

# Swindon Borough Council

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 54719

**Name of lead inspector:** Maria Barker HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 28 January 2011

**Type of provider:** Local authority

**Address:** Adult and Community Learning  
5th Floor  
Wat Tyler House West  
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## Information about the provider

1. Swindon Borough Council (SBC) is a unitary authority in central southern England. It holds contracts with the Skills Funding Agency for social and personal learning. Since the previous inspection of 2008, SBC has restructured twice. The community support team (CST) now manages the provision. The team comprises three staff: a contracts and commissioning officer, a neighbourhood and family learning coordinator and a data and performance officer. SBC employs a consultant part time to take responsibility for quality management pending the permanent appointment of a quality manager. CST reports to the head of policy within the environment, regeneration and community group of the council. SBC now subcontracts all provision to local providers through a commissioning process based on annual tendering for contracts.
  
2. SBC holds contracts to provide courses for 3,000 learners throughout 2010/11. Currently, SBC has about 850 learners enrolled on social and personal learning courses in a variety of subject areas, including family learning and wider family learning. Provision subcontracted to the colleges was out of scope for the inspection, but inspectors included evidence from the colleges in judgements on the leadership and management of the contract.
  
3. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the provider:
  - Community Learning in Penhill
  - Drove School
  - Eldene Primary School
  - Elite Progression
  - Gorse Hill School and Children’s Centre
  - Healthy Options
  - Learning for Life
  - Millbrook Primary School
  - Mussaret Tanweer
  - New College
  - Safe Silent Security Services
  - Sangita Arts
  - Swindon College
  - Swindon Library Services.

Type of provision	Number of learners in 2009/10
<b>Adult learner provision:</b> Learning for social and personal development	2,848 part-time learners

## Summary report

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>
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<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>
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	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

<b>Learning for social and personal development</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Community learning	3

## Overall effectiveness

4. Learners enjoy their learning and make good progress in developing their skills. They increase in confidence and produce high standards of work. Learners achieve well on short courses leading to qualifications. Most courses do not lead to qualifications. Learners feel safe at the learning venues and work safely in classes.
5. Teaching and learning are good. Tutors plan lively sessions and include a range of activities which capture the learners' interest. They do not always use information from initial assessment effectively to identify learning goals for individuals. They do not always sufficiently monitor learners' progress and achievement. Learning ambassadors help to recruit under-represented learners and provide effective support on some courses. Learners with identified additional support needs receive appropriate support from learning support assistants and volunteers.
6. SBC targets hard to reach groups, especially those new to learning. SBC works well with partners to develop courses specific to community needs. The use of local venues makes learning easily accessible. SBC does not sufficiently identify progression opportunities for learners who would like to continue in learning but lack the confidence to attend courses not based in the locality.

7. Leadership and management are satisfactory. SBC has clear strategies to meet local priorities. The process of commissioning courses from local providers enables SBC to reach targeted groups effectively. However, SBC does not have fully effective arrangements to monitor subcontracted provision. It does not use data sufficiently to manage its provision. The recent appointment of a quality manager has led to improvements in the quality of provision. SBC has satisfactory capacity to improve the provision further. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. SBC promotes equality and diversity appropriately but does not monitor the achievements of different groups. SBC collects learners' views at the end of each course and takes appropriate action to respond to learners' concerns.

