

Birmingham City Council

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Local Authority

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REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Birmingham Adult Education Service (BAES) provides learning programmes in 12 subject areas. It provides accredited courses for learners aged 16 to 18 and adult learners and non-accredited programmes for adults. BAES is located in Birmingham City Council's directorate for adults and communities. The interim head of service, eight senior managers, 250 curriculum and business support staff and 495 hourly-paid tutors teach and support learners. The service provides learning in nine main centres and more than 300 smaller venues. In 2010/11, some 20,800 learners made 34,450 enrolments on 3,200 courses.

This reinspection monitoring visit follows the inspection in March 2011 at which inspectors judged BAES' overall effectiveness, capacity to improve and leadership and management to be satisfactory. They found the quality of provision, safeguarding and equality and diversity to be good. Inspectors judged childcare and teaching assistants' provision to be satisfactory and information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and family learning to be good. Inspectors judged literacy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has the provider made to ensure that self-assessment and action-planning lead to improvements in literacy and ESOL?	Reasonable progress
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The service continues to implement well-established self-assessment and action-planning processes. Particularly detailed curriculum level self-assessment reports support effective action-planning for improvement. Self-assessment judgements are realistic and well supported by a wide range of evidence. The service has invested in information technology resources to enable it to gather and analyse management information accurately. Managers make good use of data during self-assessment, as well as to identify trends and to support curriculum planning. The service understands its key strengths and areas for improvement well. Managers make effective use of learner and stakeholder feedback to support self-assessment judgements. Senior managers monitor the post-inspection action plan frequently. They clearly identify actions, timescales and responsibilities. Many improvement actions have already taken place and others are well within the challenging timescales. However, it is too soon to judge the full impact of all the actions taken.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the service made in improving outcomes for literacy and ESOL learners?

Insufficient progress

Provisional data for 2010/11 indicate that overall success rates in accredited provision in ESOL have improved and are now well above national averages. Success rates for the ESOL pre-foundation level speaking and listening course have been well above national rates for four years. Success rates for foundation learners on this course are also good, having improved year-on-year to well above national averages in 2010/11. At intermediate level, ESOL learners on the speaking and listening course perform well above national averages, but those on the intermediate certificate course, who account for 3% of all learners, perform poorly.

Success rates for learners on accredited programmes in literacy are poor at all levels, except at pre-foundation level, where they are well above national averages. Success rates for learners on foundation and intermediate literacy programmes have been in decline for the last three years and are now well below national averages. Managers have established the complex reasons for this decline and have implemented a range of appropriate strategies to tackle this issue. However, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these strategies.

Quality of provision

The inspection found that targets in literacy and ESOL learners' individual learning plans were poor. How much progress has the provider made to address this issue?

Reasonable progress

The service has taken effective steps to ensure that targets in learners' individual learning plans are realistic, relevant and individual. Tutors have received training to help them devise appropriate targets. The service makes effective use of the observation of teaching and learning process to identify tutors who do not meet the service's standards and to take appropriate action. Of the 50 tutors observed in 2011/12, the service identified just over half as requiring additional help with target-setting. Observers produce detailed action plans for tutors to support them to write effective and realistic targets for learners. Tutors are aware of the significance of setting appropriate targets for their learners. Most individual learning plans now contain a range of group and individual targets. However, in a significant minority of cases, targets continue to be poorly written and insufficiently individualised. Managers are aware of this problem and have begun to develop strategies to tackle this issue.

How much progress has the provider made in tackling the poor quality of teaching found by inspectors in literacy and ESOL?**Reasonable progress**

The service has implemented several radical initiatives to improve teaching and learning. In order to improve the service's capacity to co-ordinate and effectively manage the quality of teaching and learning, it has reduced the number of hourly-paid tutors from 120 to 90. BAES has appointed 18 tutors to substantive fractional posts in literacy and ESOL with enhanced curriculum responsibilities. It has strengthened its observation of teaching and learning procedure. Following a critical judgement during the previous inspection about the size of BAES' observation team, the service decided to rationalise this team. BAES now uses a smaller team of experienced and well-qualified observers to carry out its observation of teaching and learning. Observers have received high-quality training. Teaching observation grades are now much more realistic. Observers develop detailed action plans to improve tutors' performance which managers regularly monitor. The service has made good use of an external consultant to bring additional experience and objectivity to the observation team and the grading process. The service has implemented a rigorous schedule of teaching observations in 2011/12. At the time of the monitoring visit, the service had already carried out around 50 observations. This exercise found a significant proportion of inadequate teaching. The service has now begun a comprehensive training programme for weaker tutors.

Leadership and management**The previous inspection judged curriculum leadership in literacy and ESOL to be inadequate. How much progress has the service made in tackling this weakness?****Significant progress**

The service carried out a significant restructuring of its management team very shortly after the previous inspection. The aim of this exercise was to establish a flatter management structure to ensure clear reporting responsibilities and to facilitate good communication between managers and teaching staff. The service has restructured the literacy and ESOL team so that it now consists of a curriculum leader, a curriculum manager, a team of 13 teaching and learning managers and four subject leaders who have clearly defined responsibilities for improving the quality of teaching and learning. Managers say that they are well supported and that their roles and responsibilities are clear. Tutors now receive specific curriculum-specific support to help them improve their practice.

Following the judgement at the previous inspection that the service's ESOL and literacy provision had grown at the cost of quality, senior managers decided to reduce the provision in this curriculum area by 25% in the 2011/12 academic year. The provision is now significantly smaller than at the time of the inspection. Senior managers are now able to focus their attention on improving the provision for

current learners rather than on trying to manage strategically the volume of provision that it had previously offered.

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