

Hartlepool Borough Council

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1 Outstanding

Grade 2 Good

Grade 3 Satisfactory

Grade 4 Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Languages, literature and culture
- Preparation for life and work
- Business, administration and law

Description of the provider

1. Hartlepool Adult Education Service (the service) is part of Hartlepool Borough Council. It is funded by Tees Valley LSC to provide adult and community learning in and around Hartlepool. The service receives European Social Fund funding for some projects, but none were running at the time of inspection. The council provides a job club through the Department for Work and Pensions, and **nextstep** provision, neither of which were included in the scope of this inspection. Some courses run on a full-cost recovery basis. At the time of the inspection, the service had 872 learners on courses in health and social care, science and mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), visual and performing arts and media, languages, literature and culture, education, preparation for life and work, and business, administration and law. The areas inspected were languages, literature and culture with 286 learners, preparation for life and work with 110 learners, and business, administration and law with 124 learners.
2. Hartlepool has a population of 89,200. Slightly more than 50% are female. According to the 2001 census 1.2% of the population are from a minority ethnic background, below the average of 10% for England and Wales as a whole. The unemployment rate is 5% compared with a national rate of 2.5%, and male unemployment stands at 7%, twice the national rate. Hartlepool has 15 wards in the 10% most disadvantaged nationally. Approximately 57.5% of pupils leave school with GCSE pass rates A-C, compared with 58.5% nationally.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
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Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
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Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
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Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
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Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Sector subject areas

Languages, literature and culture	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Preparation for life and work	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Business, administration and law	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Success rates on most programmes are good and improving. Most learners gain confidence and many develop good, relevant employability skills through their learning. Retention is good and improving on most courses. The range of provision is good with appropriate paths to progression. Programming is well planned to meet the needs of learners.
4. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and in many cases they are good. Assessment is good on most courses. The recognising and recording of learners' progress and achievement is at least satisfactory for learners on non-accredited courses.
5. Programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners well. Programmes are very responsive to local circumstances and external requirements. The service is particularly effective in increasing its learners' employability skills and meeting the needs of local employers.
6. Support for learners is good. Good quality, impartial information, advice and guidance are given to all learners to ensure that they are on the right programmes. Learners are given good additional information and advice to secure their progress into relevant further education or employment.
7. Leadership and management are good. Strategic leadership is particularly effective in ensuring provision meets local needs and priorities. Good measures are in place to improve the quality of the provision. Active promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Training for staff is good and learners have a good awareness of their rights and responsibilities.
8. The council's response to social inclusion is very good. Initiatives to engage priority groups are good. The service locates provision particularly well to engage learners who are defined as hard to reach. Hartlepool Borough Council works well with its partners to run programmes that benefit communities and individuals.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. The service demonstrates a good capacity to improve. It has effected many good improvements since the previous inspection. Communication is good at all levels. Retention and success rates in most areas have improved and have met the service's targets. The service has improved its range of courses and progression routes. It has successfully engaged hard to reach groups within the community, and links with community groups have been extended. Most weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been addressed and some are now strengths. The service has a good management information system and makes effective use of this for quality improvement at a strategic level. However, detailed analysis at curriculum level is currently underdeveloped.

10. The self-assessment process is good. It is inclusive and consultative and covers all aspects of the provision. The self-assessment grades broadly reflect the findings of the inspection team. Strengths and areas for improvement were broadly accurate and sufficient evidence was used to support key judgements. The report is self-critical and analytical. However, in some areas it is too descriptive. The quality improvement plan is clear and has measurable targets set within clear timescales to address identified areas for improvement. However, in a minority of areas the quality improvement plan lacks clear targets to measure and evaluate progress.

Key strengths

- Good strategic direction
- Good partnership working
- Good inclusion strategies to meet the needs of local communities

Key areas for improvement

- Better sharing of good practice in teaching and learning
- Better use, analysis and understanding of data for quality improvement at operational level

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Achievement and standards are good overall. Success rates and retention rates are good and improving on most programmes. The standard of learners' work is good overall. Most learners achieve their learning goals well. Learners' confidence and self-esteem are boosted by their learning experience. Many learners develop good social and workplace skills. Attendance and punctuality are generally good. Many learners progress to further training, education or employment. The only significant difference in the performance of different groups is that those who are offered additional support and take it have an achievement rate which is nine percentage points higher than those who are offered support and refuse it. This is accurately reported in the provider's self-assessment report where it forms the basis for good action-planning.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

