

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP Leyhill

Dates of inspection: 13-16 July 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: Requires improvement

Quality of education: Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes: Good

Personal development: Requires improvement

Leadership and management: Requires improvement

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

Leaders had not rectified all of the concerns identified at the previous inspection. The actions they had taken to improve the weaknesses identified in the provision of education, skills and work were too slow. For example, leaders had not met the training needs of all prisoners, including those related to self-employment and substantive qualifications.

Leaders had still not ensured that the curriculum was of sufficiently high quality. The curriculum did not equip all prisoners with the skills they needed for employment on release. Leaders had not ensured that prisoners made enough progress in education, work, and employment while engaging in release on temporary licence (ROTL). Consequently, too many prisoners fail to obtain employment on release.

Leaders had ensured there were sufficient spaces for prisoners to participate in education and work. All eligible prisoners worked or studied on a full-time basis. Prisoners were allocated appropriately, using well-informed career plans and in a timely manner. When prisoners wanted to change activities, this was well managed by staff.

Leaders had also increased ROTL employment opportunities since the previous inspection. They ensured that any clashes for prisoners moving between these activities was well managed. Leaders had recently changed the pay policy to incentivise education and work, with higher rates of pay for those demonstrating substantial progress.

Leaders' actions to improve all the weaknesses of the quality of the curriculum had been too slow. However, they had made improvements to their oversight of education, skills and work activities since the previous inspection. They had put in place well-structured meetings with managers from education and work to routinely discuss quality assurance activities. This

meant that leaders knew the strengths of the curriculum and had begun tackling most of priorities for development.

Leaders had largely planned a localised curriculum for external work placements to reflect the current labour market intelligence. They had fostered productive relationships with employers and voluntary organisations, which had increased the proportion of prisoners who benefited from employment opportunities since the previous inspection. Leaders ensured that around one quarter of the prisoner population were regularly attending external work placements.

Leaders had not planned a vocational curriculum that prepared prisoners well to gain and sustain employment on release. Leaders did not provide opportunities for prisoners to get formal recognition for the skills and knowledge they gained in vocational areas such as construction, hospitality and warehousing. Consequently, too many prisoners could not validate what they learned and could do as a result of the training they had received.

Leaders did not ensure that instructors consistently recorded, monitored or reviewed the progress that prisoners in work made in developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, the large majority of prisoners working in distribution-related activities or wing cleaning did not know the progress they had made and did not have their progress reviewed. Consequently, prisoners were not helped to consolidate what they had learned and were not supported to progress to more challenging skills.

Leaders provided prisoners with an induction that covered the basic information they needed on arrival at the prison. However, leaders did not ensure that the information presented was accessible to prisoners with a low reading level. In a minority of cases, the information presented was inaccurate about the current activities available. Staff do not emphasise the level of English and mathematics that prisoners needed to gain work.

Leaders provided prisoners with high-quality resources to support their learning. Prisoners used industry-standard equipment during their work sessions, including in horticulture and commercial printing.

Leaders provided prisoners with comprehensive careers education, information and guidance (CEIAG) by well-experienced and qualified staff. CEIAG staff created useful training plans that they used to allocate prisoners to the most appropriate education or work activities for them. Staff typically reviewed prisoners' career plans on an annual basis. They provided useful pre-release support to prisoners nearing the end of their custodial sentence, including identifying appropriate post-release employment opportunities, producing a CV and application letter using the Virtual Campus (VC).

Leaders ensured that most teachers and instructors were well qualified and experienced to support prisoners' learning. Leaders provided staff with useful opportunities to improve the support they offered to prisoners during sessions, such as access to a subject-specialist mentor. However, in a few cases the staff professional development that leaders had provided was not fully impactful on prisoners, such as training to provide prisoners with high-quality progress reviews.

