

Priestley College

16 – 19 Academy

Inspection dates

14–16 May 2019

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for students	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers ensure that a very high proportion of students achieve their qualifications.
- A large proportion of students achieve a high grade in their subjects on AS and vocational level 3 courses.
- Good advice and guidance enable most students to move on to further study, higher education, employment or apprenticeships.
- Students who receive funding for high needs receive a high-quality learning experience. Consequently, students achieve as well as their peers and make excellent progress.
- Teachers plan course work effectively, which enables students to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of topics.
- Most students improve their work as result of the helpful feedback they receive from teachers.
- Senior leaders, managers and staff nurture a supportive and inclusive culture. Students benefit from very good pastoral support.
- Students enjoy their studies. Their behaviour is excellent, and they show respect for each other and towards college staff.
- Students participate in a wide range of interesting and worthwhile additional activities that help them develop their personal, social and communication skills.
- Governors and senior leaders ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of 16- to 19-year olds in Warrington and prepares them well for their next steps.
- In a significant minority of lessons, teachers' expectations are too low. They do not challenge students to achieve the standards of work of which they are capable.
- Attendance is too low on a small number of vocational courses, particularly at level 2.
- Governors do not have sufficient understanding of further education to hold senior managers fully to account.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Priestley College is a 16 – 19 Academy located in South Warrington. The vast majority of students are White British, with a small number of students of minority ethnic heritage. At the time of the inspection, there were nearly 2,000 students aged 16 to 19 on a wide range of study programmes. Most study at level 3, with a small proportion studying at level 2.
- The college converted to academy status in May 2017 and is part of the Challenge Academy Trust. It recruits young people from more than 30 schools, including those serving some of the most deprived wards in the UK, the majority coming from Warrington, Halton and surrounding districts.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Teachers should plan learning activities that challenge students to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding so that all students achieve the grade of which they are capable.
- Improve attendance rates, particularly on level 2 study programmes.
- Ensure that all governors have sufficient understanding of further education to hold senior managers fully to account.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, managers and governors nurture a supportive culture which means that the college is an inclusive place to study. Consequently, students enjoy their studies and feel safe. Staff are proud to work at the college and share the governors' and senior leaders' high aspirations for their students.
- Senior leaders, managers and teachers promote equality and diversity very effectively. They create positive and welcoming learning environments and have high standards for behaviour. Most students work together very successfully and respect each other's views and opinions and those of their teachers.
- Leaders and managers have a rigorous system to evaluate the quality of provision. Operational managers have a very clear understanding of the aspects of the provision that they need to improve. Managers' subject improvement plans are effective in identifying the aspects that are not good enough and, subsequently, improving them to the benefit of students at the college.
- Managers accurately identify any underperforming subject areas through an effective subject review process. Managers put in place swift actions to address any required improvements. They supplement these with reviews of individual members of staff and hold them to account to improve their practice. This strategy has successfully improved performance, for example in A-level chemistry and photography.
- Most managers make accurate judgements about the strengths and weaknesses they observe in lessons. Managers use their findings to identify training needs and provide high-quality staff development that leads to improvements in individual teachers' practice. Teachers value the staff development and training they receive.
- Leaders and managers ensure that staff provide effective careers education, information, advice and guidance for students who aspire to go to university, for example through attending the 'graduate programme' aimed at students who aim to go to university. As a result, a high proportion of students, many of whom do not have a family history of higher education, go on to university. Vocational students attend events organised in the region where they meet prospective employers, such as 'Skills North West'.
- Leaders and managers do not have a clear oversight of the progress that students are making across all subject areas. As a result, they are not able to ensure that staff provide effective support to those students at risk of falling behind. As a result, the progress that students make on a few level 3 courses remains stubbornly low.
- Senior leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of 16- to 19-year-olds in Warrington and prepares them well for their next steps.

