

Mercia Partnership (UK) Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53305

Name of lead inspector: Shahram Safavi HMI

Last day of inspection: 23 March 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 10 Vicarage Place
Prescot
Merseyside
L34 1LA

Telephone number: 0151 292 9029

Information about the provider

1. Mercia Partnership (UK) Limited (Mercia) is a limited company that operates in Merseyside.
2. Mercia has a contract with the Skills Funding Agency to provide work-based learning provision, which accounts for around 70% of the company's revenue. The remaining income comes from courses for the unemployed and from providing subcontracted training on behalf of other providers. Mercia offers courses in information and communication technology (ICT); education and training; preparation for life and work; and business, administration and law. Inspectors did not inspect business, administration and law separately but findings about this subject area informed inspectors' judgements. Currently 375 learners are on work-based provision of whom 208 are on apprenticeship programmes at either intermediate or advanced levels.
3. Since the previous inspection, Mercia has withdrawn from providing offender learning and skills provision. Total staffing has reduced from 140 to 21. The managing director has overall responsibility for Mercia and its strategic direction. The other director has responsibility for finance. Two operations managers and one marketing manager support the general manager. Eleven full-time tutors are responsible for training and assessment and four staff have administrative responsibilities.
4. Merseyside includes Liverpool, Knowsley, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral local authorities. In 2010, Liverpool was rated as the most deprived borough in the index of deprivation of local authorities and Knowsley was rated as the fourth most deprived. In 2009, around 14% of Liverpool's population were from minority ethnic groups.
5. Mercia also provides training in family learning for Knowsley Metropolitan Council.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	451 learners 58 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Information and communication technology	3
Education and training	3
Preparation for life and work	3

Overall effectiveness

6. Mercia is a satisfactory provider of work-based learning. Since its previous inspection, Mercia has maintained the quality of provision at a satisfactory standard and its capacity to improve is also satisfactory. Overall success rates have improved for the last three years in line with the national average. However, the proportion of Train to Gain learners on education and training courses who complete within the agreed time is low. The proportion of apprentices who complete their courses successfully is higher than the national average. Learners gain a useful range of skills that are relevant to their job roles. Some learners make good use of these skills to gain promotion or to take on additional responsibility in their workplace. Learners enjoy their courses and most of the current learners are making satisfactory progress. However, women learners are less successful than men.
7. The quality of teaching and training is satisfactory. In the better lessons, tutors use a range of activities that link effectively to the learners' individual needs, job roles and interests. In these lessons, learners develop a good understanding of the topics discussed and can successfully apply their knowledge to their job roles. However, in too many lessons tutors do not include a sufficient range of

activities to help learners learn more quickly and more effectively. Tutors do not always set learners individual targets that are detailed and clear. Too many employers are insufficiently involved in the training of learners.

8. Leadership and management are satisfactory. All staff are aware that they need to improve the provision more quickly. Tutors are appropriately qualified and have relevant experience. The company's policies and practices in ensuring that learners are safe are satisfactory. Mercia uses its finances appropriately for the benefit of learners.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the overall proportion of Train to Gain learners successfully completing their courses by the planned target date has risen and is now satisfactory except for those on education and training courses where the proportion is low.
- For apprentices, overall success rates and success rates within the planned time have been good since the previous inspection. These rates are high for apprentices on intermediate-level courses. The success rates for apprentices on advanced-level courses are satisfactory.
- In 2010/11, the success rates within the planned time for women learners on Train to Gain courses were marginally lower than for men. In the same year, the success rates of women apprentices were also lower than those for men. Apprentices with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities are very small in number and their success rates cannot be compared with other groups of learners.
- Learners develop satisfactory employability and vocational skills. Current learners are making satisfactory progress. Learners on family learning courses develop good skills and help their children to make better progress at school. Learners say they feel safe.
- Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory. In the better lessons, tutors set learners achievable and challenging targets which learners find motivating. In these lessons, tutors pay good attention to learners' individual needs and plan a good range of activities. In the less effective lessons, tutors do not plan a sufficient range of activities for all learners. Generally, tutors do not make sufficient use of information and learning technology (ILT).
- Tutors plan assessments satisfactorily. However, in education and training courses they do not use a sufficient range of assessment methods and do not make a sufficient number of observations of learners applying their skills in the workplace.
- Not all employers are sufficiently involved in reviewing learners' progress. Some are fully involved and know how well their employees are progressing. They help to set them learning targets. Other employers have insufficient involvement and have little knowledge about the progress their employees are making.