12. The quality of provision is good. This is accurately reflected in the provider's self-assessment report, and the action-planning arising from the report is already improving the provision further. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory in all areas. In the better lessons tutors use a relevant range of resources and strategies but in a minority of cases teaching strategies are insufficient to meet the full range of learners' needs. Assessment to monitor and guide learners' progress is generally satisfactory. Good identification of additional learning needs takes place and support is offered to all learners who need it. In some cases support is provided generically in the classroom to meet the needs of learners who have declined individual support.
13. Programmes are very well matched to learners' aspirations and potential. The provision effectively builds on learners' prior attainment and experience. Programmes meet both national and local priorities, and the provider ensures that suitable opportunities are well-located for priority groups. The service works increasingly well with local employers to meet their needs. Progression opportunities are generally good. Courses are scheduled to suit learners' working patterns and caring responsibilities.

14. Support for learners is good. It is well structured and monitored to help learners to achieve. Learners receive clear, impartial guidance on course content and requirements. Induction is good. Access to literacy, numeracy and language support is good. Appropriate Jobsearch activities are provided through a range of partnership links to support learners seeking employment. Analysis of data indicates that support provided for learners has had a significant beneficial impact on their overall progress and achievement.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

15. Strategic direction is good. The service has a well-developed strategic plan for adult education that clearly links with the overall local strategic corporate plan. The plan helps the service achieve its vision of using comprehensive and collaborative links across a wide number of services and agencies to provide greater opportunities for people to learn. Internal links with a good range of council services are now effective. Communication is good at all levels. The service has developed a good skills for life strategy to support learners to achieve their qualifications.
16. The service has very effective partnership links to widen participation and engage learners who are hard to reach. It works well with voluntary and community sector groups for the benefit of learners. Information provided by partners is used effectively to provide a good range of projects to widen social inclusion. Well-established systems are in place with other providers to share good practice and to jointly develop quality improvement strategies.
17. Resources are satisfactory overall. Staff development is good and the service supports staff to gain additional qualifications to increase professionalism. Most venues have appropriate access for learners with mobility or sensory impairment. Venues are checked to ensure that they comply with health and safety regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act.
18. The service has good inclusion strategies to meet local needs. Information is available in a good range of suitable formats. Innovative initiatives are used to inform potential learners about the range of available provision and to attract people from priority groups into learning. Provision is conveniently located within the priority communities. Partner organisations work well with the service to introduce learners to provision. All staff have regular, relevant training in equality and

diversity, and learners understand their rights and responsibilities. The service's policies and procedures for equality and diversity are comprehensive and accessible, and make reference to all relevant legislation such as the Race Relations Act and Disability Equality Duty. Access audits have been conducted, and where venues have been deemed difficult to access, provision has been moved to more suitable premises.

19. The service has made arrangements for implementing the five themes of *Every Child Matters* in family learning, but not in other areas. The self-assessment report does not sufficiently link the themes and implementation of *Every Child Matters* to the various sector subject areas.

20. Quality assurance is insufficiently established in some aspects of the provision. A comprehensive quality improvement system covers all aspects of the learning provision. Joint lesson observations carried out during the inspection identified an improvement in observations, and matched the observers' findings. The service has developed and introduced new individual learning plans. In some areas these plans are not used well enough to record learners' progress. Systems ensure that all quality assurance procedures are carried out in a consistent way. The self-assessment process forms the basis of quality improvement within the service and has been used well to improve all aspects of leadership and management as well as the quality of provision. It is well understood by staff.

21. Analysis of data to inform course planning is insufficient. Systems are well developed, and effective reports can be produced to identify trends in learners' progress and achievement and comparative performance. However, many of the reports that can be produced are not being routinely used by tutors and co-ordinators to improve target-setting and planning for individual courses.

