

Mardell Associates Ltd. trading as Smart Training

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		29 October–2 November 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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:

- The overall success rates are consistently high across most programmes and effective actions taken to reduce the achievement gaps of different groups of learners.
- Learners develop good employability, personal and social skills. They demonstrate good practitioner skills in their sector areas.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good across all programmes and the well-developed study days enable learners to share good practices with their peers and further improve their knowledge and skills.
- Smart Training is led and managed well. Links with employers and community groups are strong, and self-assessment and quality improvement planning are thorough.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Too few learners complete their programme within the agreed time.
- Not enough teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding.
- Not all staff, particularly those who are new, are sufficiently qualified and experienced to ensure all learners are supported adequately to achieve on time.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further improve processes for recruitment to make sure all learners are placed on appropriate programmes and complete within the agreed time.
- Improve staff understanding and knowledge of functional skills.
- Improve the rigour of teaching observations to monitor and identify what learning is taking place, and to share best practices with all teaching staff across the provision.
- Implement a programme of staff development to improve further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for learners at Smart Training are good. Overall success rates, particularly for apprenticeships, have been high and well above national averages for three years for those aged 19 to 24 and 25 years or more. However, success rates for 16- to 18-year-olds have declined following the introduction of the Access to Apprenticeship programmes, and require improvement.
- Too many learners fail to complete their programmes within the planned timescales and, although improving, these success rates remain below the national averages. In the current year, however, they are starting to show signs of improvement following effective action taken to amend the recruitment procedures to reduce the number of learners who leave early. Functional skills success rates are low.
- Apprentices of Bangladeshi heritage achieve particularly well, and those with disabilities or additional learning needs achieve as well or better than their peers. Smart Training has taken good action to reduce identified gaps in achievements for male apprentices and for those of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage. Early signs are that these gaps are closing.
- Apprentices at Smart Training make significant progress in the development of their employability knowledge and skills, in topics such as health and safety and change management. They develop their social skills and professional knowledge well through a programme of study days, where they are encouraged to discuss topics with their peers, gaining insights into different ways of working in other settings. However, the development of English and mathematics skills varies across the provision.
- Apprentices in childcare progress well from intermediate to advanced level, and many describe how they now have the confidence to apply for positions of greater responsibility. They make good progress in developing professional skills in the workplace.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are mostly good and the majority of learners make good progress and work to high standards. Although a small proportion of lessons were outstanding, some were only adequate and failed to ensure all learners were appropriately challenged, and their individual learning needs fully met. Those staff who are fully qualified teachers were generally the most confident in using a wide range of teaching strategies to engage their learners.

- In the better lessons, all learners were fully involved and encouraged to participate in discussions or tasks, and learning was thoroughly assessed at each stage. These lessons were exciting and stimulating, well planned and appropriately paced to meet the needs of all the learners. Where information and communication technology was used well, learners participated fully, and the use of high quality learning materials and workbooks stimulated learning. Some learners have started to make reasonable use of the on-line training academy, a virtual learning environment which is under development, although others find it difficult to gain access and to use.
- A programme of well-planned study days is provided for apprentices and other learners. Most study days are offered around the country on Saturdays, and attendance is high. Learners appreciate these days and make the most of their time to discuss topics with their peers and to learn new skills and extend their knowledge. Most tutors are highly qualified, enthusiastic and experienced in their sector area, and provide good role models, particularly for younger learners. The quality of teaching and learning on study days is mostly good, although the planning and promotion of equality and diversity in lessons are variable.
- The teaching of English and mathematics is mostly good, although learning support provided by training account managers is inconsistent. Additional support for functional skills provided by some training account managers requires improvement so that all learners are able to achieve their best. A significant proportion of support staff has joined Smart Training within the last 12 months. Many do not have sufficient knowledge of the sector areas to be able to support learners well, or have not yet achieved level 2 or above in literacy and numeracy,
- Initial assessment is thorough and this, along with regular progress reviews, helps learners to identify clearly their development needs. However, target setting at reviews is sometimes poor, particularly where Training AccountsManagers lack familiarity with the vocational area. In childcare, nursery managers are not always involved sufficiently well in learners' reviews.
- Learners receive good initial advice and guidance. This has been significantly improved to ensure learners are placed on the correct course and has successfully contributed to reducing the number of early leavers. Pastoral support is strong from highly committed training account managers and skilled tutors. Learners enjoy their learning, speak highly of the support and teaching they receive, and indicate how these have improved their confidence and competence in their jobs.