-
- Progress reviews cover all aspects of the training programme satisfactorily. Tutors set and review learning targets. However, these targets are insufficiently detailed and often do not link on- and off-the-job training. Some tutors do not provide timely feedback to help learners improve.
 - Support and guidance are satisfactory. Learners comment favourably on the helpful and supportive tutors. Mercia has improved its advice and guidance arrangements and more learners now complete their course. Mercia provides satisfactory additional literacy, numeracy and pastoral support for learners although it does not systematically record and monitor the effectiveness of this support.
 - Mercia has a good record of working in the local community and in strategic partnerships in the region. The company has been effective in improving outcomes in line with the national average. Managers recognise the need to raise standards and drive improvements by applying thorough performance management systems. Managers' responsibilities and targets at operational level lack sufficient clarity and the pace of improvement, until recently, has been slow.
 - Arrangements to safeguard learners and staff are satisfactory. Policies and procedures are effective and clear. Mercia has a safeguarding officer and reporting arrangements for learners are effective.
 - The company promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily. Mercia sets appropriate targets and uses data satisfactorily to monitor outcomes by different groups of learners and to bring about improvements.
 - Mercia has satisfactory arrangements to engage users for making improvements to its provision. It has good systems to collect employers' views and is responsive to their comments. The company collects learners' views through surveys. However, the range of questions used and the frequency of the surveys do not encourage learners to provide sufficient feedback about all aspects of their training.
 - Overall, the self-assessment process and quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. Mercia has improved the use of data, which is now satisfactory. However, the implementation of some aspects of quality assurance is not systematic. The records of observations of teaching and learning do not always support the grades given for the lessons. The self-assessment process is satisfactory although the report is not sufficiently evaluative and does not identify all areas for improvement.

What does Mercia Partnership (UK) Limited need to do to improve further?

- Increase overall and timely success rates for all learners by negotiating and agreeing with them specific and detailed targets and an agreed date for their completion. Ensure that these targets link learners' on- and off-the-job training.
- Improve learners' progress reviews by monitoring their progress against clear and specific targets. Ensure that all employers have sufficient information about the progress that their employees are making by involving them more effectively in progress reviews.
- Improve the quality of lessons by ensuring that tutors use teaching methods that include a good range of activities suitable for all learners and use ILT creatively to stimulate learners' interest and motivation.
- Fully implement the quality assurance policies. Increase the pace of improvement by ensuring that all managers have clear responsibilities and performance targets. Ensure that the self-assessment process generates a more evaluative report that identifies all the areas for improvement.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- taking a qualification at work
- gaining a better understanding of how children learn and behave
- being able to use computer packages to improve work
- gaining employment or promotion
- making friends and becoming more confident
- the good tutors who are very patient.

What learners would like to see improved:

- individual support during lessons
- the uninspiring teaching in some lessons
- the link between theory lessons and job roles in the workplace
- learning targets to make them clearer and more informative
- the involvement of employers and supervisors in training.

Summary of the views of partners and employers as confirmed by inspectors

What partners and employers like:

- the partnership working at strategic and operational levels in Merseyside
- the flexibility of tutors to fit in with work commitments.

What partners and employers would like to see improved:

- information about learners' progress on the courses.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

9. Since the previous inspection, learners' outcomes have improved consistently each year in line with the national averages and they remain satisfactory. Apprentices' outcomes have been high each year although they declined slightly last year. Learners develop satisfactory employability and vocational skills and current learners are making satisfactory progress. Since the previous inspection, Mercia has effectively managed a period of significant change with a reduction in provision. It has continued to make good use of feedback from employers to improve its provision. The company has maintained the inspection grades for overall effectiveness, quality of provision and the subject areas. Mercia has responded satisfactorily to the findings of the previous inspection and the monitoring visit in 2010. It has improved the use of data, observation of teaching and learning, and the quality improvement arrangements. However, quality assurance is not yet consistently applied and the pace of some improvements have, until recently, has been slow. The findings from the observation of teaching and learning are not always accurate. The self-assessment process has improved although the self-assessment report is insufficiently critical. Mercia accurately identified most of the strengths but only some of the areas for improvement found by inspectors.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Overall success rates and success rates within the planned time for Train to Gain learners have improved and are now satisfactory. In 2009/10, Train to Gain success rates for those completing within the planned time were low. In 2010/11, these rates improved by five percentage points and were satisfactory. Train to Gain learners' overall success rates and success rates for those completing within the planned time on intermediate courses were low in 2010/11. Since the previous inspection, success rates for Train to Gain learners on advanced courses have been consistently high each year.
11. Train to Gain learners in all regions are not equally successful. Learners from Liverpool have high success rates. However, the performance of Train to Gain learners in Salford, Sefton and Warrington is low.
12. Success rates for apprentices on intermediate courses are good and significantly above providers that are similar to Mercia. Success rates are satisfactory for advanced apprentices.
13. There is little difference in the success rates for men and women on Train to Gain courses. However, the proportion of women learners on Train to Gain programmes who succeed within the planned time is lower than men. In 2010/11, women apprentices' overall success rates were lower than for men

