

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

## **HMP Winchester**

### **Last day of inspection: 19 February 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: Requires improvement

Personal development: Inadequate

Leadership and management: Inadequate

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

Leaders had not taken effective action to address long-standing weaknesses in education, skills and work. They had failed to secure sufficient purposeful activity places, and the curriculum remained too narrow and not ambitious enough to meet prisoners' needs. As a result, too many prisoners waited too long for induction and allocation or were placed in activities that did not support their progression.

Leaders and managers had not ensured that the limited education, vocational training and industry places were allocated appropriately to reflect prisoners' needs or aspirations. Several industries, including textiles, waste management and gardens, operated at reduced capacity or not at all. Consequently, many prisoners remained unemployed or without enough purposeful activity, restricting their opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviour required for employment and successful resettlement.

Leaders had not broadened the curriculum to meet the needs of prisoners. They had begun to use labour-market information to plan courses such as the construction safety certification scheme and traffic-management. They had also introduced a job-readiness framework. However, these developments were at an early stage and reached only a small proportion of prisoners. As a result, too few prisoners benefited.

Leaders had not established an effective induction and allocation process. Managers did not ensure that prisoners received timely careers information, advice and guidance before being allocated to education, vocational training or industries. Consequently, prisoners were often allocated to activities that did not reflect their prior attainment, their need to develop their English and mathematics skills or career

aspirations. As a result, many prisoners left their course early or did not attend consistently because the learning did not meet their needs.

Leaders had not developed clear, consistent or well-sequenced progression pathways across industries. Too many prisoners were limited to basic, repetitive tasks and were unable to move on to more challenging work or develop higher-level skills. Although some workshops offered structured routines and opportunities to progress from simple to more responsible tasks, this was not widespread across the industries. Consequently, prisoners, particularly those with higher prior attainment, were not sufficiently challenged and could not access more advanced training.

Leaders did not ensure that prisoners in work areas, such as wing cleaning and food serveries, received the training required by prison policy before taking up these roles. Waiting lists for food-handling and hygiene qualifications were too long. This was compounded by the fact that too many prisoners were past their planned course end dates. Although leaders had recently introduced brief subject-specific workbooks, they had not established effective arrangements to monitor completion. As a result, prisoners were unable to develop the skills and qualifications needed, not only to improve their employability, but also to meet the legislative and compliance requirements associated with these roles.

Leaders had not ensured that learning and work progress plans for all prisoners working in industries were completed and reviewed promptly. Too many prisoners working in industries did not have an up-to-date plan identifying their starting points, skills development targets and next steps. Instructors in tailoring made good use of progress in work booklets to capture starting points, set targets and review progress regularly, and prisoners in these areas understood the skills they were developing and how these related to future employment. However, this good practice was not yet consistent across all industries. This limited leaders' ability to ensure that all prisoners made sustained progress.

Leaders had introduced new work opportunities within the prison's industries, but these did not provide prisoners with clear or structured routes for progression. Although instructors used workplace tasks to help prisoners develop basic transferable skills, leaders had not ensured that industry roles linked coherently to accredited vocational training. As a result, prisoners working in industries were unable to progress into recognised qualifications, and too many left without gaining the formal accreditation needed to support employment on release.

Milton Keynes College delivered education and vocational training. Teaching staff were appropriately qualified and planned lessons logically, helping prisoners develop essential knowledge and skills. However, the quality of education was too variable and, overall, not good enough. Too many individual learning plans (ILPs) were incomplete or not used well enough to guide learning, and teachers did not consistently plan effectively for mixed-ability groups. As a result, lower-level learners were sometimes unable to participate confidently. While some prisoners produced strong work in subjects such as art and digital skills, too many did not sustain their

learning or achieve their intended outcomes, particularly in functional skills English and mathematics.

Teachers and instructors used a range of effective strategies, including questioning, discussion and practical demonstrations. They revisited key topics to support recall and applied learning to workplace tasks; for example, in waste management, prisoners used mathematical concepts to calculate recycling volumes and track financial savings for the prison.