Early years and playwork

Apprenticeships

Learning programmes for 16-18

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and contribute to good outcomes for learners. The majority of learners quickly develop good skills, knowledge and abilities, which they use to provide effective childcare services in their workplace. Their learning is good because assessment and the vast majority of teaching are thorough and well planned. Assessment is fair and good attention is given to ensuring it is timely, reliable and informative for each learner. Current learners are progressing well.
- Planning and teaching are good in most instances as tutors use their skills and expertise effectively to ensure they adopt teaching methods that match each individual learner's needs, interests and learning styles. Well-planned and delivered study days promote good development of childcare skills through tutors' adept blending of theory with examples of practice in childcare settings. Learners receive good encouragement which increases their confidence by speaking out in class and using their initiative in discussions.

- Close attention is given to ensuring learners have a good understanding of how to safeguard children, promote early learning, and observe national guidance and codes of practice such as the Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles. Technology is used effectively to ensure taught sessions are delivered well through the exchange of information and webcasts. Access to on-line resources, however, is inconsistent. Support to ensure learners develop their English and mathematics skills is not always effective.
- Arrangements for initial assessment and induction are good because they are thorough and well structured. Individual needs and interests are accurately identified, which enables staff and employers to recognise learners' starting positions and plan personalised learning programmes; for example, learners with additional needs achieve very well because they receive early and more frequent support to meet their needs.
- The vast majority of employers support learning very well because tutors engage with them in planning for learning opportunities. They value the training highly because they can see the progress made by the learners and the advantages this brings to the workplace. However, employers are not always sufficiently involved in reviewing learning.
- In lessons, and in the workplace, learners generally have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. Learning goals are generally clear and good support to reach them is readily available from staff. However, in a few instances spelling and grammar in written assignments are not accurately checked and targets set in progress reviews are not always sufficiently clear. Feedback on progress and success is well crafted and motivates learners. Written feedback is recorded clearly.
- Teachers and assessors provide timely advice and information to help support learners in making their next step in education and training. The majority of learners progress to higher qualifications.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff give a high priority to promoting fairness and developing a thorough understanding of the importance of recognising and respecting differences. However, equality and diversity are not always promoted well enough in a minority of progress reviews and lessons.

Business management

Apprenticeships

Good

- Well-planned study days complement apprentices' on-the-job training in nursery settings and offices. Regular skills tests are used effectively to check learning. Apprentices thoroughly enjoy the study days and indicate these have helped to improve their interpersonal skills, communication and confidence. Apprentices make good progress in developing good business management skills which has a positive impact on their work. Success rates within the planned time are improving. The likelihood of apprentices leaving their programmes early is being reduced through more rigorous initial advice and guidance.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Learning in the workplace motivates the apprentices, who often take on additional responsibilities or gain promotion as they improve. Apprentices are able effectively to place management and leadership theories into context to effect change. A comprehensive induction includes initial assessments; targets are set for improvements in literacy, numeracy and information technology.
- Apprentices have an accurate understanding of their achievements and progress. Performance is clearly tracked and monitored online. Regular reviews focus on unit assessment feedback, work based projects and practice for functional skills tests, although not all targets are set against

achievable timescales. Peer mentoring supports newer apprentices through effective sharing of study skills.