and a smaller proportion of women completed their qualification within their planned timescale.

14. Learners say they feel safe. They enjoy developing new skills such as computing skills. In family learning, learners improve their literacy and numeracy skills and help their children with their school homework.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. Teaching, learning and assessment practices are satisfactory. In most lessons tutors meet learners' individual needs satisfactorily. In the better lessons, tutors include a good range of activities relevant to the learners' job roles. In these lessons detailed discussions help learners to apply what they have learned to their work. In the weaker lessons, tutors do not provide sufficient challenge for the more able learners. In these sessions, the link between on- and off-the-job training is not clear and tutors make insufficient use of ILT.
16. In ICT courses, tutors provide effective coaching at work to help learners build confidence and skills. However, in education and training courses almost all the training is undertaken off-the-job and tutors do not plan for or deliver on-the-job training. Assessment of learners' work is satisfactory. However, tutors do not always provide sufficiently detailed action points from assessments so that learners can improve.
17. Tutors review learners' progress regularly. However, the involvement of employers in reviews is not sufficient. The reviews do not always result in clear action points to identify learners' development needs or record what employers should do to help learners make progress.
18. The provision satisfactorily meets the needs of learners, employers and the partners. Mercia has been successful in engaging learners to develop their skills for the changing employment opportunities in Merseyside. Employers are positive about the courses that Mercia offers and speak positively of the company's efforts to meet their needs.
19. Mercia works effectively with partners to develop new programmes. For example, the company is working with the Army to meet the training needs of disabled soldiers leaving the Army. Links with schools are particularly strong at management level. However, Mercia recognises the need to build stronger links with supervisors and mentors of learners across all courses to improve the employers' contributions to planning, training, assessment and reviewing learning.
20. Mercia provides satisfactory support and guidance. Tutors are supportive and learners discuss with them any barriers to their progress. Careers advice is satisfactory. Mercia has improved its analysis of the reasons for learners leaving their programmes early. Initial advice and guidance have improved and more learners are now staying on and completing their courses. Mercia provides satisfactory additional literacy, numeracy and pastoral support for learners.

However, it does not systematically record and monitor the effectiveness of this support.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

21. Mercia has satisfactory strategic and operational plans. The company responds appropriately to national priorities. For example, it has significantly increased the size of its apprenticeship programme. Mercia works particularly effectively with its partners to provide training in response to the changes in the Merseyside economy. Since the previous inspection, Mercia has carefully managed the effects of a reduction in provision and total staffing although roles and responsibilities at management level are not sufficiently clear in respect of a number of processes. For example, the responsibility for the implementation of action plans in subject areas is not always clear. The use of data has significantly improved. However, the pace of improvement in some areas has been slow. Although Mercia sets itself challenging targets, its arrangements to meet all its targets in a timely manner are not sufficient
22. Arrangements to safeguard learners and staff are satisfactory. All staff have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks and have received appropriate training. Mercia has a designated safeguarding officer who is a senior manager. Mercia's policies and procedures for identifying and dealing with safeguarding risks are satisfactory. During induction and progress reviews, tutors inform learners satisfactorily about how to safeguard themselves. Mercia offers sufficient training for learners on their rights and responsibilities when working in a digital environment.
23. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff have received appropriate training on equality topics. The company provides learning in a wide variety of locations and effectively widens participation in learning for learners who typically would not access training. Tutors include equality and diversity topics satisfactorily in most aspects of training and most learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity matters. Mercia sets targets and uses data to monitor and improve participation and achievement by different groups of learners. The number of learners with physical disabilities and/or learning difficulties has increased in the past year.
24. Mercia's use of learners' and employers' feedback to inform improvement planning is satisfactory. Good use is made of employers' feedback to change its training to meet employers' needs more effectively. Mercia collects learners' feedback through end-of-course surveys and informal discussions with tutors. However, learners' surveys do not provide sufficient information about all aspects of the training.
25. Quality improvement procedures are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, Mercia has improved its quality systems. The observation of teaching and learning has significantly improved. Mercia has developed a good set of guidance forms to record the observation of teaching and learning that focus specifically on different teaching and learning techniques. Managers observe all

