

Lincolnshire County Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) provides adult and community learning to the county. It is managed by Lincolnshire Lifelong Learning Service (LLLS). Provision in family learning is delivered directly by LLLS. The rest of the provision is delivered by a range of providers each under subcontract to LLLS.

The most recent inspection report, a reinspection, was published in June 2009. LLLS was graded satisfactory for overall effectiveness, quality of provision and leadership and management. It was graded good for capacity to improve and achievement and standards. Of the three subject areas inspected, preparation for life and work and family learning were judged to be good. Provision in sport, leisure and recreation was graded satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has LLLS made in improving the use of data to monitor and improve the quality of provision?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection LLLS has implemented a range of highly effective initiatives to improve the use of data, resulting in improved outcomes. A council performance team manages the data for LLLS and the data are rigorously maintained and analysed. Data are analysed in detail in all aspects of performance. Reports are clear and used well to monitor and improve all parts of the provision. Arrangements for subcontractors' handling of data are thorough and enforced rigorously. The performance team has created software to help small providers manage data. The development and maintenance of this is monitored very stringently and excellent efforts are made to maintain the integrity and security of the data. Staff from small providers receive good training and guidance in the use of this software. LLLS has established an innovative benchmark club. This is made up of similar local authorities who deliver this type of government-funded learning. LLLS is highly effective in developing this group who share a wide range of data. Further development of this group now includes the use of data analysis to highlight and share good practice that has resulted in improved outcomes.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has LLLS made in improving success rates since the last inspection?

Significant progress

Since the previous inspection LLLS has implemented a range of very successful initiatives to improve success rates. Overall success rates have improved markedly by 20% in a three-year period and are now very high. The observation of teaching and learning is more rigorous, resulting in better teaching and learning. Training in, and monitoring of, the use of a process for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning (RARPA), for staff in both direct delivery and sub-contracted provision is thorough and effective in helping learners make progress. Improvements in success rates are consistent across all of the provision, in both accredited and non-accredited programmes. The more rigorous use of data has contributed to these improvements. Other aspects of learners' experience have similarly improved. Learners' attendance has risen from 88% in 2009/10 to 90% in 2010/11. Retention rates have also improved and, for 2010/11, were exceptionally high at 99%.

Quality of provision

How much progress has LLLS made in introducing a strategy to enhance the quality of target setting for learners?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection LLLS has provided good training to enhance tutors' target setting skills. LLLS is rigorous in ensuring that all new tutors benefit from these development opportunities. LLLS places an appropriate focus on raising the quality of target setting within courses that use a process of RARPA. Within family learning, the learning diary introduced around the time of the previous inspection is now well embedded in the programme and includes use of appropriate target setting to aid learner progress monitoring. LLLS makes adequate use of quality assurance processes, including assessment through direct observation of lessons, to monitor the quality of short- and long-term target setting for learners. However, LLLS has not systematically evaluated the impact of improvement initiatives on the quality of service-wide targets for learners and course success rates. The most recent self-assessment report does not make a judgement on the effectiveness of the strategy to enhance the quality of target setting for learners.

How much progress has LLLS made in using learners' views to inform curriculum monitoring and development?

Reasonable progress

LLLS is currently implementing its learner engagement strategy across the service. Since the previous inspection, LLLS has established learner focus groups and currently has eight of the 19 subcontractors participating in this initiative. In addition, LLLS uses an appropriate range of methods to gain learner feedback, including course questionnaires and telephone surveys. However, survey questions do not always adequately capture the information needed to assess the quality of all key

stages in learners' progress. LLLS has established web-based feedback channels that are appropriately advertised, though current take-up is relatively low. Overall it is too early to make a judgement on the effectiveness of these and other new initiatives. LLLS makes good use of some learners' views to identify and implement actions that lead to quality improvement. For example within family learning, learners' suggestions have led to the adjusting of course timing and childcare arrangements to better meet users' needs. However, a detailed analysis and evaluation of service-wide feedback to inform fully a curriculum-level action planning process for improvement, has yet to be completed. As recognised by LLLS, learners and subcontractors are not routinely informed of LLLS's response to received feedback.

Leadership and management

How much progress has LLLS made in the rigour of checking safeguarding policies? **Reasonable progress**

LLLS has improved its safeguarding strategy and processes to secure learners' safety. In addition, service-level agreements have been updated to reflect the higher expectation LLLS now has of all its subcontractors. LLLS has established effective communication channels with all subcontractors. It has supported, and worked effectively with subcontractors to improve the relevance of existing health, safety and safeguarding policies and procedures. Working with the Council's adult safeguarding board, LLLS has developed an appropriate set of criteria to assess the relevance of subcontractors' safeguarding arrangements. These criteria are used effectively by LLLS to undertake risk banding of subcontractors that supports compliance monitoring. LLLS carries out regular and frequent reviews of each subcontractor's performance against expected standards and progress made in introducing improvements in learner safety. While LLLS takes immediate action to work with providers to deal with any identified risks, it does not ensure that all action is completed before the term starts. Since the previous inspection, most subcontractor managers and tutors have participated in relevant safeguarding training. However, LLLS has only recently started to monitor effectively staff progress in completing training.

How much progress has LLLS made in improving the monitoring of the impact of equality and diversity plans? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection LLLS has improved the way it monitors the implementation and effectiveness of action plans overall. This has improved the monitoring of the impact of equality and diversity plans, which are well integrated within overall quality improvement plans. Equality and diversity actions are allocated to a senior manager who closely monitors their impact. As a result of the changes, staff have much greater confidence in their understanding of the quality of the provision. Action plans are broken down clearly into more detailed and specific activities that are closely monitored. This results in improvements, for example in the recruitment of lone parents. This has risen from 89% of target to 95%. LLLS sets

targets for, and monitors, the success rates of different learner groups, such as lone parents and unemployed people, for direct delivery provision. However, it does not monitor achievement of learners from different minority ethnic sub-groups. Furthermore, while it sets and monitors recruitment targets for groups of learners for each provider and sets overall achievement targets for groups of learners in subcontracted provision, these targets are not shared with providers. The achievement of different groups is not monitored at provider level for subcontracted provision.

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