

London Borough of Harrow

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 50227

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Last day of inspection: 7 December 2011

Type of provider: Local authority

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Harrow is an Outer London borough situated in North West London. The population is increasing and becoming more diverse with just over half of residents from minority ethnic backgrounds. Overall, employment levels and household earnings are relatively high. However, Harrow also includes areas of significant deprivation and acute housing need.

Harrow Council delivers adult, community and family learning through subcontracting and partnership arrangements with a range of providers, including two further education colleges, schools, the voluntary and community sector and other council departments. Just over a third of provision is directly delivered by the council. In 2010/11 there were 3,418 learners on personal and community development learning, 677 learners on family learning and 576 learners on information and communication technology (ICT) community learning programmes. The vast majority of provision leads to non-accredited outcomes for learners.

At the last inspection, in November 2007, the service's overall effectiveness was judged to be good, as were achievement and standards, the quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity. The subject areas of family learning and community development were also judged to be good.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in developing quality improvement procedures and the self-assessment process since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, self-assessment was judged to be thorough. Since then the service has established a comprehensive approach to evaluating all parts of its provision. Course tutors routinely evaluate the outcomes for learners and quality of provision and these often include useful analyses of learners' achievements. Service managers complete detailed self-assessment reports for each area of learning, which inform the overall self-assessment report. While these curriculum area reports increasingly include reference to learners' views, they do not make best use of the available performance data to support all of the judgements made. Clear actions for further improvement are identified, but targets are not always sufficiently clear or measurable to ensure rigorous monitoring of progress to secure the required improvements.

Managers rightly identify that there is too much variation in the quality of self-assessment reports from some of its partner organisations. While some provide good

information relating to learners' achievements and progression, others are too brief and do not make effective use of performance data.

Service managers work closely with their counterparts in partner organisations to make and moderate judgments about the quality of teaching and learning. In the small sample of lesson observation records seen there was considerable variation in the detail and analytical rigour of the judgements recorded and how well the evidence supported the grade awarded. However, in a joint lesson observation conducted during the visit, judgements made accurately identified the key strengths and weaknesses of the lesson.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for learners?

Reasonable progress

Direct evidence from learners, the provider's own evaluations and the strengthened process for the recording and monitoring of learners' achievements show that many learners continue to achieve their learning goals well. They accrue a wide range of positive outcomes and skills that are of very practical benefit to them in their daily lives. Older learners gain basic skills in ICT. In family learning, parents are better able to support their children in school through their improved understanding of the curriculum. Developing greater confidence in speaking English for those learners for whom English is a second language enables them to liaise more effectively with their children's school. Those with mental health difficulties achieve greater independence and feel less isolated.

An increasing number of learners are attaining qualifications at foundation and intermediate level. Since 2008/09, retention rates and the achievement of learners have improved incrementally. During this period, the service has successfully reached more learners who are taking their first steps into learning. Learners spoken to by inspectors had progressed well through taking a range of courses, and some take up valuable roles as volunteers and parent ambassadors who promote learning well to others. The service has rightly identified the need to monitor the progression of all learners more effectively.

The quality of provision

What progress has been made in the recording of learners' progress?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the recognition and recording of learners' progress and achievement (RARPA) was judged inadequate. Since then, a new system of RARPA has been introduced and implemented across all directly-delivered provision. Records of progress are now used routinely across the service. They are easy to administer for tutors and learners and, in the best examples, RARPA is used effectively to identify individual targets, reflect on and review learning and monitor the progress of individuals and advise them on their next steps. In other instances, individual targets are unambitious and RARPA is not yet fully embraced by all tutors. The service has

rightly recognised that some target setting is not always suitably specific or measurable and that RARPA could be used more creatively in some settings.

Records of progress are not sufficiently analysed in order to provide more detailed information on the achievement of learners across the service. Gaining information from partners on the achievement of learners in their settings is underdeveloped. However, plans are in place to improve the quality of information provided by partners.

What progress has been made in developing effective information, advice and guidance for learners?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, information, advice and guidance were judged to be satisfactory. Since then, the service has gained the Matrix accreditation for information, advice and guidance services. Tutors are sufficiently equipped so that they can offer relevant information and guidance about the next steps in learning for those in their class. This typically involves signposting future progression opportunities within the service or partner organisations and helping individual learners to receive one-to-one guidance.

The service has made good progress with its carefully targeted information, advice and guidance in wider family learning provision. Resources are targeted towards those with greatest needs. A trained coordinator provides information, advice and guidance to all learners on wider family learning programmes, through group visits and one-to-one follow-up sessions. The well-structured support is carefully tailored to individual learners' needs and circumstances, is highly effective in developing learners' skills and confidence and enables learners to progress successfully to higher levels of study and to secure employment. Learners particularly valued the ongoing support they received and many spoke eloquently of how this had transformed their lives. Some of these learners return to the service to share their experiences which, in turn, inspire and build other learners' confidence and aspirations.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in increasing the percentage of men participating in family learning programmes?

Reasonable progress

The survey visit in 2008 evaluated the benefits of family learning for individuals, families and communities. It found that the proportion of men taking part in family learning was low. A range of well-considered programmes and targeted activities has successfully increased the proportion of men participating in family learning. They achieve some good outcomes including improved relationships with their children. In wider family learning the proportion of men increased from 4.8% in 2008/09 to 20% in 2010/11. In-year data for this year show that currently 30% of all enrolments on family learning programmes are men, although it is too early in the academic year to conclude that this proportion of men participating will be maintained.

What progress has been made in effectively promoting the Skills for Life strategy or equivalent across the provision?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the Skills for Life strategy was judged to be inadequate. Since then, the service has developed a clear strategy to promote and extend opportunities for learners to develop their language, literacy, numeracy and ICT skills so that they can progress to higher levels of study and increase their ability to gain employment.

The service has worked well with other partners in the borough to map existing provision for English for speakers of other languages, identify gaps and plan appropriate provision, for example through family learning. The Parents into Employment project met learners' language needs well and over half the parents involved improved their language skills by at least one level whilst on the programme.

Through close working with primary schools, the service has been able to identify parents who would benefit from literacy and numeracy lessons and an increasing number took and achieved national tests at foundation and intermediate level last year. Evaluations of some family learning provision also demonstrate a positive impact on raising children's achievement, but these data are not yet available consistently for all schools involved to enable the service to measure the impact across all provision.

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