

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP Stocken

Dates of inspection: 27 to 30 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: Good

Leadership and management: Requires improvement

Since the last inspection, leaders had made notable improvements to the education, skills and work provision. They had either resolved or partially resolved each of the concerns inspectors had raised. Leaders had increased considerably the number of activity spaces, so that there were sufficient places for the entire population. However, there were only enough full-time spaces for approximately two-thirds of prisoners, which was not enough for a training prison.

Leaders, backed by a well-appointed employer advisory board, had enhanced the curriculum so that it had a clear focus on preparing prisoners for employment. They offered prisoners challenging workshop activities and had worked with employers to develop high-quality training environments. For example, the Karcher workshop replicated the firm's external working environments, with prisoners completing exacting repair tasks.

Inspectors also found improvements to the vocational training offer run by People Plus. Joint work with Toyota had enhanced the motor vehicle curriculum. Prisoners used modern vehicles to improve their skills and knowledge and developed the broader employability skills that the employer needed. Those prisoners who moved to open conditions had the opportunity to continue their development by working for Toyota via release on temporary licence. An array of prisoners also benefitted from job interview practice with external professionals and a few received job offers.

A small number of prisoners studied modules in vocational subjects at level 3. In addition, a few completed distance learning courses such as Open University degrees. They mostly had suitable support and access to the resources they needed for their studies via the Virtual Campus.

Staff vacancies at People Plus meant that there were gaps in the mathematics and English curriculum which had persisted since the last inspection. Prisoners could not consistently access the functional mathematics and English courses they needed to develop their skills and knowledge. This limited the opportunities for a minority of prisoners to move on to vocational training courses. Leaders had not provided an ambitious digital skills course. There were only limited opportunities for prisoners to develop the digital skills they needed for living and working in modern Britain.

Prisoners largely received a swift induction, but induction sessions were not sufficiently interactive or engaging. This resulted in some prisoners losing interest. However, in most cases, the one-to-one guidance prisoners received during the session helped them to select the right course or work option to meet their career aims.

Staff with responsibility for the allocations process managed this well. Prisoners mostly accessed activities which matched their goals and their needs. Only a very small proportion of the population was unemployed. However, there were long waiting lists for vocational training and for functional mathematics, in particular at entry level.

Leaders had provided too many wing cleaner activity spaces. Prisoners often finished their cleaning duties quickly and did so to a good standard, but were then underoccupied for their working hours.

Through the pay policy, leaders incentivised education, in particular functional skills. As well as receiving the highest rates of pay for studying functional mathematics and English, prisoners received bonuses when they passed examinations.

The education and vocational training curriculums offered by People Plus were largely planned and taught effectively. Prisoners usually developed foundation-level skills well before they moved on to more complex concepts. This helped most prisoners to develop their knowledge and skills incrementally over time. Teachers and trainers were largely suitably qualified, experienced and occupationally competent. Some vocational trainers had benefitted from comprehensive external training from employers, which kept their vocational subject knowledge up to date. Teachers and trainers taught learners effectively, for example by providing environments conducive to learning, planning activities which met prisoners' needs and explaining new topics clearly.

Teachers and trainers provided frequent and encouraging feedback to prisoners. This helped prisoners to reflect on what they could now do and where they needed to improve. Most teachers and instructors identified the spelling, punctuation and grammar errors prisoners made. This included, in vocational training areas, key subject terminology which prisoners spelled incorrectly.

In a few cases, education teachers did not check that prisoners had understood key concepts thoroughly enough. They moved on too quickly to more challenging concepts without ensuring that prisoners had grasped the basic aspects of what they were studying. Prisoners who had English as an additional language but studied subjects other than English for speakers of other languages did not consistently benefit from curriculum planning that met their specific needs. For example, in functional English classes they did not develop all the specific skills they needed, such as improving their pronunciation skills.

In education and vocational training, prisoners mostly passed the qualifications they studied. However, the achievement rates in functional mathematics and English were too low, in particular at levels 1 and 2.