tutors twice a year and provide them with clear actions for improvement. However, in too many of the recorded observations, the strengths identified in the lessons are normal practice and many lessons are over-graded. Mercia does not always record some aspects of its quality assurance activities. Following a review of the pace of improvement, Mercia has changed the speed and responsibilities for the implementation of quality assurance processes. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this action.

26. Since the previous inspection, self-assessment has improved. Mercia now uses data appropriately to support its judgements. However, the self-assessment report is not sufficiently evaluative. The improvement plan is a satisfactory tool for further development of the provision.
27. Mercia provides satisfactory value for money. The majority of learners are developing appropriate skills and knowledge. The company uses the views of learners and employers appropriately. Mercia manages its resources satisfactorily to meet the needs of learners.

Subject areas

Information and communication technology

Grade 3

Context

28. Mercia currently provides apprenticeships in ICT at intermediate and advanced levels for 187 learners. Thirty learners are advanced and the remainder are on intermediate courses. Most learners are working towards user qualifications in information technology. Learners are mostly aged 19 or over. Around 70% of learners are women, 9% are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 14% have a declared disability.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Apprentices' success rates were high in 2008/09 and 2009/10 but declined to the national average in 2010/11. Since the previous inspection, the success rates of Train to Gain learners have improved and they are now satisfactory.
- Success rates of apprentices and Train to Gain learners completing within their planned timescale declined in 2010/11 but were still above the national average and satisfactory. Overall, learners are making satisfactory progress. However, a small minority of learners are making slow progress. They have reached their planned end date for completion with large parts of their qualifications still incomplete.
- Learners develop good skills in using ICT to improve their work. They develop strong interpersonal skills that are useful in their employment. Learners report that they enjoy their courses and feel safe in their work and training environments.
- Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory in all courses. In the better lessons, tutors make good use of the information from initial assessment to plan and deliver lessons that link closely to learners' job roles and interests. During these lessons, tutors promote equality and diversity very effectively and offer learners good literacy and numeracy support.
- Tutors do not sufficiently plan and discuss with learners their progress to complete within the planned time. Tutors agree short-term targets with learners. However, these targets do not always relate accurately to the overall requirements of the course. Employers are not always aware of learners' progress and their course workload. They do not always attend the review meetings.
- The range of provision successfully meets learners' and employers' needs. Qualifications offered are very relevant to learners' medium career plans and development goals. Mercia offers additional training to learners who are at risk of redundancy.

- Support, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Tutors offer satisfactory induction for learners that includes clear information about their courses. However, some learners are not sufficiently aware of the level of work that successful completion of the course requires. Learners with additional support needs receive reasonable support. However, a small group of learners whose working pattern changed received insufficient support until recently.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers work particularly effectively with the trades unions' and employers' representatives to promote learning. However, until recently Mercia has been slow to reverse the decline in apprentices' success rates. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory and learners have a reasonable knowledge of safe practices when working in a digital environment.
- Mercia's promotion of equality and diversity is good. The company offers training to groups of disadvantaged learners such as ex-offenders, those with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the unemployed and learners with disabilities. Tutors reinforce learners' knowledge of diversity very effectively with a series of short videos and interesting activities such as quizzes. Learners have a good awareness of equality and diversity issues.
- Quality improvement processes are satisfactory. Internal verification is satisfactory although the records of observations of assessments are not always sufficiently detailed. Observations of teaching and learning are useful and improve tutors' practice. However, the recorded observations do not always include judgements about learners' pace of learning. Observations of progress reviews are not sufficiently regular or fully recorded.
- The self-assessment process is satisfactory and results in a clear quality improvement plan. It takes appropriate account of the views of learners and employers. The self-assessment report makes satisfactory use of data and includes the strengths identified by inspectors. However, it does not identify some of the key areas for improvement.

What does Mercia Partnership (UK) Limited need to do to improve further?

