

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP and YOI Stoke Heath

Dates of inspection: 23 February – 5 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: Requires Improvement

Personal development: Requires Improvement

Leadership and management: Inadequate

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

Senior leaders had not fully rectified the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Although they had not increased the number of full-time places in education, leaders had increased prisoners' access to education, skills and work by increasing the allocation of part-time spaces. Leaders had reduced the number of classes that were cancelled and ensured that prisoners received support in the development of their English and mathematical skills. They had increased their offer of qualifications in vocational training, industries and work. However, leaders had not developed an effective whole-prison reading strategy, or increased attendance to sessions sufficiently.

Leaders mostly had an effective oversight of the quality of the education, skills and work provision. The quality of education and training that prisoners received had improved. However, there was a lack of sufficient challenge and oversight from senior leaders. Leaders had not ensured that all prisoners could access sufficiently their allocated activities. The structure of the regime meant that prisoners could not attend all education, skills and work sessions due to clashes with other activities such as association. This meant that prisoners were frustrated at not being able to attend all sessions. Attendance was not high enough.

Leaders had a clear purpose for their education and skills curriculums. Since the previous inspection, they had developed a wider offer that met the needs of most prisoners and local and regional skills shortages. Leaders offered pathways in personal development, construction, manufacturing, hospitality and the green sector. They provided courses in scaffolding, traffic management and dumper and roller. This meant that prisoners developed the skills needed to gain employment upon release. On these courses and in hospitality, employers conducted job interviews with prisoners and offered employment to those closest to release.

Leaders had ensured that there were sufficient part-time education, skills and work places for a high proportion of the prison population. Prisoners were allocated swiftly to activities that mostly aligned to their chosen pathway. However, wing work fell out of the main allocation process. Since leaders had increased the number of part-time spaces, more prisoners were accessing both education and work. Leaders had implemented outreach provision and increased the number of spaces for prisoners to study English and mathematics.

The pay policy made sure that those who attended education received equitable pay relative to other activities. Leaders ensured that prisoners received bonus payments upon completion of their qualifications. Prisoners were incentivised through higher pay to take on trusted roles such as peer mentors.

Most work and workshop activities provided the opportunity to work towards accredited qualifications. For example, prisoners achieved qualifications in customer service, team leading and food safety. Most prisoners achieved their qualifications. In a few workshops, prisoners developed specialist skills. For example, in tailoring prisoners followed complex patterns when cutting and sewing garments. In welding, prisoners-built prototype beds to industry specifications.

Novus delivered education, vocational training and work-related qualifications in the prison. They had put in place suitable curriculums that met the needs of most prisoners. Most prisoners on functional skills English and mathematics and vocational qualifications benefited from well-planned curriculums that were sequenced in a logical order so that they developed their knowledge and skills over time. In food preparation, prisoners developed their knife skills before applying these when preparing vegetables and meat. Most prisoners made at least their expected progress and those that remained on their courses achieved their qualifications.

Prisoners received helpful and informative information, advice and guidance about the education, skills and work activities available to them on arrival at the prison. They benefited from individual interviews and discussions with mentors that helped them to consider appropriate pathways that met their individual needs. Careers advisors supported prisoners to consider activities that closely aligned with their future employment opportunities. However, at the time of the inspection, these plans were not routinely reviewed or adjusted to ensure that they continued to meet the needs of the prisoner. Prisoners who were due for release were supported well. They created CVs, conducted job searches and completed disclosure letters for future employers.

Teachers mostly used effective teaching strategies. In mathematics, teachers used worked examples to demonstrate how to calculate mode, median and mean. Prisoners applied this new knowledge well to complete mathematical problems independently. However, in a few instances the pace of sessions was too slow. Teachers did not provide prisoners with the explanations needed to move on to their next task. This meant that they did not develop their knowledge as quickly as they could.

Instructors in industries and work did not routinely identify prisoners' existing knowledge and skills. This meant that they could not monitor well enough the progress that prisoners made.

