

North Lincolnshire Council

Partial reinspection report

Unique reference number: 53589

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Last day of inspection: 24 March 2011

Type of provider: Local Authority

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Introduction

North Lincolnshire Council (NLC) was inspected in September 2008 in which achievement and standards, leadership and management, capacity to improve, and equality of opportunity were all judged inadequate. Six subject areas were inspected of which education and training, preparation for life and work, and family learning were inadequate. At the reinspection in January 2010, family learning remained inadequate but all other inadequate aspects and subject areas were satisfactory. A reinspection monitoring visit in October 2010 identified insufficient progress in improving family learning. This partial reinspection focuses on family learning provision together with an assessment of progress against five themes covered in the monitoring visit.

The outcome of this reinspection is as follows:

Subject area/type of provision	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Family learning	4	3

Context

NLC is an adult and community learning provider with an administration centre in Scunthorpe. It provides accredited and non-accredited learning programmes in eight subject areas through a network of four main centres and 17 community-based venues. These include schools, Sure Start children's centres and adult education centres. Female learners comprise around three-quarters of the total learners.

The original wider family learning (WFL) courses have recently been augmented by family literacy, language and numeracy courses (FLLN). There were 37 learners on programmes at the time of the reinspection. FLLN is coordinated by a new curriculum manager who also has responsibility for Skills for Life. WFL is coordinated and delivered by a full-time curriculum manager.

Key Findings

- Learners' attainment of their learning goals is now satisfactory. Many learners progress from FLLN provision to Skills for Life and other appropriate courses. They are generally well aware of progression routes.
- In 2010/11 success and retention rates for learners on the early start programme are improving. Learner numbers are increasing in the healthy eating courses. Retention is good on the recently introduced family literacy and numeracy courses. While learner numbers are growing in FLLN, they are declining in WFL.
- Learners enjoy learning and make progress at a satisfactory pace. They acquire knowledge and skills to help support their own learning and that of their children. Learners gain confidence to engage more fully with the school, improve their self-esteem and develop communication skills.

- Learners feel safe and also feel their children are safe. Learners are able to make more informed choices about their health and well-being. WFL programmes effectively promote healthy eating and a greater understanding of good diet and nutrition. Overall safeguarding arrangements have been further developed within NLC and are satisfactory.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. Most tutors use a range of teaching activities and techniques to engage and enthuse learners. At its best delivery is well-paced and teaching and learning are stimulating and inspiring. Delivery is not always individualised to meet the needs of all learners.
- Planning for individual learning is insufficiently robust. Tutors now use initial assessment in family learning but the process generates too little detailed information about learners' existing skills levels. A useful written record of each learner's progress is now compiled at the end of each session, involving learner and tutor. This identifies what a learner has achieved, provides encouragement and supports retention.
- The range of provision in family learning is too narrow, although literacy and numeracy provision has been expanded since the last inspection. Four FLLN courses are presently offered and NLC is planning to offer more literacy programmes in the summer term. Provision is now better planned to offer coordinated progression routes. Courses are offered at accessible venues. Child care and help with transport support learners' ability to attend classes.
- NLC continues to work productively with partners such as schools, children's centres, libraries and sports clubs to target provision to meet the needs and interests of parents, communities and stakeholders. Partnership working with schools is particularly effective in breaking down barriers and changing the perceptions parents have about schools.
- Information, advice, guidance and support for learners on family learning courses are satisfactory. Tutors have a sound understanding of their learners' needs and provide, or refer to, additional support if required. Information and guidance about progression opportunities are provided on course completion.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. A revised management structure in family learning is now in place which has resulted in a very good review and overhaul of quality assurance policies and a more focused curriculum development and delivery strategy. Clear planning and effective support mechanisms have resulted in positive staff morale and acceptance of the need for change.
- Tutors are satisfactorily qualified and experienced for their roles and supported with suitable training. Too few staff have specialist literacy and numeracy qualifications. Further training is planned. Resources are satisfactory.
- The promotion of equality and diversity within family learning is satisfactory. NLC has taken some action to engage more fathers in family learning, with 20% of male learners in WFL, and there are examples of different cultural influences being introduced in healthy eating courses.

What does NLC need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop and implement strategies to improve the quality of family learning.
- Develop the curriculum offer to include more accredited provision at appropriate levels and to expand the range of WFL provision.
- Improve the depth and detail of information collected during initial assessment to identify accurately individual needs and abilities of learners in relation to prior skills and course learning objectives and use this information in planning teaching and learning.
- Ensure that target setting is sufficiently challenging and individualised for each learner.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in strengthening the effectiveness of self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements to secure and sustain improvement?

Reasonable progress

Leadership and management arrangements have been restructured and reinvigorated since the reinspection. Comprehensive quality improvement systems have been introduced and are beginning to be used well to identify and monitor the progress of improvement actions.

