

The Learning Curve

Not for profit organisation

Inspection dates		16–18 October 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Learners' achievement rates are high, as they were at the last inspection, and overall they remain significantly higher than comparable national averages. Achievement rates for the year to date are currently as high as in previous years.
- Learners' development of social, personal and employability skills is good. Many learners progress to further learning or employment.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and have improved since the last inspection. Well-qualified and experienced tutors use their knowledge and skills very well to engage and connect with learners.
- Tutors and other staff provide excellent support for learners. The Learning Curve staff provide learners with good quality information, advice and guidance.
- Leadership and management are good, and have improved since the last inspection. Strategically and operationally, The Learning Curve is highly and successfully focused on meeting the learning needs of particular targeted groups, notably those from hard-to-reach sectors of society or those who have previously been disaffected with, or disengaged from, education.
- The Learning Curve's own quality improvement arrangements are, for the most part, very good. However, whilst its systems for the coordination and monitoring of partners' performance are sound, the range of data on their learners' performance is not sufficiently up to date.
- Good promotion of equality and diversity is central to all elements of the The Learning Curve's working practices and learning programmes.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The Learning Curve needs to exercise more depth and rigour when evaluating the impact on learners of its own and partners' teaching, learning and assessment sessions. Insufficient

timely data are available on the achievement rates of learners on its partners' programmes and The Learning Curve has difficulty in quickly identifying any emerging poor achievement.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- The Learning Curve's management information system needs to provide more timely information on the performance of learners on its partner organisations' programmes so that any emerging poor performance can be identified and remedied quickly.
- The observation of teaching and learning should include a deeper focus on the quality and impact of the teaching and learning being observed in order that they can be improved further, and the range of shared good practice can be enriched.
- The Learning Curve managers should disseminate widely to all tutors existing good practice in how individual learning plans and feedback are already being used well by some tutors to set learners clear and challenging targets, identify their progress more effectively and provide clear direction on what each learner needs to do to improve.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Learners' outcomes on community development programmes remain good, notably for the very many learners whose previous experiences of formal education or training have not been positive and for those with multiple barriers to learning. Learners develop the range of their social, personal and employability skills particularly well.
- Learners' achievement rates for the last complete year are high and generally at rates significantly above comparable national averages. Achievement rates for the current year to date are at least as good. On many courses, every learner achieves his or her qualification. However, the achievement rates on a very few courses are lower than national averages.
- Learners enjoy their learning and make good progress. Young people who were previously or are still not in education, employment or training (NEET) develop useful practical skills and employability skills such as team working, curriculum vitae building, improved confidence and self-esteem. Young mothers and mothers-to-be develop a good understanding of the benefits of play and healthy eating, both for themselves and their babies. Attendance and retention on the vast majority of courses are good.
- The Learning Curve managers routinely analyse data on the achievement rates of different learner groups and during the past year noted that female learners were performing less well than male learners. After managers took effective remedial action this is no longer the case. There are no other significant differences in learners' achievements.
- Learners develop their self-confidence well. The learners' contributions observed during learning sessions were generally articulate and enthusiastic. Learners are proud that they are now able to speak with authority and confidence in front of a group. Learners from different cultural backgrounds develop good English speaking skills.
- Tutors and support staff provide appropriate information and advice for individual learners on their options for further learning and pathways which might lead to employment. A good proportion of the learners on preparation for life and work and health and social care courses take further qualifications or gain employment.

- Learners with particularly severe learning difficulties or from very disadvantaged backgrounds make very good progress in adapting to the demands of everyday living. Some of these learners also gain employability qualifications.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment on community development programmes are good and have improved since the last inspection. High quality teaching and learning in classrooms and the many other types of learning sessions offered are effectively promoting learners' development and application of new skills and knowledge. Tutors work extremely effectively in sessions with learners of very mixed ability and support each learner to reach their full potential.
- Well-qualified and experienced tutors use their wide knowledge, experience and skills very well to inform and stimulate learning. A good range of activities is used to engage learners and promote learning including whole group discussions, small group work, quizzes and individual tasks. Group discussions frequently include well-informed debate by learners of challenging topics including aspects of ethics, morality and human behaviour. Digital resources, such as interactive learning technologies, are not available in many community venues, which limits the range of teaching strategies which tutors can use.
- Teaching is conducted at a pace and in ways which take account of the needs and abilities of individual learners. Sessions observed by inspectors for young mothers and for young people who were NEET were delivered with subtlety and informality, and encouraged their participation because learners did not feel intimidated. In an information and communication technology (ICT) class with older learners, individualised coaching was sensitive and gently supportive, and these learners were very comfortable about asking for help. Young mothers are encouraged to bring their babies to sessions and crèche facilities are often provided.
- Assessment is fair and well planned. Tutors' written and verbal feedback on individual learners' work is, for the most part, constructive, encouraging and helps build confidence, but in a very few cases observed the content of feedback was not sufficiently detailed to identify what a learner needed to do to progress further.
- Individual learning plans (ILPs) are used particularly well on programmes for NEET learners. On these programmes tutors use ILPs very effectively to set clear, specific and motivational targets and record each learner's progress towards achieving them. However, on other courses, tutors do not use ILPs so well. Target setting is neither clear, specific nor measurable and learners' progress is often presented, at best, as a checklist of tasks completed rather than a record of what skills have been learnt.
- Tutors use initial assessment well to identify and arrange support for additional learning needs and the extent of learners' prior knowledge of the subject so that learning can be planned individually. Tutors provide appropriate and discrete support in English and mathematics for learners who need it, directly supporting the achievement of individuals' learning goals.
- Equality and diversity are promoted effectively during learning sessions and used well to provide themes or a context for learning. Learners have a good understanding of these twin aspects.
- Support for learners is excellent and tutors motivate learners very well, the majority of whom progress through a range of courses progressively gaining relevant skills and knowledge. The Learning Curve's engagement workers give learners appropriate information, advice and guidance at the beginning of, and throughout, their course.