What learners like:

- Local, community-based classes
- The possibility of progression onto higher level courses
- The cultural input about life in the countries whose language learners are studying
- The high level of individual support
- The informal approach to learning
- Making good progress on spelling
- Good tutors who give individual help and make lessons fun
- 'Learning plans are useful to review my progress'

What learners think could improve:

- The amount of repetitive paperwork they have to complete
- Being sure of a place on follow on courses
- The reliability of information learning technology – it doesn't always work and laptops won't connect to the internet
- The individual learning plans – 'there's no obvious point to them except for the session record'

Sector subject areas

Languages, literature and culture

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

22. At the time of the inspection 16 courses were running in British sign language (BSL), French, Italian, Greek and Spanish, as well as one course in deaf awareness and one in coping with hearing loss. Currently 286 learners attend courses at eight venues across the borough. Just over half of the classes are in the evening. Most are two hours long and run for 11 or 31 weeks. Courses are mostly at levels 1 and 2, with more advanced courses in Spanish. Some 62% of courses are accredited. The programme is delivered by nine part-time tutors, one of whom also acts as curriculum co-ordinator.

Strengths

- Good development of the curriculum

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient development of opportunities for learning in language classes

Achievement and standards

23. Retention and achievement rates are satisfactory. Retention has improved to 84%, rising by five percentage points in the last year. Attendance in the classes observed during inspection was satisfactory at 73%.

24. Attainment in class is satisfactory. Learners increase in confidence and skills. They develop greater cultural understanding of the user-group of their chosen language. Learners of BSL apply

their learning satisfactorily in the workplace as well as in family contexts. This is recognised in the provider's self-assessment report.

Quality of provision

25. The overall quality of provision is satisfactory, as detailed in the provider's self-assessment report. The standard of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Most teachers have appropriate teaching qualifications and subject knowledge. Tutors are sympathetic and supportive, however, the development of opportunities for learning in language classes is insufficient. In the better lessons tutors make effective use of the target language and the range of activities is good. The pace of these lessons is challenging and gives learners ample opportunities for progression. In some lessons exposure to the taught language is insufficient and translation is overused. Some instructions are insufficiently clear and learners become confused. In poorer lessons little differentiation takes place for the range of learners' abilities and prior knowledge. Lesson plans are often sketchy and fail to time activities. Some activities are too lengthy and tutors are unaware of imbalance in the type of activities they use. In a few lessons, tutors dominate activities and learners are passive and unable to participate fully in learning.
26. The range of language-specific tests in initial assessment is good in identifying skills' levels in all aspects of language learning. Learners' prior achievements and experience are taken into account satisfactorily in planning for learning. Assessments are roughly standardised across languages, and are useful in measuring learners' progress.
27. The provider has good local partnerships and responds well to prospective learners' needs. Classes are offered in most areas of the town, sometimes with small numbers, to ensure that provision is available for all. Progression opportunities are adequate, and the service works well with other providers to signpost learners to appropriate progression routes.
28. Support for learners is satisfactory overall. Learners receive good initial advice and information. Tutors support learners well and have established strategies to help learners who have missed classes.

Leadership and management

29. Leadership and management of the area are satisfactory overall. Managers have a clear vision and strategy for the way in which the curriculum needs to be developed to meet the needs of the

local community. Accreditation opportunities have grown and changed in response to learners' feedback. The provision of non-accredited courses to support learners who are insufficiently confident is satisfactory. These learners can progress to accreditation when they have developed the necessary language skills and confidence. The borough has responded to local needs appropriately in the provision of BSL, a course in coping with hearing loss and an accredited course in deaf awareness and communication. The area has responded well to the business community by providing tailored courses. For example, four local organisations have received a one day training package in deaf awareness and communication tactics as part of their workforce development, and over 100 learners have taken part in this.

30. Communication between managers and tutors in meetings, by telephone, text and email is satisfactory. Tutors are well supported by their manager. Good practice is identified through observations, and shared well at team meetings to improve provision. Managers use learners' feedback well to plan the curriculum. Retention and attendance are satisfactorily monitored to support learners.
31. Equality and diversity are satisfactory. The materials and content of language lessons are adequately monitored for equality of opportunity and reflect the diversity of society.
32. Observations of teaching and learning conducted before the current academic year were ineffective and judgements were inconsistent. More recent records of observations are more judgemental and have satisfactorily identified some individual training needs. The standard of lesson planning was identified as a priority area for improvement through the lesson observation system, matching inspection findings. However, this was not subsequently incorporated into generic training for linguists.
33. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate and the grade matched that given at inspection. However, it did not identify lesson planning as an area for improvement, and retention and achievement rates were judged to be strengths.