Across education, skills and work, teaching staff, instructors and peer mentors worked effectively together, including co-teaching some aspects of lessons or training. Peer mentors were suitably qualified and completed training in topics such as support for prisoners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Peer mentors enjoyed their roles and were positive about the wellbeing benefits these provided and the impact they had on their mentees.

Prisoners with identified SEND and other barriers to their learning and skills development received effective targeted support. Teachers and instructors used education support plans to adapt their teaching and instruction appropriately. For example, education teachers provided prisoners with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder fidget toys to aid their concentration. Prisoners with SEND largely achieved their qualifications at similar rates to their peers.

Leaders had implemented a reading strategy that promoted a culture of reading well. Leaders used a range of interesting and valuable activities to realise this, such as book clubs and reading challenges. They provided mobile libraries on wings and book corners in workshops, which prisoners used well. Prisoners spoke positively about the impact that reading had on their lives. Prisoners who needed to learn to read or improve their reading benefitted from highly effective lessons taught by reading specialists. They used appropriate resources and provided careful guidance that helped prisoners decode sounds. Prisoners spelled words accurately and read paragraphs aloud with precision and accuracy.

In work activities, instructors mostly organised workshops well. They focused prisoners on the work tasks they needed to complete so that, in most cases, prisoners were busy. Instructors used Coracle laptops to provide additional courses to prisoners. This ensured that prisoners used their time well during quieter periods by developing their knowledge of topics such as health and safety. However, instructors did not focus closely enough on developing prisoners' employability skills. They did not set prisoners challenging, individualised targets that would help them develop skills such as timekeeping, working with others or problem solving.

Across education, vocational training and industries, prisoners largely demonstrated positive attitudes towards their activities. They listened attentively, concentrated well and engaged purposefully with the work they had been set. Inspectors found that workshops and vocational training environments were calm and productive, with prisoners working collaboratively. In education, prisoners followed established routines well to ensure they settled quickly into lessons. Relationships between prisoners and staff were positive and respectful, and staff quickly and appropriately tackled rare instances of prisoners using derogatory language. Prisoners felt safe in education, skills and work.

Although most prisoners attended their education, training and work sessions well, attendance rates were too low in functional mathematics and English. In addition, a minority of prisoners arrived late for their activities.

Leaders had worked effectively to improve the quality of careers information, advice and guidance prisoners received. As well as initial careers reviews to inform personal plans and future goals, most prisoners also received timely reviews. In a minority of cases, these did not happen swiftly enough.

Leaders used their considerable links to employers to provide prisoners with valuable employment training and guidance. For example, Toyota provided careers information sessions to help prisoners understand employment opportunities in the automotive industries. Members of the employment advisory board provided guidance on self-employment and prisoners could attend careers fairs where they met directly with employers.

The 'Feel Good Friday' initiative which leaders had introduced supported well the increasing number of prisoners who were close to release. It enabled partner agencies to work more effectively together to address prisoners' needs and guide them towards suitable employment opportunities.

The curriculum which leaders offered contributed positively towards prisoners' personal development. Prisoners developed valuable personal skills such as patience, resilience, and self-esteem. Leaders supported isolated prisoners to develop self-confidence by expressing themselves through personal writing through the 'Second Chance' programme. The majority of prisoners who completed this writing programme moved on to mainstream education courses.

Prison leaders offered enrichment activities that supported prisoners' wider development. For example, the library offered clubs, quizzes and 'open mic' events to improve prisoners' social skills. In addition, prisoners frequently attended on-wing activities such as fitness sessions, table tennis and coffee mornings. A minority completed courses such as drug and alcohol awareness using Coracle laptops.

Although prisoners showed respect and tolerance towards their peers and could talk broadly about these concepts, in too many cases their knowledge of fundamental British values was not sufficiently well developed. Prisoners also lacked a thorough enough knowledge of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concern

Staff vacancies meant that prisoners could not always study functional English and mathematics at the level they needed. At the time of the inspection there were lengthy waiting lists for entry-level mathematics in particular.

Priority concern

Achievement rates in functional mathematics and English at levels 1 and 2 were too low.

Key concern

There were too many prisoners in wing cleaning roles. They did not have enough to do to fill their working hours.

Key concern

Workshop instructors did not set prisoners development targets that met their employability needs.