Instructors did not typically set meaningful targets to help prisoners build on their knowledge and skills or support their wider development. As a result, too many prisoners worked on the same production task without further developing their knowledge and skills. However, in welding, instructors provided additional challenging tasks to those prisoners that had prior experience. This supported prisoners to hone their skills, producing work of a high standard.

Staff accurately assessed any special educational needs and/or disabilities that prisoners had upon arrival at the prison. They provided appropriate strategies so that prisoners with support needs could participate in education. Teachers and instructors had received appropriate training in neurodiversity which meant that they planned their lessons and work to meet prisoners' individual needs so that they could succeed. They broke activities down into small manageable steps and provided suitable adaptations for prisoners with dyslexia. Peer mentors had received training in how to support prisoners with neurodiversity needs and supported their peers well. As a result, prisoners with special educational needs and/or disabilities developed the knowledge and skills they needed and achieved as well as their peers.

Teachers and instructors supported prisoners to develop their English, mathematics and digital skills. In kitchens, prisoners used computerised order systems competently and calculated food orders accurately. Staff supported prisoners in employability lessons to create spelling dictionaries to improve their written work. In customer service, prisoners used feedback on their spelling and grammar to correct their work. Most prisoners improved their work over time. Leaders had increased the number of digital courses on offer to develop prisoners' digital skills so that they could access the virtual campus. However, at the time of the inspection most prisoners did not benefit from this resource to broaden their learning.

Teachers and instructors mostly used a range of effective assessment strategies to identify gaps in learning. In education, teachers provided appropriate feedback that told prisoners what they had done well and what they needed to do to improve. Prisoners acted on this feedback and improved their work. In forklift truck driving, instructors provided effective verbal feedback to prisoners to further develop their skills such as placing and lifting pallets.

Most prisoners acquired useful knowledge, skills and behaviours through their education or work. Those who studied mathematics learned and used the correct sequence of operations to complete calculations accurately. Prisoners who studied qualifications in industries developed technical and employability skills which helped them to complete safety checks such as checking hydraulics and nut bolts before starting the forklift truck. In hospitality and catering, prisoners trained in environments that mirrored restaurants and public houses. Staff organised events so that prisoners experienced working in busy environments that closely reflected the sector.

Leaders had not implemented an effective prison-wide reading strategy. Managers and most staff did not routinely encourage men to read. Although there were reading challenges in place aimed at encouraging reading, too few prisoners were aware of these and therefore did not take part. However, leaders had established an appropriate way to identify prisoners' gaps in reading. The very few non-readers and emerging readers received targeted support that helped them to improve their reading skills such as dedicated reading time at the start of classes and individual weekly support.

Prisoners demonstrated positive attitudes to their education, training and work. They were polite towards and respectful of their peers and staff. Prisoners were enthusiastic about their learning and participated well in workshops and lessons. In workshops prisoners were keen to share their knowledge and skills with others. For example, in manufacturing they demonstrated to others how to use saws safely and cut metal tubes accurately. Prisoners felt safe in classrooms and workshops.

Prisoners in education benefited from discussions on a range of topics that helped them to develop their self-awareness and improve their confidence. However, leaders had not ensured that prisoners in industries and work accessed a curriculum that supported their wider development. Too many prisoners were not aware of the wider opportunities available to them.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concerns

Leaders did not sufficiently scrutinise the impact of quality improvement actions to ensure that they rectified all weaknesses swiftly.

Leaders had not ensured that all prisoners could access sufficiently their allocated activities. They were taking too long to rectify the regime issues causing low attendance across education, skills and work.

Leaders and managers had not implemented an effective reading strategy to develop prisoners' reading further.

Key concerns

Leaders had not ensured that all prisoners had access to a curriculum that supported their wider development.

Leaders did not have an accurate oversight of the progress that all prisoners made towards their learning goals and skills development in industries and work.