## Main findings

- Learners develop good skills and gain in confidence and self-esteem. They achieve high standards of work in classes. Learners take pride in their achievements and engage well in classroom activities. They are attentive and eager to learn.
- Learners feel safe in the learning venues. They feel well supported by tutors and support staff, including the learning ambassadors. Learners adopt safe working practices. Tutors conduct thorough risk assessments and review them appropriately.
- Teaching and learning are good. Tutors plan activities that stimulate learners' interest and motivate them to learn. The supportive ethos puts learners at ease, and they soon play an active part in sessions. Tutors give helpful support to individual learners, in some classes assisted by volunteers, learning ambassadors or learning support assistants.
- SBC has recently improved processes to recognise and record progress and achievement in non-accredited learning. However, they are not yet consistently well applied, for example some individual learning plans set broad goals and do not monitor progress effectively. Initial assessment of learners' skills does not always inform individuals' learning goals sufficiently.
- SBC meets the needs and interests of learners satisfactorily. It engages vulnerable learners and hard-to-reach groups in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Managers make good use of extensive formal and informal networks to identify and meet the needs of target groups. However, SBC does not plan provision sufficiently to ensure structured progression opportunities for learners.
- SBC has good strategic leadership and ambition to meet the needs of local communities, particularly those in deprived neighbourhoods. The tendering process for subcontracted provision fits well with the council's priorities. However, SBC has not sufficiently established its procedures for the operational management of the provision.
- The collection and use of data and management information are inadequate. SBC does not systematically collect and use reliable information to monitor and manage subcontracted provision. For example, it was unable to provide key

data on learners' outcomes during inspection. It has yet to identify the range of information needed to monitor provision effectively.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. SBC effectively targets under-represented groups, including learners from minority ethnic groups. SBC uses data insufficiently to monitor the impact of equality and diversity measures. It collects information on learners' gender, age, ethnicity and disability, but does not collect information to analyse the achievement of different groups of learners.
- SBC does not have comprehensive quality assurance and improvement arrangements. It does not monitor the quality of its subcontracted provision sufficiently. Recent improvements in the quality of provision have yet to impact fully and resolve all areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- SBC has insufficiently developed its self-assessment and quality improvement process. It has clear plans to improve the self-assessment process by using feedback from learners, partners and subcontractors more effectively. Monthly meetings do not record progress in implementing the quality improvement plan.
- SBC has insufficient familiarity with good practice in the sector. Staff do not currently have sufficient experience or expertise in adult and community learning. They have limited understanding of how to rectify areas for improvement identified at this, or the previous, inspection.

### **What does Swindon Borough Council need to do to improve further?**

- Continue to improve practice in implementing key learner processes, such as initial assessment and recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning, so that individuals' learning programmes meet their needs effectively.
- Ensure that the provision meets the needs of target groups and offers clear progression routes, so that learners can benefit more fully from the opportunity to engage in learning and to gain qualifications.
- Improve the collection and use of data and management information so that SBC manages all aspects of provision comprehensively and identifies and reduces achievement gaps of different groups of learners.
- Comprehensively monitor the quality of subcontracted provision through consolidating quality assurance and improvement arrangements so that subcontractors implement key processes to a consistently high standard.
- Develop the self-assessment process so that it uses feedback from learners, partners and subcontractors effectively and engenders a detailed quality improvement action plan. Monitor the implementation of the quality improvement plan systematically and routinely records progress made.
- Ensure greater familiarity with good practice in the adult and community learning sector so that SBC can monitor and manage provision in the light of best practice in the sector.

## **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What learners like:**

- the good support they receive from the service
- learning new things to help them and their families
- helpful and friendly tutors
- the chance to meet new people and support each other in learning
- learning close to home in a non-threatening environment
- the friendly and relaxed atmosphere
- being treated fairly, whatever ones personal circumstances.

### **What learners would like to see improved:**

- longer courses, so that they can learn more
- greater availability of crèche facilities
- better opportunities to progress to further learning
- better communication between tutors and staff at course venues
- the paperwork, which can take a long time to complete.

## **Summary of the views of partners as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What partners like:**

- being able to make a difference to the community through working with SBC
- good communication and support from SBC
- good partnership working
- regular meetings both at their own venues and at SBC
- the recent increase in expertise at SBC with a clear focus on quality improvement
- being valued as partners by SBC
- the valuable role carried out by learning ambassadors.

