

Birmingham City Council

Partial reinspection report

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Type of provider: Local Authority
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Introduction

1. In March 2011, Ofsted judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to be satisfactory. However, provision in literacy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) in learning for qualifications programmes was judged to be inadequate. This reinspection focuses on the adult learner responsive funding stream of literacy and ESOL.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Literacy and ESOL	4	3

Context

2. At the time of the reinspection of adult learner responsive funded programmes, 3023 learners were enrolled on literacy and ESOL courses, comprising 1,630 literacy and 1,397 ESOL learners. Courses are part-time and offered in a range of venues across the city. Approximately 60% of the provision is accredited at entry, foundation and intermediate levels. The vast majority of learners are female and/or from a minority ethnic heritage, and around 10% have a disability.

Key findings

- In-year success rates on accredited courses are improving and, in 2011/12, were in line with or above the national average. Only ESOL Speaking & Listening success rates at intermediate and foundation levels have dropped to below the national average, but they are relatively small cohorts representing less than five percent of the provision.
- Retention in non-accredited literacy and ESOL provision in 2011/12, which comprises 40% of the provision, has improved very significantly since the last inspection. Good progress has been made in raising achievement rates from being very poor to satisfactory levels, although these remain slightly lower than the high national average.
- Target setting for learners is good. Targets in all classes are personalised, differentiated and based on initial assessment. This is a significant improvement and a consequence of effective targeted staff development. In most classes, targets are owned well by learners and learners' progress is monitored regularly. However, a few tutors are not providing feedback that is sufficiently developmental.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Session planning is very detailed for all classes and frequently includes differentiated activities and objectives related to citizenship or employability. Learners have good opportunities to engage in a high level of discussion and learner-led activities. They benefit from collaborative learning with their peers, particularly on the assessment of written work.

- Tutors' practice of enabling learners to develop their skills within sessions is not always successful. In some sessions, learners struggle to complete tasks within the timescales allocated. In a few classes, the range of stimulating learning resources used is too limited.
- The use of learning technology is not sufficiently developed. Learners have far too little opportunity to interact with the learning intranet, although it is increasingly used by tutors to share resources and to access web-links in the classrooms. Learners have insufficient access to hands-on technology in class in order to ensure that they develop effective skills for improved employability and social inclusion.
- Observation and class visits are used effectively to drive up standards of teaching and learning. Observers have benefited from extensive training leading to university diploma accreditation. Documentation has been simplified to include a greater emphasis on learning, rather than teaching techniques. However, observers do not always identify sufficiently well enough how to improve teaching and to make innovative use of resources.
- Curriculum management is satisfactory. Immediately after the last inspection, managers took firm and effective action to drive improvement. The management of in-year data is improving rapidly and is resulting in successful measures to tackle poor retention, and to speed up the implementation of planned improvement actions. Systems for monitoring progress towards targets are in place but they are not implemented consistently.
- Staff development is good. It has had a strong impact on targeted areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and through self-assessment. Tutors report that training has been very practical and has given them the confidence to implement changes.
- Self-assessment is good. Tutors and learners have contributed extensively to the self-assessment report and tutors now have a better understanding of their contribution to the whole service report. Most strengths and areas for improvement have been identified accurately and the current report matches the findings of the reinspection.

What does Birmingham City Council need to do to improve further?

- Continue to monitor data and make timely interventions to further improve retention and success in non-accredited provision.
- Increase the proportion of teaching and learning that is good or better by continuing to develop tutors and by increasing the time spent on the controlled practice of skills for learners in class.
- Develop learner use of information technology, including the use of the learning intranet, to improve their learning, employability, social inclusion and access to further education.
- Ensure all learners are provided with well-focused feedback to promote extended and independent learning.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has the provider made to ensure that self-assessment and improvement planning are addressing improvements identified at the last inspection? **Reasonable progress**

The service continues to implement well-established self assessment and improvement planning processes as identified at the last inspection. Good investments in information technology and human resources have led to considerable improvements in data collection and analysis to inform curriculum planning and action planning. Since the inspection, a senior manager has been allocated responsibility for ensuring all recommended improvement actions in literacy and ESOL are addressed, resulting in significant progress in addressing improvements in these areas. Reasonable progress has been made in the majority of other subject areas and in responding to recommendations made at the last inspection. However, the service recognises the disappointing downward trends in retention and success rates in language, literature and culture programmes.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the service made in improving outcomes for learners through its retention rate strategy in learner responsive programmes? **Reasonable progress**

Senior managers have devised a high profile and clear retention strategy which is well published, understood and acted upon by staff. In-year data demonstrates that retention rates for the whole service have improved significantly this year to 85% and are now satisfactory overall. Rates are particularly high in health, social care and public service and information and communication technology programmes. However, retention rates in language, literature and culture programmes have declined over a four year period. In 2010/11, Black and Pakistani learners undertaking ESOL courses did not succeed as well as other learners. Analysis of current retention data indicates that there is no marked difference between the retention rates of different groups of learners.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the provider made in the development and improvement of tutors skills to ensure that all teaching is of good quality?

Reasonable progress

The service has made significant investment in the provision of training and development for all staff. Imaginative policies and procedures are encouraging even staff who work the fewest hours to participate in learning. Improved tutor participation in learning activities is a key target for the service and this is closely monitored by managers. Much work has been undertaken to develop a modularised programme of tutor development and the programme is now extensive. The up-take of these modules has significantly improved this year and is having a very beneficial effect on improving teaching and learning. A revised and accredited mentoring programme is being used to very good effect in order to develop and support tutors.

Leadership and management

How much progress has the provider made in improving the accuracy and effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching and learning?

Reasonable progress

The accuracy and monitoring of teaching and learning have much improved since the last inspection. A rigorous schedule of observations has been undertaken in the weakest subject area identified at the last inspection. All tutors have been observed, any unsatisfactory teaching quickly identified and actions are swiftly put in place to address weaknesses. Observers are much more rigorous in making their judgments. They have participated in well focused professional development in order to improve and develop their observation practice and are now able to gain accreditation for their observation activities through arrangements with a local university. Managers are monitoring carefully the outcomes of observations and have taken swift and effective action to reduce any identified unsatisfactory teaching. Actions for improvement are identified on tutor development plans and most are monitored well. Tutors' training and professional development needs are well targeted.

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