

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP Highpoint

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: Inadequate

Quality of education: Inadequate

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?

Leaders had not secured sufficient improvement in education, skills and work since the previous inspection. Too many long-standing weaknesses remained despite leaders' actions to improve outcomes for prisoners. Long-term vacancies in key teaching, careers and neurodiversity roles restricted prisoners' access to education and support. Prisoners' attendance remained too low, too few achieved their intended learning aims and leaders' actions to improve reading benefited too few prisoners. Although leaders had strengthened oversight through performance meetings, quality improvement arrangements and greater challenge of providers, these actions had not resulted in sufficiently timely or sustained improvement.

Leaders had planned sufficient activity spaces by combining full- and part-time opportunities. However, they did not ensure that these were used effectively. Allocation arrangements did not enable prisoners to move promptly from induction to suitable education, vocational training or work. Too many prisoners remained unemployed or intentionally unemployed while places in some activities remained unfilled.

Leaders did not reconcile information about capacity, allocation and actual participation accurately enough. Consequently, they did not understand precisely why prisoners were not participating or how effectively available places were being used.

Prisoners benefited from a suitably structured induction that helped them understand the education, skills and work opportunities available. Staff identified prisoners' prior attainment in English, mathematics and digital skills and used this information to avoid unnecessary reassessment. Careers advisers explored prisoners' previous experience, interests and release plans and used this information to inform learning and work plans.

Leaders had not ensured that the pay policy encouraged enough prisoners to improve their English, mathematics or vocational skills. Production targets linked to pay motivated prisoners working in industries. However, some prisoners chose work rather than education, even when improving their English or mathematics would have supported their progress to more demanding training or employment.

Leaders had a clear understanding of prisoners' employment aspirations, release destinations and relevant labour-market priorities. They had strengthened employer engagement and developed useful employment pathways in rail track and plant operations. Prisoners on these programmes developed valuable specialist skills and, in several cases, progressed directly into employment on release. However, these opportunities benefited relatively few prisoners. Leaders did not use their understanding of prisoners' needs and labour market priorities systematically enough to review the full curriculum or ensure that provision across both sites met prisoners' rehabilitative and employment needs.

The curriculum was not sufficiently broad or consistently available for a large category C training and resettlement prison. Leaders did not ensure that enough prisoners could access English and mathematics provision when they needed it. Too few prisoners could access vocational training, and opportunities to gain recognised vocational qualifications were very limited. Too many prisoners could not continue their learning without disruption or develop and gain recognition for the knowledge and skills needed at the right stage of their sentence.

Leaders had not developed a curriculum that met the specific needs of young adults. Although they planned to introduce a revised, bespoke curriculum, this was not in place at the time of the inspection. Consequently, young adults did not receive sufficiently tailored education, skills and work provision to meet their needs and support their progression.

Leaders provided regular work opportunities through prison industries, but these did not consistently help prisoners develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they needed for employment. In textiles and printer recycling, prisoners progressed from basic production tasks to quality assurance, packaging and forklift-truck driving. Prisoners in horticulture and tailoring also developed useful practical skills. However, too many workshop activities were repetitive and insufficiently ambitious. Prisoners often completed production tasks without understanding how the skills they developed related to employment and, where appropriate, without gaining recognised qualifications.

Leaders did not ensure that wing workers received a structured induction or role-specific training. Consequently, these prisoners were not sufficiently well prepared to carry out their responsibilities or develop transferable skills through their roles.

PeoplePlus delivered education and vocational training at the prison. Managers had planned courses in English, mathematics, English for speakers of other languages, digital skills and vocational subjects to help prisoners develop the knowledge and skills they needed for further learning, work and release. However, managers did not ensure that teaching posts were staffed consistently. Some teaching vacancies remained unfilled over prolonged periods and, where teachers were recruited, they were not retained. Consequently, planned provision, including motor vehicle and other vocational courses, was unavailable or delivered inconsistently. Staff provided appropriate support for prisoners studying through the Open University and other distance learning programmes, helping them to continue their studies.

The quality of teaching and training was too variable. Where teaching was effective, teachers and trainers used information about prisoners' starting points to plan learning that met individual needs. They explained new knowledge clearly, used practical activities effectively and provided feedback that helped prisoners improve. Where teaching was less effective, activities were not sufficiently ambitious, feedback did not explain clearly enough how prisoners should improve, and spelling and grammatical errors in teaching materials did not model the standards expected of prisoners.

