

Milton Keynes Council Adult Continuing Education (ACE)

Local authority

Inspection dates		13-16 November 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 make good progress on their courses, significantly improving their opportunities for further study and employment. They gain confidence from their studies, improve their English and mathematical skills and are better able to contribute to their local communities.
- Learners' success in examinations and assessments has significantly improved since the previous inspection and is good overall. Their success rates on many courses are above national averages.
- The overall standard of learners' work is good, including practical activities. Learners enjoy their courses, contribute positively to the working environment of ACE and attend well.
- Good management ensures that teaching, learning and assessment are good. Many learners benefit from well planned, purposeful and challenging teaching, engaging them and encouraging them to continue their studies.
- Helpful learning plans, often jointly agreed by learners and their tutors, set personal goals for improvement and progress. Learners' work and progress are carefully assessed.
- Productive partnerships with a wide range of local organisations ensure that ACE offers a wide and relevant range of courses to meet the needs of learners. Employability-related courses improve the prospects of learners and match local employers' needs.
- Quality improvement is good and good quality assurance underpins the good provision and provides direction for further improvement.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Learners' success rates are not yet sufficiently high overall and in a small minority of subject areas they are poor.

- Teaching and learning are not yet consistently good across all subjects and there is too little that is outstanding.
- ACE does not systematically use the many positive aspects of its provision to help improve poorer performing aspects of its work, through the sharing of good practice.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates in the small minority of subject areas where they are poorer.
- Consistently apply the ACE scheme for the observation of teaching and learning. Ensure that the work of the external review group is extended to all subjects and is fully used to embed a critical evaluative approach to further improve teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that the much good practice within ACE is shared fully and more systematically to consistently raise the quality of provision in all subject areas.
- Improve the analysis and use of learner data by managers and tutors to better understand provision, better evaluate effectiveness of actions taken and help plan further improvement.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for learners have significantly improved since the previous inspection, both on courses for qualifications and on non-accredited, social and personal development courses. ACE's own data indicate that this significant trend of improvement strengthened and continued in 2011/12.
- Success rates for the many learners on the non-accredited courses are high overall. ACE's largely thorough and reliable systems for recording and recognising achievement show that overall success was 89% in 2010/11, improving to 93% in 2011/12. Most subjects and courses display high success rates; for example, 95% for preparation for life and work and 90% for languages, both large areas of provision. Both achievement and retention rates are high. A minority of smaller areas of provision, such as history, philosophy and theology and leisure, travel and tourism, have poorer success rates. In retail and commercial enterprise, the success rate, although relatively high, has stayed much the same over three years.
- The overall ACE success rate for learners on courses for qualifications has improved year on year over the last three years and was good, at 81%, in 2011/12. Most learners are aged 19 and over and their overall success rate improved significantly in 2011/12, to 84%, which is good. Long course success rates for 2011/12 are highest at intermediate level, but only slightly poorer at other levels. In the visual and performing arts, success rates are too often low.
- Facilitated by good diagnosis of learners' needs, learners have good opportunities to develop their English and mathematical skills. ACE integrates this work well within learners' subject lessons. Learners with previous low levels of literacy and numeracy skills have high success rates on national qualifications. The high-grade success rates for the relatively small number of learners studying GCSE English and mathematics require further improvement.
- ACE analyses success data to determine any significant achievement gaps and there are none.
- Learners make good progress on their courses and often achieve good standards in their work, including their practical work. For example, in performance, learners often achieve high standards; although, in art, progress is less marked. Overall attendance is good, and improving.