The governance of the provider

- The governing body is enthusiastic, committed and has extensive educational experience. Along with senior leaders, governors ensure that the college is meeting the specific needs of the communities that they serve. The governing body does not have the necessary experience to hold the principal and senior managers fully to account. While there is extensive experience in fiscal management, trust strategy and experience of school

leadership, there is a noticeable lack of understanding of further education. This limits the challenge that governors can provide to senior leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that the designated safeguarding lead, the safeguarding team and members of staff at the college receive appropriate training to allow them to execute their roles effectively. Leaders and managers have implemented appropriate recruitment practices to ensure that staff are suitably checked before they start work at the college.
- Leaders maintain effective relationships with a range of external organisations to assist students when they need support. Staff swiftly use external help from a range of agencies to support students when referrals are made. This ensures that students benefit from support at college and are safe when they are not at college. The college takes swift action to address any incidents of bullying. Staff provide effective care for students with any health or mental health concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- At the time of the inspection, there were nearly 2,000 students aged 16 to 19 on a wide range of study programmes. Most students study at level 3. A third follow AS and A-level courses, a third vocational programmes and the remainder a mixed programme of vocational and A-level subjects. The largest subject area is science and mathematics, followed by creative arts, media, languages and literature.
- Leaders plan programmes for each student that fully meet the principles of study programmes. They ensure that programmes provide opportunities to progress and that students develop the mathematics and English skills they need. A high proportion of students achieve a GCSE grade 9 to 4 in English and mathematics or make progress towards this goal.
- Teachers plan course work effectively, which enables students to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of topics and themes. The vast majority of teachers set aspirational targets for students to achieve and monitor their progress towards these targets through regular assessments. As a result, students make good progress.
- Most teachers provide useful feedback that helps students know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Feedback in art and music is particularly helpful. As a result, students significantly improve the quality of their musical performance and their portfolio of artwork. Many students act on feedback to improve the quality of their work over time. This helps students to achieve the grades of which they are capable.
- Teachers ensure that students develop the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in their qualifications and in their working lives. For example, in performing arts, students develop a range of performance, technical and personal skills to work in a professional theatre. In level 3 sport, students develop a good understanding of mental preparation and its impact on sports performance.
- The work that students produce is at least to the standard expected. It is of a very high standard in visual arts, textiles and sport. Through projects that teachers set them,

students develop a strong awareness of social, political and moral issues. For example, in foundation art, students research dementia, mental health and homelessness. In A-level dance, students discuss political issues relevant to various historical periods.

- Teachers track and monitor student progress very carefully. As a result, teachers identify accurately students who start to fall behind and implement appropriate measures to get them back on track, such as support sessions and meetings with parents and carers. Students benefit from effective pastoral support and the strong working relationships they have with teachers.
- Students gain good levels of independence while at college and teachers prepare them well to study at university. For example, high-achieving students benefit from specialised programmes to support their applications to prestigious universities.
- Teachers challenge stereotypes, promote equality of opportunity and celebrate diversity very effectively. For example, level 3 public services students discussed a news article about the first female Secretary of State for Defence. Teachers support students to set up number of networks at the college, including a Christian voice and a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender forum.
- In a significant minority of lessons, teachers have low expectations of what students can and do achieve. In these instances, weak teaching stifles students' independent study skills and limits the progress students make on their courses.
- In a few instances, teachers do not probe and check the depth of students' understanding or help extend their knowledge. As a result, students in these lessons provide superficial answers and cannot demonstrate the knowledge expected for the level and point in the course.
- Staff do not record or review the personal development targets they set for students. Consequently, a minority of students do not improve their attendance, progress or behaviour as identified in personal development targets.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Vocational students benefit from a broad range of activities which prepare them well for the world of work. For example, students learn about the importance of financial literacy, problem solving, project management, working under pressure, and meeting deadlines.
- Students participate in a wide range of interesting and worthwhile additional activities. As a result, they develop good personal, social and communication skills. For example, through the active citizenship programme, students take an active role in shaping college policy decisions. Students take an active role in community events, such as UK Parliament Week and International Women's Day, and take part in local volunteering programmes.
- Participation in sporting activities by students is good, with many representing the college in competitive leagues, with considerable success. Students make a valuable contribution to the life of the college as mentors and student ambassadors.
- Students benefit from effective advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about going to university. Teachers support students well with their university applications and interview preparation. Students take part in university open days and higher education events at the college. As a result, progression to university is good, with

most students securing places at their first choice of university.