### **What partners would like to see improved:**

- more guidance on how to fill in some of the required documentation
- more information on the tendering process
- clear communication about reasons for unsuccessful tenders
- less focus on price in tendering requirements
- SBC's understanding of the holistic nature of provision in children's centres and other community venues.

## Main inspection findings

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 3**

8. SBC demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve its provision. Although progress in rectifying areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection has been slow, recent improvements have been substantial. Since the previous inspection, SBC has restructured twice and has successfully introduced an effective tendering process based on a clear ambition to meet the needs of priority groups. Teaching and learning are good. The quality manager, in post since the summer of 2010, has made a significant impact in improving the quality of provision overall. Regular meetings with subcontractors focus on implementing key processes to improve the learners' experience. Course files demonstrate clear improvements in practice, although SBC recognises the need for further development.
9. Inspectors agreed with the key areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report. The report is appropriately self-critical. SBC plans to produce a more detailed quality improvement plan and monitor and record progress against the plan systematically.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 3**

10. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall. Inspectors were unable to make judgements about performance trends of different groups as SBC does not collect comprehensive data. Most courses leading to a qualification are short with appropriate success rates. Most provision is non accredited. SBC planned to collect reliable data for 2010/11 on achievement in non-accredited provision. However, the recording of progress and achievement is still inconsistent.
11. Learners achieve high standards in lessons and diligently complete their work. They are attentive and eager to learn. Learners with mental health and other challenges extend their musical and artistic skills and their sense of well-being through participation in creative activities. Learners engage well in practical activities. For example, in healthy cooking courses they learn new techniques and prepare nutritional dishes for their families. Learners developing a computer game alongside their children make good progress. Learners are justly proud of their achievements.
12. Learners feel safe and welcomed in local venues. They feel well supported by tutors and staff. They particularly value individual support from learning ambassadors. Learners adopt safe working practices. Tutors reinforce health and safety awareness, for example suitable seating and good posture when using a computer. Tutors complete thorough risk assessments at the start of each course and make modifications to improve safety and promote good practice. SBC recognises the risks associated with the use of primary school seating by adults at some venues and plans to take appropriate action.

## The quality of provision

## Grade 3

13. The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. Teaching and learning are good. The majority of tutors identify clear learning outcomes in session plans, which they adapt well to suit individual learners. A good range of activities in classes stimulates learners' interest and inspires them to learn. Tutors build learners' self-esteem effectively and make good use of praise and encouragement. They foster a supportive ethos which puts learners at ease. Tutors and other staff support individual learners with additional needs well. SBC provides literacy, language and numeracy support to meet identified needs.
14. Assessment of learners' progress is satisfactory. Tutors do not always use outcomes of initial assessment to identify individual learning goals. Some individual learning plans and learning logs include detailed and specific individual learning goals, and record progress towards achieving these goals thoroughly. Others identify group goals that are too broad to usefully assess individual progress. The appointment of the current quality manager has led to substantial recent improvements in practice.
15. The provision appropriately meets the needs and interests of targeted groups. SBC provides relevant courses in local venues to attract new learners, especially those who lack confidence or are initially wary of engaging in formal education. However, SBC does not plan sufficient local progression opportunities for learners to develop their skills further or gain qualifications. SBC offers very little provision in the evenings or at weekends to meet the needs of those in employment.
16. SBC has satisfactory partnership arrangements. It makes good use of extensive formal and informal networks to identify needs. Learners benefit from specific provision, such as security training for asylum seekers and refugees, which leads to employment. Learning ambassadors attend local events and work in the community to encourage participation.
17. SBC offers satisfactory care, guidance and support. It meets the support needs of individual learners appropriately. For example, a learning ambassador supports a learner with a visual impairment. Free crèche provision in many centres enables learners with childcare responsibilities to attend courses. Learning ambassadors provide mentoring and support for individual learners. Case studies show their value in helping learners take up courses and achieve their goals. However, they are not available on all courses. Tutors and learning ambassadors provide basic information and guidance to learners about their options and refer them to professional guidance services when necessary.