- Learners are well motivated, enjoy their studies and often attain their personal learning goals. Courses often provide them with a qualification for the first time in their lives. Learners develop their skills well and often apply them with their families and in the community, including at work. Learners on employability programmes are particularly successful in gaining employment.
- Learners value the benefits of studying alongside others and are proud of their achievements. Many develop the confidence and enthusiasm to study further. They progress well to further courses, especially with ACE. ACE does not systematically track leavers' destinations or further progress, but it is taking steps to improve its arrangements.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved significantly since the previous inspection, as have arrangements to monitor their quality. Many sessions are well planned and are purposeful, productive and challenging. Their positive impact is reflected in good outcomes for learners in most areas of study, including languages, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), dance and life drawing. Learners are highly motivated in sessions, enjoy discussions with their fellow learners and often develop their capacity to study independently from their tutors.
- Teaching and learning in too many art sessions insufficiently challenge learners to extend their skills or to produce larger or more complex work. This is reflected in the success rates on some art courses which are below the national average.
- Tutors are well qualified and use their subject knowledge well to motivate and engage the wide variety of learners. The most successful sessions are carefully planned, using the initial assessment of learners' skills and their personal learning goals. Prompt, engaging starts are used by tutors with a series of varied activities to encourage learners and raise their ambition. In language sessions, learners are challenged to improve their skills and make rapid and impressive progress. In ESOL, learners respond with enthusiasm, enjoyment and growing confidence in pronunciation. Teachers skilfully use questions to extend learning and check understanding by their group.
- Where teaching and learning require improvement, sessions are often not planned to meet the specific needs of individuals nor to prompt learners to exceed their own expectations. In such sessions progress is slow, with learners repeating tasks at the same level. At times, tutors dominate, with overlong introductions before active participation by the learners. Extension activities are insufficiently prepared and learners wait for others to finish. This lack of challenge is identified in ACE's self-assessment report.
- Learners' needs, and those of the wider communities, are well met through a good and relevant range of courses. Of particular note is the neighbourhood employability programme (NEP) which provides job clubs in selected wards of the borough. It has been highly successful in improving employability skills and reducing social deprivation. Learners improve their self-esteem and interpersonal skills and gain employment.
- Assessment of learning is good. In most sessions, learning plans are used well to track progress, with meaningful comments from tutors. In life drawing studies, they are completed as homework in order to maximise lesson time. In the NEP, learners value the opportunity to set regular goals for job applications and are proud to measure their own progress. In languages, the 'language ladder' is used particularly effectively to assess skills levels and to measure progress. In a minority of sessions learning plans are not used well to monitor progress.
- English and mathematical skills are developed satisfactorily and appropriately for community learning. For example, in upholstery and sewing courses, fabric requirements and costs are calculated. Measurements are required for interior design projects. In Indian cookery sessions learners weigh and cost ingredients. However, such opportunities are not always extended to more advanced learners.
- Resources to support teaching and learning are good overall. Sessions take place in a wide variety of community centres and other venues across the borough. The Academy centre has

outstanding facilities which are used particularly well in mathematics and fashion courses. Most classrooms have interactive whiteboards. Technology is used successfully in language courses, mathematics and ESOL to extend discussion and widen cultural horizons, but is not used well in many art sessions. Some tutors' notes for learners of information and communication technology (ICT) are uninspiring, out of date and of poor quality.

- Learners are supported well. ACE has a welcoming approach and provides inclusive learning environments in its many centres, as confirmed by learners. Tutors foster good working relationships and learners value the extra support and guidance given outside sessions. Additional learning support is provided when identified as a need and has improved retention and success rates.
- Equality and diversity are satisfactorily promoted in teaching and learning. In ESOL, many aspects of equality and diversity are embedded to ensure the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners are celebrated and shared. Aspects of cultural heritage are well integrated in language lessons. However, the promotion of cultural diversity has yet to be monitored in the curriculum and is not yet embedded in all sessions.