Teachers in education planned learning activities well. In a few industry activities, such as joinery and horticulture, prisoners received training that replicated industry standards. However, too many instructors in work and in ROTL employment did not take into account the individual starting points of prisoners. Instructors did not adequately consider prisoners' ongoing training needs. As a result, prisoners were not well prepared for future employment on their release.

Since becoming the Prison Education Service provider in October 2025, Milton Keynes College had worked productively to provide greater access to English and/or mathematics lessons for prisoners. Experienced and well-qualified teachers planned lessons well. They referred to examinations in lessons to help prisoners understand the questions they would be asked and how to answer them well. Teachers provided useful one-to-one support in lessons, including to prisoners with additional support needs.

Leaders had taken well-considered actions to support prisoners with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) since the previous inspection. Leaders had appointed staff with expertise in SEND and had improved the processes they used to monitor and adjust the support provided to prisoners. Leaders ensured that additional support information was shared with teachers and instructors. This meant that prisoners received the additional support they needed with their learning. For example, prisoners with dystonia were provided with soft-touch keyboards and prisoners with dyslexia were supported by peer mentors. Most prisoners with SEND made suitable progress against their learning goals.

Too many prisoners who started qualifications in education, including English, mathematics and enterprise, did not achieve them. Teachers did not always use what prisoners knew and could do to inform their teaching and support positive achievement. Teachers did not always ensure that prisoners used the feedback they received to improve their work.

Prisoners studying short vocational courses, including health and safety, mentoring and cleaning, achieved their qualifications. In these vocational courses, prisoners mostly produced work to the expected standard. Prisoners who attended external work placements gained confidence and developed independence and employability skills. Too few prisoners, however, secured employment on release.

Prisoners attended their education and work activities well. They were punctual to lessons and integrated quickly into workplace routines. Employers, including those in construction, hospitality and business administration, reported that prisoners worked safely, showed initiative and took responsibility for their tasks without close supervision. Prisoners in work reported feeling part of the workforce, which helped to increase their confidence. They responded positively to feedback, managed their own schedules and took pride in their work.

Leaders had largely provided suitable access to distance-learning courses via the VC. They used distance learning provision as the sole opportunity for a few prisoners to gain an accredited qualification at level 3 or above. A small number of prisoners studied degree-level courses and mostly reported being well supported by staff.

Leaders provided suitable events to raise awareness of and to celebrate diversity. Leaders had put in place well-structured events to raise funds for charity. These events helped prisoners to develop a sense of community responsibility. For example, peer-led events

recognised national days, such as the Holocaust Memorial Day and raised money for charities such as Age UK.

Leaders had put in place a few useful reading support initiatives. A small number of prisoners participated in peer-supported reading groups and benefited from reading-related guest-speaker workshops. Leaders worked closely with staff from the Shannon Trust to develop reading mentors. However, leaders acknowledged inconsistencies in the broader implementation of their reading strategy. For example, staff did not always promote reading for pleasure. Leaders knew prisoners' reading levels upon arrival at the prison but did not routinely assess or monitor their progress.

Leaders had not implemented an effective personal development curriculum. They had not ensured that prisoners' wider skill development needs were being met well enough, including digital skills and knowing the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Leaders had not ensured that prisoners received enough guidance and support about living independently, including money management and healthy eating. Consequently, prisoners did not develop enough of the knowledge and skills they needed for the modern world.

Leaders had provided a mostly suitable range of enrichment activities for prisoners. These included fitness-related sessions, gardening, and peer-led games such as chess. However, participation was typically low. The activities that were provided did not always meet the interests of younger prisoners.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concern

The curriculum did not sufficiently meet prisoners' training needs, including self-employment and substantive qualifications.

Priority concern

Too many prisoners failed to obtain employment on release.

Key concern

The recording of work skills and behaviours developed in prison was poor. As a result, prisoners did not fully understand the progress they had made or how their new skills might be useful to them when applying for work or on release.

Key concern

Prisoners were not prepared sufficiently for the modern world. There was limited access to digital skills development and a lack of learning about how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views.