- Teachers ensure that students who choose not to go to university receive useful information, advice and guidance about going into employment or on to apprenticeships. For example, employers from a wide range of sectors provide information about their specific industries through the effective careers programme.
- Students benefit from very good pastoral support. Students speak very highly of the contribution their personal tutors, subject teachers and progress tutors make in helping them to overcome personal issues. Support staff take effective action to help students with their mental health and well-being. Arrangements for students at risk, and particularly those who have missed extended periods at college, are effective.
- Arrangements to ensure that students with high needs settle well when starting at the college are good. Support tutors carefully plan study programmes to ensure that they meet the specific needs identified in students' education, health and care plans. Study support tutors provide a caring and nurturing environment in a dedicated study space in which students feel secure, safe and clearly flourish.
- Teachers positively promote British values through a broad range of activities. For example, Members of Parliament visit the college to promote voting rights. Staff and students organise special events to develop their cultural awareness. For example, public service, history and music staff and students organised Armistice Day celebrations.
- Students speak positively about their experiences at college and take pride in their work. Their behaviour is excellent in lessons and around the college. Students are polite and highly respectful of their peers, staff and visitors.
- Students are aware of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism. Students speak confidently about the key characteristics and changes in an individual's behaviour that may provide cause for concern. For example, mood changes, changes to their appearance, frequent absence or becoming more distant from friends.
- Too few students on level 2 vocational programmes benefit from external work experience placements.
- Attendance across A-level study programmes is good. However, students' attendance on a minority of vocational programmes is too low, particularly at level 2.

Outcomes for students

Good

- For the past three years, the proportion of students who achieved their qualifications has been high, particularly for those studying at level 3. This is true for the vast majority of subjects. Students of Asian heritage achieve particularly well, as do students who are in receipt of high needs funding.
- In the past year, a very high proportion of students studying for vocational qualifications at level 3 achieved the grades expected of them. This accounts for around half of students who study at level 3. The proportion of students who achieve high grades in sport, production arts, applied science, and art and design courses is good.
- The proportion of students who achieve their expected grade is high in AS subjects and is particularly high in fine art, textiles, computing, art and design, English language and literature, geology and physical education.

- While pass rates were high in 2017/18, some students on A-level subjects, including business studies, chemistry, English literature, mathematics and psychology, did not achieve the grade of which they were capable in relation to their starting points.
- The number of students who completed their course declined very slightly in 2017/18 when compared to the previous year. In the current year, the proportion of students who remain on their course is high in all subjects. The number of students who progress to a second year of study is high, particularly on A-level courses.
- In 2017/18, standard level GCSE pass rates 9 to 4 for English were high and increased for mathematics.
- Students produce work of a good standard that meets or exceeds the requirements of their programme. For example, A-level textile students produce high-quality designs.
- A high proportion of students go on successfully to higher-level courses at the college or to university. Others gain employment or enrol on apprenticeship programmes. In the 'graduate group' – students who are targeted to 'aspire high' – nearly all got a place at prestigious universities, including the University of Cambridge. A high proportion go to Russell Group Universities.
- There remain a few vocational subjects, such as business and health and social care, and A-level subjects, such as sociology, law and politics, where the proportion of students who achieve a high grade is too low.

Provider details

Unique reference number	144782
Type of provider	16 – 19 Academy
Age range of students	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	2,050
Principal/CEO	Matthew Grant
Telephone number	01925 633591
Website	www.priestley.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of students (excluding apprenticeships)		27	145	58	1,721	20	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of students aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of students for which the provider receives high-needs funding	33							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	SGI Ltd							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and staff, these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Andrea Machell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Clare Russell	Ofsted Inspector
Alex Fau-Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Cocker	Her Majesty's Inspector

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