Visual and performing arts

Community learning

Requires improvement

- Success rates on courses for social and personal development, not leading to external examinations, are often high. For the smaller number of accredited courses they are below the national average overall, with some that are very low. Learners' attainment of practical skills and the standard of their practical work are satisfactory overall, with work that ranges from sound to excellent.
- Learners enjoy their studies and attend well. Their social and personal development, across the very wide range of courses offered, is good. Learners are more confident and articulate since they joined their courses. English and numeracy skills are appropriately promoted; the latter well in sewing and upholstery sessions, for example by calculating the amount of fabric accurately to cover a chair or for making a dress.
- Teaching and learning are not consistently good or better. In a significant number of sessions, learners make good progress and are soon able to carry out complex tasks. For example, on sewing courses, they often progress quickly from low starting points to be able to use complex cutting and sewing techniques. In life drawing sessions, excellent use is made of models to strike quick poses to challenge learners' ability to draw.
- Unfortunately, this good practice is inadequately shared. In too many sessions, learning goals set by tutors are insufficiently challenging. Sessions move forward too slowly and many learners are not stimulated or inspired to further develop their skills, learn independently or progress to higher levels. For example, learners studying art have often attended for many years without making sufficient progress and are allowed to develop an over reliance on copying from pictures.
- Learners participate well in the valuable range of public and performance activities supporting their courses. They and their tutors organise visits to important exhibitions. Learners exhibit and sell work at local galleries. One learner won a 'best in show' prize at an exhibition of local artists. Many commissions for work are received by learners of stained glass techniques, improving their confidence and skills. Learners of jazz and tap dance perform at a local theatre.
- The assessment of learners' work is satisfactory. In the better sessions, tutors and learners understand the value of learning plans and they chart and plan progress together. In contrast, ongoing assessment is insufficiently thorough in less good sessions, making it difficult to accurately assess learners' progress and their attainment at the end of their courses.

- The use of ICT to enhance learning is insufficiently developed. For example, although many learners continue to develop their skills at home by using ICT, opportunities at ACE for learners to carry out research using computers are underdeveloped. Tutors' session notes for learners are sometimes not well presented. Learners would prefer to receive these via email.
- Learners receive good support from their tutors. Tutors are well qualified and many are successful practitioners. Learners appreciate the good specialist advice and guidance they often receive from them, based on tutors' up-to-date knowledge.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in sessions is satisfactory, with some good examples of projects and work schemes which draw on key strands of diversity. However, such work is insufficiently embedded throughout the curriculum.

Classical and modern foreign languages

Community learning

Good

- Good teaching, learning and assessment are reflected in the high success rates of learners. Success rates have improved to good levels on all internally accredited courses and on most externally accredited courses. Learners enjoy their studies, are highly motivated and attend well and punctually. They develop good study skills and enjoy speaking the language they are learning.
- Learners make good and rapid progress in their sessions. They develop good practical language skills which many use successfully to help gain employment. Learners in all beginners' sessions, a few weeks from the start of their courses, are already able to talk confidently about themselves and others in their study language. Particularly positively, more advanced learners of Japanese enjoy listening to Japanese spoken at normal speed.
- Tutors are well qualified, expert in their subjects and keep up to date. Working to a common framework, they enjoy sharing and developing new resources which benefit their learners. For example, Russian literature and film have been adapted to be accessible to advanced learners, and, in German sessions, learners play a television panel game to help practise their questioning skills.
- English is rarely spoken in sessions and learners have excellent opportunities to hear and use the language they are learning. They develop good grammatical understanding as they learn to communicate, and many also acquire good reading and writing skills, particularly through homework. In many sessions tutors provide a high level of challenge and technologies are well used to bring the outside world into sessions, and to foster independent learning at home.
- Assessment of learning is good. Well founded and successful national schemes for language learning provide a good framework to help learners and tutors plan learning, set targets for work and measure progress. Tutors make good use of interactive games to check learners' understanding and learners have good opportunities to ask questions. Work for learners is set and marked well and learners receive prompt, constructive and helpful comments.
- Learners are well supported. Effective systems ensure that they join the right courses and that their general language goals are identified. Tutors know their learners very well and cater fully for individual requirements, for example by providing extension work or learning materials matching personal interests. Some of the paperwork to plan and map progress is criticised by learners as being too complicated and too time consuming.
- While ICT is used well by tutors in many sessions, there is no ACE virtual learning environment to support learners' independent learning, and the availability of technologies requires improvement in a small number of locations.