- Health and safety and changes in management legislation are related well to current work practices. Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of business codes of conduct, ethical behaviour and compliance. Apprentices are able to talk confidently about legislation changes and the impact of this on their job. Equality and diversity are integrated into the programme well, although they are not always sufficiently promoted in lesson planning and through study days.
- Tutors are well qualified and knowledgeable about business management. They successfully plan lessons to provide sufficient challenge through management concepts to develop learners' confidence in their knowledge and skills. Smart Training provides good support through email, handouts and books, although not all learners make full use of the on-line training academy. In the better lessons apprentices demonstrate a sense of pride and professionalism in their understanding of internal and external customers. In lessons requiring improvement, tutors do not clearly plan to meet the needs and interests of all learners through differentiated teaching and learning strategies.
- Assessment planning is generally good and a range of assessment methods is used. Work based assessments are well planned with assessors using standardised documentation. Assessed work, however, sometimes lacks clear developmental feedback and does not always indicate what has been achieved and what action is required to improve.
- Advice and guidance have recently improved and are good. Care is now taken to ensure apprentices are enrolled onto the correct programme which contributes to fewer apprentices leaving their course early. Initial assessment clearly identifies support needs through on-line tests. However, support for English and mathematics for some apprentices is inconsistent.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Smart Training provides good leadership and management and has a strong capacity to improve the provision. Management of performance across all programmes is robust and staff are set stringent targets for learners' achievements. These are monitored regularly through a wide range of performance management meetings.
- At a time of significant contractual and funding changes, and economic decline, overall success rates have remained high over the past three years, and improvements have been made to the provision to ensure more learners achieve on time. Teaching, learning and assessment, along with learners' and employers' experiences, are good. Learners improve their confidence, employability and vocational skills, and some apprentices gain promotion or additional job responsibilities.
- Links with employers are particularly good and have been further strengthened through improved liaison with training account managers. Managers skilfully plan how the learning programmes can be tailored to meet employers' and learners' needs. They carefully identify what apprentices and other learners can achieve, taking care to accommodate specific requirements of employers and offering additional classes or bespoke provision where needed.
- Smart Training has an excellent process for mentoring new staff. Experienced mentors are chosen, and one-to-one interaction and monitoring of standards are good. The quality of staff is good and they are carefully selected for their role. Although actions are in place to ensure all new staff are mentored appropriately, several tutors are yet to become fully qualified or experienced as teachers. Some newly appointed training account managers do not have level 2 qualifications or above in literacy and numeracy, and lack experience of the vocational areas where they provide support for learners.
- Observations of teaching and assessments are undertaken regularly. However, there is insufficient understanding of what constitutes effective learning in teaching observations. Grades

are often confusing and there is inadequate moderation of findings. The observations do not give a clear indication of what makes a lesson good or outstanding, so that managers can confidently identify and share best practices.

- The quality of learning resources is good. Smart Training has invested in the further development of the on-line training academy by appointing a new member of staff who is designing additional tools to guide learners.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement planning are thorough and provide managers with a clear plan for development. The self-assessment report successfully draws on the views of learners, employers and staff, and uses data effectively to provide an honest and evaluative account of the provision. The company accurately identified that actions were needed to remedy a drop in success rates within the planned time and to narrow the achievement gaps of different groups of learners; these have started to improve.
- Smart Training actively promotes equality and diversity through its programmes and responds well to community needs. Apprentices from Bangladeshi, Tamil and orthodox Jewish communities attend their own study days, and Smart Training makes appropriate adjustments for apprentices with disabilities.
- Equalities data are closely analysed, gaps in performance are investigated and actions taken where required. Training staff are kept up to date with legislation about discrimination, and the progress of vulnerable learners is monitored at management meetings. However, aspects of equality and diversity are not always well promoted in lesson planning and study days, and the newly formed equalities forum does not have learner representatives.
- Smart Training meets the statutory requirements for safeguarding learners and has a named safeguarding officer in each of its five regions. Training account managers are specifically trained to risk assess childcare premises, and health and safety are high on the agenda in the training programmes. First-aid training for learners is particularly rigorous.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

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Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	3	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Early years and playwork	2
Business management	2

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Part-time	0	0	0	146	0	214	0	59
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	152	207	235	988	0	0		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Additional socio-economic information

At the time of inspection 2,572 funded learners were enrolled on programmes. Of these, around 33% have additional learning needs and approximately 45% are from disadvantaged areas. The overall proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is around 30%. Groups of learners reflect the different local populations. Staff backgrounds reflect those of the learners.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Neil Edwards HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Managing Director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. 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 on-line questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed 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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