The breadth of courses available to prisoners was too narrow and did not fully meet their needs.

#### **Concern**

The range of accredited qualifications was too limited, and prisoners were unable to gain recognition for the skills they had developed in industries.

#### **Concern**

The approach to helping prisoners who were leaving the prison and going on to sustainable education, work or training was not systematic enough.