Self-assessment has evolved from an annual event with little subsequent impact on quality improvement into a key component of what is now a systematic and well-planned quality improvement cycle. The 2009/2010 self-assessment report is a self-critical, evaluative and honest picture of the provision, with realistic grading. However, it is too detailed and too long to be sufficiently accessible to all staff.

The quality improvement cycle is robust and well-structured. It involves thorough continuous assessment of the quality of all aspects of the provision and a rigorous, timetabled monthly review of progress towards achieving quality improvement actions. Action points and reviews of progress indicate steady improvement across a wide range of aspects.

A peer lesson observation process is now in place which supports the dissemination of good teaching practice between tutors. The arrangements for the formal observation of teaching and learning now include family learning and a formal moderation process. However, the original and moderated grades awarded are at times over-generous.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in maintaining or improving outcomes for learners?

Reasonable progress

Overall outcomes for learners have improved over the past three years, although the extent of progress has been greater in some areas than others. Most learners continue to improve their economic well-being and use safe working practices. In 2009/10 learners' overall success rates on accredited courses reached the national average of around 76%. However, behind this figure the success rate for NLC's adult learners on short courses is four percentage points above the national average but around three percentage points below on long courses. Success rates are very high in information and communication technology (ICT), arts and media, and education and training courses, satisfactory in preparation for life and work, and business administration but low

in health and social care. Overall, retention is satisfactory on adult courses but low for learners aged 16–18.

The overall success rate of learners aged 16–18 is significantly lower than their adult counterparts, as was the case at the previous inspection. NLC has no strategy or action plan to improve the success rates of this group, many of whom have disengaged from formal education.

Quality of provision

What progress has NLC made in the implementation of the recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) process?

Reasonable progress

At inspection, the RARPA process was comprehensive but its application was an area for improvement. The application of the RARPA process is now consistent across almost all the provision, but it is still an emergent process within family learning. The RARPA process underpins the effective identification of individual learners' starting points and support for the achievement of realistic goals. The quality of data on learners' performance is much improved and timely, providing tutors and course leaders with accurate information on learners' progress. Course information has been reviewed and clarified to help learners select the correct course and level to match their abilities and interests. The initial assessment of learners' needs and abilities now covers all learners, although it is still not sufficiently rigorous in family learning. Individual learning plans are produced for all learners. These identify learners' agreed learning aims and goals but target setting is not always specific, measurable or sufficiently time-bound.

NLC has strengthened its arrangements to evaluate how well the RARPA process is being used and how effectively courses meet individual needs. It now uses cross-curriculum moderation as part of its improved quality cycle. Moderation has successfully highlighted problems around target setting and a lack of supporting evidence, prompting further support and training.

What improvements has NLC made to the delivery of information, advice and guidance (IAG) across the provision?

Reasonable progress

Nineteen staff have achieved a National Vocational Qualification at level 2 in advice and guidance since the reinspection in January 2010. These staff now comprise an IAG team which formally visits each course offering detailed IAG to groups and individual learners. They augment the informal advice and guidance which is generally provided routinely by tutors. Most tutors provide effective professional support.

The impact of IAG is now tracked and evaluated well on a termly basis. NLC has improved the monitoring and tracking of course enquiries. Pre-enrolment information sessions have improved prospective learners' understanding of courses, levels and

progression options. Promotional materials have been redesigned to attract and better inform prospective learners of local provision. Well-designed information displays in learning centres increase learners' understanding of the progression routes open to them. Joint information events are held in partnership with other NLC departments and local training and education providers.

NLC has improved the clarity of course information on the council website to provide more accurate information about each course and is introducing online enrolment in response to learner feedback. However, the adult community section of the NLC website is not sufficiently user-friendly, particularly for any users with poor ICT or English language skills. Details of family learning programmes on the website are not easily accessible.

Leadership and management

What improvements has NLC made in actively promoting equality and diversity, tackling discrimination and, in particular, narrowing the achievement gap

Reasonable progress

Arrangements for equality and diversity were satisfactory at the time of the reinspection. NLC has since achieved the Investors in Diversity award – the first council in the country to do so.

NLC now makes very good use of local management information to target its provision in specific areas of deprivation and need. For example, the number of learners from low income backgrounds and young people in high-density social housing almost doubled between 2008/09 and 2009/10.

NLC has established a specialist team to support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Around 100 learners were supported in 2009/10. Although the size of this team reduced at the beginning of 2011, NLC is managing to maintain its level of support using tutors and volunteering staff. The success rates of those accessing support in 2009/10 are higher than those who did not.

There are some good examples of the promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum, including projects and lesson themes which promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures, but such practice is not yet embedded throughout the provision.

The small number of minority ethnic learners succeeded less well than white learners in 2009/10 but there is no clear prior pattern of underperformance. Nevertheless NLC has not paid sufficient attention to establishing the reasons for underperformance among these groups or to identifying supportive action.

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