- Learners have an excellent choice of nine languages to learn, with good progression opportunities. The 'small steps' approach, with nine levels, from beginners to advanced level, allows large numbers to achieve.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in studies is good. Learners from a wide range of age and backgrounds enjoy working together and support one another well. Contemporary culture is introduced into many sessions, for example by watching foreign news channels. However, not all tutors systematically include the cultures of the societies in which the languages are spoken.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior managers provide good leadership and management and are ambitious to improve the provision further. ACE's operational plans and wide range of courses are clearly linked to the over-arching strategic plans and objectives of the local authority. A very strong emphasis is placed on economic regeneration and improving social cohesion, especially where there are pockets of long-standing unemployment.
- ACE works well with a wide range of partners to plan expansions to the provision, including local charities, employers, community faith groups and Jobcentre staff. Employability-related courses are now offered and ACE communicates well how these meet local employers' needs and improve the employment of learners. Good links with external and local authority agencies help to provide effective support for learners with additional learning and social needs.
- Since the previous inspection, managers have successfully introduced a range of actions to improve the quality of provision, as well as outcomes for learners. These include the introduction of a new management information system and new arrangements to collect the views of learners. ACE has invested significantly in resources to support learning, and across the large number of learning sites they are good.
- Learners' performance on many courses has improved throughout a significant period of organisational change. Staff clearly understand the target to further improve learners' outcomes and share the high aspirations of managers. Internal communications are good, with extensive use of email and intranet content to keep the widely dispersed group of tutors informed of targets and changes to the service.
- The monitoring of the quality of provision is thorough, self-assessment is good and ACE has a good track record of sustained improvement. Operational managers use data increasingly effectively to evaluate the provision, although action plans for improvement are often insufficiently reviewed and do not clearly show the extent of impact. ACE does not yet make the most effective use of its much good practice to help poorer performing areas improve.
- The ACE scheme for the observation of teaching and learning is much improved since the previous inspection and provides a largely reliable basis for further improvement. Membership of a peer review group, of several community learning providers, enables robust external benchmarking for session observations and good moderation of grades. A small number of subject areas are not yet fully involved with this and they do not benefit from this more focused and critical approach to session observation.
- ACE effectively collects and uses the views of users to help shape improvements. Learners complete surveys and contribute to focus groups. Their views are used well to evaluate the provision and support judgements in the self-assessment report. Learners also make useful recommendations through comment boxes at local venues.
- ACE promotes equality and diversity well, especially to those from disadvantaged communities, including the long-term unemployed and migrant communities. ACE positively promotes education and training to people of all abilities and needs and is particularly successful in encouraging young people and residents in areas of socio-economic deprivation to return to learning. ACE makes good adjustments for learners with disabilities to support them to reach their potential. Staff complete appropriate training on relevant topics and increasingly promote

equality and diversity effectively in most sessions. ACE monitors the progress of different groups of learners carefully and there are no significant categories of under performance.

- ACE meets its statutory requirements with regards to safeguarding. It provides a safe environment for learners and most have a sufficient understanding of relevant procedures and whom to contact if they have any concerns. Learners' behaviour and attitudes are respectful both to each other and the staff. Health and safety assessments of community learning venues are satisfactory and most have good access for those with reduced mobility.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Milton Keynes Council Adult Continuing Education

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Performing arts	3
Visual Arts	3
Classical languages	2
Modern foreign languages	2

Provider details

Milton Keynes Council Adult Continuing Education	
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Part-time: 3754
Head of Service	Ms Claire Griffin
Date of previous inspection	7 November 2008
Website address	www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/ace

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Part-time	35	1780	35	382	3	31	0	14
Number of community learners								
2258								
Number of employability learners								
22								
Funding received from								
Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maybe Magazine ■ Connexions ■ The Art Room 								

Additional socio-economic information

Milton Keynes Council provides community learning and employability programmes through its adult continuing education (ACE) service. Courses are offered in most sector subject areas from 15 locations across the borough. ACE serves a community with overall unemployment levels similar to those for the United Kingdom as a whole, although the unemployment of young people, especially those aged 20 to 24, is high. Pockets of significant economic and social deprivation exist in parts of local authority wards. Milton Keynes has a significantly growing minority ethnic population and minority ethnic communities account for around a third of all Milton Keynes pupils.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

David Martin HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Adult Learning Manager 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 online 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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