The effectiveness of leadership and management**Good**

- The Learning Curve has developed a tightly focused, and very effective, strategic and operational approach to the achievement of challenging goals and objectives, notably providing learning and skills development opportunities for very specific target groups, many of whom are hard to reach or previously disaffected with learning. Trustees are kept well informed about the provision and provide good governance and support to managers.
- As lead partner, The Learning Curve works closely in partnership with a diverse range of other providers; the number of partners has grown significantly in the past year as new funding streams and programme options have been secured. In the same period it has skilfully reorganised its own management, staffing and resources; it has managed change sensitively at a provider whose provision has now come under The Learning Curve's direct control.
- The Learning Curve staff are enthusiastic, strongly committed to ensuring a high quality of work and to meeting the needs of its carefully targeted groups of learners. Its management and teaching staff are well qualified, and have good opportunities for professional development. The Learning Curve's various teams are well managed; they work cooperatively and productively together.
- The Learning Curve has implemented good quality improvement arrangements and these have been instrumental in maintaining the high quality of the provision. The system for observing the quality of teaching and learning is thorough and well structured. The outcomes of observation are used well to identify some good and less good classroom practice. However, observers do not always evaluate the quality and impact of teaching and learning in sufficient depth.
- The Learning Curve managers recognise that, since the number of partners has grown substantially, its practical arrangements for overall quality monitoring require review and development. For example, whilst it has very sound systems for the coordination and quality monitoring of its own programmes, the data available to managers on learners' achievements on its partners' programmes are not sufficiently up to date to enable the quick identification of poor performance.
- The Learning Curve's self-assessment arrangements are sufficiently evaluative and accurate. Its associated quality improvement action planning is formalised, detailed and the foundation of a continuous quality improvement process. The Learning Curve has good arrangements for the collection, analysis of, and response to learners' views which are then used to improve the provision.
- The Learning Curve's programmes are very well designed and planned to meet the needs of clearly identified target groups including young single mothers, young people who were NEET and ex-offenders. Managers make extensive and very productive use of local market information and a wider range of social and economic data to develop and target its provision at such groups. Programmes are designed and run with learners' needs very much in mind.
- Good promotion of equality and diversity is central to The Learning Curve's operating vision, values and to the ways it operates its programmes. The organisation is very focused on, and successful at, engaging in learning with people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who were previously disaffected with learning or have multiple barriers to learning. The promotion of equality and diversity within teaching sessions is good and tutors use cultural differences within groups to good effect to develop all learners' understanding. Procedures for dealing with bullying, harassment and health and safety issues are very sound.
- The Learning Curve meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding. A designated safeguarding officer and appropriately trained staff are in place and all necessary Criminal Records Bureau checks have been completed. The Learning Curve provides good safeguarding information and contacts for all learners and works well with partners to ensure that all learners are safe, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)


The Learning Curve

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Community Development	2

The Learning Curve	
Type of provider	Not for profit organisation
Age range of learners	16-18 and 19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time:17
	Part-time: 2631
Principal/CEO	Tim Ward
Date of previous inspection	November 2009
Website address	www.learningcurve.org.uk

[illegible]

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- Hartcliffe and Withywood Ventures
 - Hedley Hall
 - Hele Hub
 - Inspire Cornwall
 - Learning4Life
 - Learning Links
 - Lymenet
 - Oyisco
 - Q Training
 - Questions & Answers
 - Savannah Foundation
 - Shaw Trust
 - Silai for Skills
 - Southern Brooks
 - Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)
 - St Loye's Foundation
 - The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)
 - The Hub, Yeovil
 - Volunteer Network
 - Wiltshire Blind
 - Wiltshire Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)

Additional socio-economic information

The Learning Curve leads a large consortium of voluntary sector providers. The Learning Curve's own learning programmes are offered in Wiltshire, Swindon, Bristol and Plymouth. Its partners offer programmes throughout the South East and South West regions of England, from Sussex across to Cornwall.

The Learning Curve's main focus is the provision of learning programmes and opportunities for disadvantaged and excluded groups, primarily of programmes from entry to foundation levels. Many of The Learning Curve's learners are previously disaffected with education and training, some are ex-offenders and others have significant barriers to systematic learning and development. Programme delivery is mainly from outreach centres including libraries, children's centres and probation offices.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Nicholas Crombie HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the chief executive of The Learning Curve as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and quality improvement action plans, and the previous inspection reports. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and others; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions in a range of settings. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors focused primarily on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in community development programmes and graded this sector subject area as shown in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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