Preparation for life and work

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

34. The service currently offers 12 accredited literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, with a further three non-accredited courses for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. Accredited programmes for literacy and numeracy focus on attainment of levels 1 and 2 of the national tests to facilitate progression in employment and training.

35. At the time of inspection, 110 learners were enrolled on courses, of whom 91 were working towards national accreditation.

36. The area is managed by a full-time curriculum manger supported by four part-time teaching staff.

Strengths

- Good retention rates
- Good achievement rates on numeracy national tests
- Good range of courses to develop employability skills

Areas for improvement

- Declining achievement rates on literacy national tests
- Insufficient range of activities in many lessons to enable learners to practise newly developing skills

Achievement and standards

37. Achievement and standards are good, as detailed in the provider's self-assessment report. Retention rates are good overall. Good actions have been put in place to address previously poor retention on ESOL courses. ESOL learners now attend lessons confidently and regularly. Learners are well-motivated and develop confidence, self-esteem and a sense of direction. Punctuality is very good.
38. Learners make good progress in lessons and work well towards national tests. Many progress to higher level courses. Learners' achievements on numeracy national tests are good and improving, at 79% in 2006-07. However, achievement rates on literacy courses declined from 65% in 2005 to 55% in 2006.

Quality of provision

39. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In better lessons, activities and worksheets are well designed to relate to the literacy, numeracy and language skills learners need at work or on a vocational training course. For example, in one 'Numbers in Nursing' lesson, learners measured the area of a room to calculate the correct amount of disinfectant required to clean a hospital room. Learners are accurately assessed for their existing mathematics skills and work in appropriate groups to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts through very practical and relevant activities. The tutor facilitates activities very effectively and supports learners on an individual basis to clarify understanding and support learning.
40. In some lessons, learners work at one pace as a whole group, engage on one activity for too long and lose concentration and interest. Learners often work for a substantial part of a lesson solely on completing generic worksheets. They have few other opportunities to develop and practise their literacy and language skills independently through a range of differing activities in groups or pairs. Individual learning plans are too complex. Tutors have been slow to adapt them to make them accessible and useful to help learners set clear goals, and to monitor and evaluate their progress towards these goals.
41. The service provides a good range of courses which develop learners' employability skills well. Very good links have been made with sections of Hartlepool Borough Council, voluntary groups, union learning representatives and other organisations such as Connexions, to organise bespoke courses to meet specific skills needs. 'Move on' courses leading to levels 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy national accreditation have been specifically designed to address the needs of

teaching assistants to enhance the quality of their work in schools. A customised numeracy course for nurses has been successfully organised to support the needs of learners training to be nurses at Teesside University.

42. Support for learners is satisfactory. All learners have an appropriate initial assessment to identify their skills' levels, and discuss their aims and aspirations before being placed in a class. Additional support is satisfactory. Tutors give appropriate information and advice at reviews and at the end of the course to maximise learners' progression opportunities. One group of learners recruited to a family learning course progressed to an accredited numeracy course to gain a national certificate after useful discussions with their tutor.

Leadership and management

43. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The skills for life strategy gives a clear direction for the development of provision. The service has developed good strategic and local partnerships to share good practice and co-ordinate planning of provision to best meet the needs of the local community. The provider has a clear focus on enhancing employability skills within the local geographical area. Initiatives such as 'Challenge Hartlepool' have been very effective in raising the profile of skills for life provision. Some employers now offer skills checks to all their new employees. The good local network has published information on learning opportunities through a range of media including regional television and radio advertising.
44. Staff meet regularly for discussion and relevant staff development activities. Most staff have appropriate qualifications and experience and keep up-to-date with new initiatives through professional journals, dedicated websites and discussion at team meetings. The service makes good use of feedback from learners to plan and implement curriculum changes and developments.
45. Staff are fully involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report. The report is broadly accurate. However, it is not sufficiently self-critical in its judgments. It identifies areas for improvement relating to the use of individual learning plans but does not address necessary improvements in teaching and learning.
46. Equality and diversity are satisfactory. They are explained well in induction and learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. However, written materials documenting the equal opportunities policy are insufficiently simplified for many learners to fully understand. The provider has identified this, and is working to improve these materials for learners.