Instructors working in industries demonstrated secure occupational knowledge and showed prisoners how to complete work tasks safely and effectively, particularly in tailoring, waste management, and painting and decorating. They set clear expectations for conduct and safety, and monitored prisoners' work appropriately. Prisoners produced work of an appropriate standard under instructors' supervision.

Leaders and managers did not use information about attendance, past planned end dates, achievement and withdrawal effectively. This limited their ability to identify patterns of underperformance or take timely action to improve teaching, training and outcomes. As a result, they did not have sufficient oversight of how well prisoners were progressing towards accredited qualifications, including in English and mathematics.

Prisoners' behaviour in education classes, vocational training sessions and industries was calm and respectful. Prisoners related positively to teachers and instructors, followed safety expectations and used personal protective equipment appropriately in industries. Most prisoners engaged constructively in discussions in education and vocational training. They completed work tasks diligently in industries. They demonstrated good understanding of the values of tolerance and respect. However, inconsistent attendance in education and vocational training, and occasional poor punctuality, meant that prisoners did not consistently develop the expected employability standards leaders aimed for.

Leaders had improved the identification of prisoners with special educational needs and/or disabilities and ensured that teachers in education had access to support plans. Teachers used these plans appropriately in most education classes, and learning support practitioners provided effective assistance. Instructors working in industries adapted work tasks, where needed, and supported prisoners appropriately. However, leaders did not ensure that support strategies were implemented consistently across all industry settings. As a result, some prisoners did not receive support to help them make sustained progress.

Leaders were at an early stage in implementing a whole-prison reading strategy and had not yet established effective arrangements to identify reading gaps or provide systematic support for those needing to improve their reading fluency. Work with the Shannon Trust, including the recent recognition of peer mentoring as a paid activity, was beginning to have a positive effect, but it was too new to have had a sustained impact. Within education, teachers prioritised reading more effectively by embedding

it into English lessons and using phonics-informed approaches where appropriate, but this was not replicated consistently across industries.

Although attendance rates had improved since the previous inspection, they were still low. Approximately a quarter of prisoners did not attend their scheduled lessons. Too often, they missed their planned activities to attend appointments in other prison departments, such as health care. Prison leaders had not undertaken enough work to understand fully the reasons why prisoners chose not to attend their activities. Attendance rates were high for most work and vocational training sessions.

Leaders had not ensured that personal development activities were broad enough or sufficiently well promoted to meet the needs of the population. A minority of prisoners on specific wings could access activities such as music, pottery, well-being groups and chess, but these were not available across the prison. Leaders did not evaluate participation rates by wing or by prisoners' needs.

Leaders had not ensured that the pay policy incentivised education. Prisoners received similar or better pay for low-skilled work compared with education classes, which discouraged participation.

Leaders had recently introduced a job-readiness framework intended to support prisoners in preparing for employment. However, at the time of the inspection, it had not reached enough prisoners. Prisoners also did not have sufficient access to the virtual campus (see Glossary) to search for jobs or prepare their CVs and disclosure statements. As a result, too many left custody without the tools or confidence needed to secure employment on release.

Leaders and managers had identified many of the weaknesses across education, vocational training and industries, and produced action plans to address them. They had begun to strengthen oversight of teaching through lesson observations and had taken steps to improve communication between education and prison staff to support prisoners with additional needs better. However, leaders did not check carefully enough whether these actions were improving the quality of education, vocational training or work, and therefore could not be sure that the issues they had identified were being resolved.

### **Concerns:**

Leaders had not secured sufficient activity spaces, or made sure that the allocations process operated as an effective route into purposeful activity. This resulted in too many prisoners being unemployed, waiting too long for induction, or allocated to activities that did not reflect their starting points or career intentions.

Leaders had not developed a curriculum that met the needs of a reception population. Despite introducing some new courses, the overall offer remained too limited to support prisoners' personal, academic or professional development effectively.

Careers guidance was not timely or sufficiently personalised, with too many prisoners allocated to activities without prior guidance and leaving custody without a CV or record of their achievements.

Personal development opportunities did not reach enough prisoners to make a sustained difference to their wider skills and rehabilitation.