- Increase the success rates for all learners by ensuring that all employers and learners are fully informed about the level of commitment that successful course completion requires. Take effective intervention measures to ensure that learners who progress slowly complete successfully.
- Ensure learners' progress reviews are effective by discussing with learners and employers clear and detailed action points that ensure learners can complete all aspects of their courses by the planned completion date.
- Ensure the observation of teaching and learning has a strong focus on learners' pace of learning by ensuring that learners' progress during the lessons is fully evaluated and recorded.

Education and training

Grade 3

Context

29. One-hundred and twenty-nine learners are working towards qualifications in supporting teaching and learning in schools. Twenty-one learners are apprentices. Most learners are studying at intermediate level. The majority of learners work in schools as volunteers and the remaining are employed either on a part-time or full-time basis. Tutors offer off-the-job training to groups of learners in schools or community settings. Almost all learners are women and none has a declared disability.

Key findings

- Overall outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, apprentices' success rates have improved each year and in 2010/11 they were high. These rates were around 10 percentage points above the national average and around 17 percentage points above the average for similar providers.
- Since the previous inspection, the overall success rates and success rates within the planned time for Train to Gain learners have been low. The success rates for learners completing within the planned time improved in 2008/09 and 2009/10 but declined in 2010/11. Train to Gain success rates for advanced courses are satisfactory although many learners do not complete within their planned timescale.
- Learners develop satisfactory occupational and personal skills that enable them to be more effective in the classroom as teaching assistants. Most learners have gained improved classroom management skills and a better awareness of how children learn. Current learners are making satisfactory progress and few have left early.
- Learners enjoy their courses and are motivated and enthusiastic about the employment opportunities that the qualification provides. Learners' progress to other courses is good and a significant number of them progress from intermediate to advanced-level courses. Many learners have been given increased responsibility in their workplace and a few have gained permanent employment contracts since beginning the course. They say they feel safe and have an appropriate understanding of safeguarding issues.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Tutors are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subjects. They plan and deliver lessons satisfactorily. However, tutors do not include a sufficient range of activities to meet the needs of all learners. Some learners find lessons uninspiring. Tutors do not use ILT sufficiently to engage learners' interests.
- Almost all the training is carried out off-the-job. However, tutors do not plan learning sufficiently to include learning through learners' job roles in the workplace.

- Overall, assessment practices are satisfactory. Tutors use their good knowledge of the workplace to assess learners' understanding of the lessons. Assessment plans are satisfactory. However, tutors have an over-reliance on written statements from employers about learners' skills levels. Tutors do not make a sufficient number of observations to assess the application of learners' practical skills in the workplace. Tutors provide good feedback on learners' work.
- The review of learners' progress is unsatisfactory. Tutors review learners' progress regularly, often during group-teaching lessons. This does not allow learners to discuss their progress and other issues confidentially with their tutor. Following progress reviews, tutors agree a number of actions with learners. However, the action points are not sufficiently detailed. Reviews do not involve employers sufficiently in reviewing learners' progress and in planning their learning.
- Mercia engages with employers and partners satisfactorily to develop the provision. Tutors use their working relationships with senior managers in schools and community centres effectively to plan and offer courses for learners that meet their needs.
- Support, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Mercia has revised its arrangements for advice and guidance. Tutors use workplace mentors to ensure learners are prepared and informed about the programme and to ensure they have a better understanding of the course requirements. Fewer learners now leave their programmes early. Tutors provide good support to learners with personal or workplace issues.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Following the previous inspection, Mercia developed a range of strategies to improve learner retention rates and outcomes. The use of data to monitor learner progress is systematic. Managers discuss and regularly monitor learners who are at risk of making slow progress. However, the pace of implementation of some of these actions has been slow until recently.
- Quality improvement processes are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, observations of teaching and learning have improved. Tutors find the process useful in improving their teaching methods. Tutors share good practice satisfactorily. However, the results of quality assurance activities are not always sufficiently recorded. For example, the recorded observations do not always support the grades awarded to the lessons.

What does Mercia Partnership (UK) Limited need to do to improve further?

- Improve overall and success rates within the planned time, by monitoring the learners who are at risk of leaving their courses too early without achieving. Give effective support to these learners to help them to stay and complete.
- Ensure progress reviews are effective by agreeing with learners and school mentors clear and detailed action points. Fully engage the school mentors in planning and assessing learning.