## Leadership and management

## Grade 3

18. SBC has satisfactory leadership and management. Strategic leadership is good, and well attuned to the council's wider priorities. SBC has a clear commitment to meeting the needs of deprived communities and attracting under-represented groups into learning. SBC subcontracts with providers through a



tendering process with a clear focus on meeting local community needs and increasing employability skills. The annual process of tendering provides flexibility and responsiveness. However, SBC does not comprehensively monitor and manage the subsequent subcontracting arrangements.

19. SBC does not use data and management information effectively to monitor its performance. It recognises this in the self-assessment report. It has yet to identify the full range of reports required for effective trend analysis to monitor and manage all aspects of provision effectively. SBC does not analyse available data effectively, for example to identify trends in success rates on courses leading to qualifications. It has not ensured that it collects reliable data on achievement in non-accredited provision. It does not use data to identify the impact of specific measures, for example the effectiveness of actions taken to support learners with identified literacy, language and numeracy needs.
20. SBC has satisfactory safeguarding arrangements. It meets government requirements and adopts appropriate practice in safeguarding vulnerable adults. Satisfactory strategies and policies link to the council's arrangements for safeguarding. The council has a suitably-trained designated person who oversees safeguarding arrangements and delivers appropriate basic awareness training to the service and its subcontractors. SBC monitors the completion of Criminal Records Bureau checks on all staff and volunteers in contact with vulnerable adults. SBC has clear arrangements for staff to report safeguarding concerns. However, information given to learners on reporting safeguarding concerns lacks clarity.
21. SBC promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily. The service's equality and diversity policies link well to those of the council. SBC requires appropriate equality and diversity policies of subcontractors, and monitors these adequately. Learning ambassadors support equality and diversity effectively, but are not available to support all learners. SBC recognises this as an area for improvement. SBC and its subcontractors have satisfactory procedures to eliminate bullying and harassment. Learners receive appropriate information on how to instigate a complaint. However, SBC does not monitor complaints received by subcontractors. SBC uses data insufficiently to monitor the impact of equality and diversity measures. It collects and analyses suitable information on learners' gender, age, ethnicity and declared disability at enrolment. It does not collect data to analyse the achievement of different groups of learners. It does not set targets for improving the achievement of particular groups of learners.
22. SBC systematically collects learners' views at the end of their courses, and acts upon these to improve provision. It does not specifically collect learner or stakeholder views of the provision overall to inform the self-assessment process. It plans to do so for the next self-assessment report. Overall, the self-assessment report is accurate, although repetitive. SBC does not record progress in implementing the quality improvement plan.

23. The previous inspection report identified quality improvement arrangements as a key area for improvement. SBC made slow progress in establishing effective arrangements until the recent appointment of a suitably experienced quality manager. Clear guidance on the completion of required course documentation has improved the implementation of key processes. However, not all subcontractors implement the procedures to a consistently high standard. Observations of teaching and learning have high priority and include specific and time-bound action planning for improvement.
  
24. SBC does not have sufficient familiarity with good practice in the adult and community learning sector to manage all aspects of provision effectively. Apart from the quality manager, SBC's staff do not have a background in post-16 education. They have limited awareness of mechanisms used by good or outstanding providers that could be adapted to rectify key areas of improvement, such as the effective use of data.

## Information about the inspection

25. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the service's contracts and commissioning officer, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's monitoring visit and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors used group, individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gather the views of learners. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had completed on behalf of the service. They also visited learning sessions. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in the subjects the provider offers.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Swindon Borough Council**  
**Learning type: Social and personal development: all adult safeguarded provision**

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Social and personal development</b>
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	850	850
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>A. Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
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>	n/a	
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a	
<b>B. Quality of provision</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
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	
<b>C. Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
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?	4	
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

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