Business, administration and law

Good: Grade 2

Context

47. Currently 124 learners are enrolled on a range of programmes from level 1 to level 5. National vocational qualification (NVQ) courses are offered in administration, customer service, management and team leading. Courses are also offered in office skills, accounting software, and bookkeeping. Non-accredited courses include SAGE payroll and basic bookkeeping. Courses are delivered at eight community venues across Hartlepool. Most are delivered during the afternoon or early evening. The part-time curriculum co-ordinator is supported by a team of three part-time tutors, and five part-time assessors support the delivery of NVQ programmes.

Strengths

- High success rates on NVQ team leading and administration courses
- High success rates on non-accredited programmes
- Good standard of learners' workplace and personal skills
- Effective support to address individual learners' needs
- Broad range of courses with good progression routes

Areas for improvement

- Low retention rates on bookkeeping and office skills courses
- Slow progress and attainment on NVQ level 3 in management
- Poor involvement of workplace supervisors in monitoring learners' progress
- Insufficient use of targets in quality review and action-planning

Achievement and standards

48. Achievement and standards are good overall. Success rates are high on NVQ level 2 team leading, NVQ administration courses from levels 1 to 3, and non-accredited provision. Retention rates are showing a declining trend in level 1 bookkeeping and office skills, and the level 2 diploma in accounting. The standard of students' work in relation to their learning goals is good, and most learners make good progress towards successful achievement of their learning goals.
49. Learners develop good workplace and interpersonal skills. Learners on NVQ courses have good organisational and presentation skills. Learners' portfolios indicate a very good understanding of the necessary background knowledge and assessment criteria. Most learners develop high self-confidence and good social skills, and enjoy good rapport and respect for one another. Some learners on NVQ programmes find it difficult to balance their work commitments with the demands of the course, and patterns of attendance on some courses are irregular. Progress has been slow on NVQ level 3 management, and attainment levels have been poor.

Quality of provision

50. Teaching and learning are good. Support to address individual learners' needs is effective. Tutors have good knowledge of learners' ability levels and preferred learning styles, and support in classrooms is good. Assessors give very effective guidance to learners attending NVQ evidence-gathering workshops. Learners are encouraged to support each other, and peer support is used well on some office skills courses to develop independent learning. Learners on all programmes have good access to tutors outside regular class hours, and many keep in regular contact by email or telephone. Most lessons are well-structured, and tutors use an appropriate range of teaching and learning activities. Some schemes of work are cursory, and some lesson plans overlook the need for teaching, learning and assessment strategies that address mixed ability groups.
51. Courses meet the needs of learners well. Provision is delivered in eight community locations, and all centres provide a welcoming, safe and supportive learning environment. Much of the ICT equipment is modern and at the latest industry standard. The overall standard of classroom accommodation across all the sites is satisfactory. Learners on office skills level 1 have access to an excellent range of learning materials designed to develop both their workplace and social skills. A broad range of courses offer good progression opportunities from level 1 to level 5. The recent expansion of NVQ provision is a successful response to the local authority agenda to raise business skills in its own workforce, and a number of new NVQ courses have been established during the past 12 months. Enrolments onto some programmes are low, and the number of male learners studying on courses remains low.

52. Learners on accredited and non-accredited programmes receive good information, advice and guidance, and their support needs are well catered for. For example, learners have an initial assessment as part of their induction to ensure they are on the right course and to plan their learning programmes, and learners with dyslexia and visual impairment are given adapted learning materials. The planning, monitoring and recording of learning is satisfactory. Feedback is satisfactory, and learners are given a clear idea about what they must do to improve. Assessors on NVQ programmes carry out regular observations of candidates in the workplace. Workplace supervisors are not always involved in the assessment of learners, and are not kept sufficiently informed on the progress of learners.

Leadership and management

53. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers set a clear strategic direction for the team, and staff deliver a high standard of care, education and training. Strategic priorities are reflected in clear operational targets, and staff are responsive to the changing needs of local employers. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. Observation of teaching and learning is conducted as part of the quality assurance process, but few observations of tutorial or assessment activities have so far been conducted. Teams meet on a regular basis to review learners' progress. Regular and effective standardisation meetings take place. Internal verification is satisfactory. Use of targets in quality reviews and action-planning is insufficient. The self-assessment report accurately reflects the strengths and areas for improvement found at inspection and forms the basis for a relevant action plan. The practice and promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall. Learners have a good awareness of their rights and responsibilities.