- Improve the assessment process by ensuring that tutors increase the number of observations of learners applying their skills in the workplace.
- Monitor the quality-assurance plan and ensure that all actions are fully completed. Record the results of quality-monitoring activities in detail.

Preparation for life and work

Grade 3

Context

30. Currently, Mercia offers literacy and numeracy training to 59 learners. Learners can study accredited qualifications in literacy and numeracy from foundation to intermediate levels. The majority of the current learners are on the intermediate-level course in literacy. Most learners undertake this qualification in addition to other qualifications. Almost all learners are women with the majority aged 25 or over.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, success rates on the majority of courses have improved. In 2010/11, success rates were satisfactory, although for intermediate-level literacy courses they were low. The progress of current learners is satisfactory.
- Retention and attendance rates are satisfactory. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Learners satisfactorily improve their self-confidence and employability skills. For example, many learners employed as soldiers, teaching assistants and dental nurses increase their chances of promotion or taking on additional responsibility.
- Learners enjoy their learning. They try out different writing styles to express themselves. Many learners have used these new skills to improve their everyday lives, such as using grammar more precisely, increasing their self-confidence and being able to help their children to learn.
- Learners say they feel safe and are aware of safe working and learning practices. They know how to protect themselves and each other. Not all learners give enough attention to safety when working at computer workstations. They have sufficient awareness of how to identify different forms of bullying and prevent them.
- Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory. Tutors plan most lessons satisfactorily. In the better lessons, tutors skilfully blend literacy and numeracy learning with learners' job roles, such as calculating supplies for soldiers on operational duties. In these lessons, tutors plan activities particularly effectively to ensure learners of varying abilities can take a full part in all learning experiences.
- In the less effective lessons tutors do not provide all learners with enough individual support to help them progress sufficiently. In these lessons, the quality of teaching materials varies but generally it is of a satisfactory standard. Tutors do not use ILT sufficiently to make lessons interesting.
- Tutors understand learners' needs satisfactorily and are sensitive in the way they help them overcome learning challenges. However, they do not set learners sufficiently detailed individual targets. Often the targets do not include

learners' wider development needs such as using computers for research. Employers are not sufficiently involved in reviewing learners' progress.

- The range of courses available meets the needs of learners and employers satisfactorily, although limited only to literacy and numeracy. Good opportunities are missed to extend the provision to meet wider needs. Mercia has very strong links with employers to provide valuable work experience, especially in schools.
- Partnerships with the Army, schools, hospitals and community groups are satisfactory and strong in some cases. They lead to improved outcomes for many learners. Mercia uses its partnerships successfully to enrol learners onto its courses. Often employers provide good resources to support learning, such as those available at Manchester Dental School.
- Learners receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. They are comfortable about discussing their progress with tutors. Tutors are experienced in identifying and assessing learners' support needs, and in providing additional support for learners. They give detailed information to learners about progression options and the value of their qualification to employers.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Tutors are appropriately qualified. Mercia has fully reviewed the courses and has accurately identified that it needs to align the provision more closely with national strategies such as offering foundation learning. The company has recently increased the pace of improvement that had previously been slow.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Tutors promote equality and diversity satisfactorily. There is little difference in the achievement and progress of learners from different groups. Inspectors agreed with the grade for this provision in the self-assessment report.

What does Mercia Partnership (UK) Limited need to do to improve further?

- Improve the success rates of all learners by ensuring that individual learning targets are detailed and include learners' wider development needs. Monitor learners' progress against their targets more closely and involve employers in the process.
- Ensure all lessons are good or better by ensuring that tutors plan a good range of activities to engage all learners' interests.
- Ensure that actions resulting from the review of the provision are fully implemented and in a timely manner.

Information about the inspection

31. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the general manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body and data on learners and their achievements over the period of the contract.
32. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed teaching, learning, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subjects the provider offers.

<p>Record of Main Findings (RMF)</p> <p>Mercia Partnership (UK) Limited</p> <p>Learning types: 14-16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships. Social and personal development: adult safeguarded learning.</p>
--

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	0	0	0
Part-time learners	375	208	167
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3		
A. Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	3		
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
A3. Do learners feel safe?	3		
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>			
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>			
B. Quality of provision	3	3	3
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3		
B3. How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3		
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3		
C. Leadership and management	3	3	3
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3		
C2. <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3		
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3		
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3		
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3		
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

*where applicable to the type of provision

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 090105

© Crown copyright 2012