Prisoners who attended their allocated activities developed useful knowledge and skills and could explain how they might apply them. For example, prisoners in English developed skills they could use to support their children, while those in plastering developed practical techniques relevant to employment. However, inconsistent attendance and high withdrawals restricted the proportion of prisoners who benefited fully from the planned curriculum.

Prisoners whose learning difficulties and/or disabilities had been identified received effective support in education. Teachers used learning support plans appropriately, and learning support practitioners helped prisoners to participate and achieve at rates similar to their peers. However, very few prisoners outside education had their neurodiverse needs identified and supported. The long-standing vacancy in the neurodiversity support manager role meant that leaders did not identify prisoners' needs or coordinate suitable support effectively across education, skills and work. Consequently, too many prisoners did not receive the assessment, adjustments or support they needed to overcome barriers to participation and progress.

Leaders' actions to improve prisoners' reading had limited impact. Not all eligible prisoners received timely reading screening, and leaders did not monitor closely enough whether prisoners with low reading skills accessed and benefited from support. Reading champions and Shannon Trust mentors supported prisoners in the library and on the wings, including a small number with English as an additional language. However, leaders did not deploy these resources effectively enough to meet identified need. Prisoners in work and industries had less frequent access to the library, which restricted their opportunities to select books and take part in reading activities. Teachers promoted reading effectively in English and English for speakers of other languages, but staff did not promote it systematically across vocational training, industries and work. Consequently, too few prisoners improved their reading or developed positive reading habits.

Too few prisoners completed and achieved their intended learning aims. High withdrawal rates substantially reduced achievement, particularly in functional skills English and mathematics. Too few prisoners who achieved entry 3 functional skills progressed successfully to level 1, especially in mathematics. Consequently, too many prisoners left learning without gaining the qualifications they needed to support further learning, employment or resettlement.

Prisoners' attendance at education remained too low despite some recent improvement. Attendance was higher in several work and vocational activities but remained inconsistent across both sites. Too many prisoners did not attend English and mathematics regularly enough to make progress, and non-attendance contributed to high withdrawal rates.

Leaders did not analyse achievement, withdrawal, progression or attendance information well enough. They did not consistently distinguish between operational withdrawals and those caused by non-attendance, incorrect allocation, enrolment errors or insufficient time to complete; nor did they understand the reasons for prisoners' absence well enough. Consequently, leaders did not know precisely why prisoners were leaving courses or not attending, or where they needed to take action to improve participation, completion, achievement and progression.

Prisoners who attended education, vocational training and work behaved well. They treated staff and each other with respect, felt safe and followed health and safety requirements. Most arrived punctually and took pride in the progress they made.

Leaders had not developed a sufficiently coherent personal development curriculum. Monthly themes, peer mentoring, employer engagement and enrichment activities helped some prisoners to develop confidence, communication and teamwork skills. Employer events enabled prisoners to practise interview skills and, in a few cases, progress to job interviews. However, many opportunities were available only to prisoners in education or on specific wings, and too many prisoners did not know what was available. Staff did not consistently identify or review meaningful personal development targets. Consequently, prisoners' access to personal development depended too much on where they lived or the activities they attended, and too many were unclear about the personal skills and behaviours they needed to develop.

Prisoners who received careers information, advice and guidance found it useful. Careers advisers supported prisoners with education, employment, accommodation, banking and preparation for release. Multi-agency pre-release clinics helped prisoners approaching release, and links with employers provided useful employment events and opportunities. However, long-term vacancies in the careers team meant that too many prisoners waited too long for initial interviews and subsequent reviews. Consequently, careers advisers could not review prisoners' progress, or update their learning and work plans promptly enough to reflect prisoners' changing needs, aspirations and release plans.

Prisoners' access to the recent version of the Virtual Campus was restricted by technical and infrastructure difficulties. Consequently, too few prisoners could use it to develop digital skills, undertake independent learning or prepare for employment and release.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concern

Leaders did not plan a sufficiently broad, ambitious and consistently available education, skills and work curriculum.

Key concern

Too many prisoners did not complete and achieve their intended learning aims.

Key concern

Too few prisoners benefited from timely identification of their support needs that enabled them to overcome barriers to participation in education, skills and work.