

Medway Community Learning

Inspection dates		4-8 February 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate-4
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Inadequate-4

Local authority

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is inadequate because:

- Leaders and managers have failed to make enough improvements for learners since the last inspection in 2009. Some areas of provision are worse now than they were then.
- Leaders and managers do not identify the strengths and weaknesses of the provision accurately and fail to keep the local authority sufficiently well informed about its quality. As a result, the local authority is unable to provide the challenge needed for improvement and to ensure that the service is fully accountable for its performance.
- Over three years there has been little improvement in the proportion of learners who complete their courses successfully. Where learners are studying for qualifications, too few stay until the end of the course and pass their examinations.
- Too much teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Too often tutors do not support learners well enough to enable them to extend their knowledge and skills.
- Tutors do not use information on the individual needs of learners well enough to tailor teaching to meet these needs.
- The recording of the progress and achievement of learners on non-accredited courses is not accurate enough. Some targets are too imprecise and others do not challenge learners enough.

This provider has the following strengths:

- The range of programmes on offer meets the needs of the local community and reflects the council's priorities well.
- Partnership working effectively broadens the curriculum for learners.
- Learners are well motivated, enjoy their studies and often attain their personal learning goals. They develop their skills well and often apply these in their everyday lives.
- Learners on employability programmes and those undertaking apprenticeship qualifications achieve well.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Undertake rigorous self-assessment and improvement planning and fully identify areas for improvement, so that these are tackled methodically and effectively.
- Ensure that the local authority is provided with comprehensive information with which it can hold the service to account and provide effective oversight of the provision.
- Increase retention and success rates on courses leading to qualifications by building on the good practice exhibited on the better performing courses.
- Improve the effectiveness of recording and recognising the achievement of learners on non-accredited courses so that data on the outcomes for learners are fully reliable.
- Improve the less effective teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that tutors fully use the outcomes of learners' initial assessments to help them plan good teaching
 - ensuring that teachers provide clear written feedback to learners on how to improve their work
 - increasing the challenge in lessons to all learners
 - helping tutors to better use information and learning technologies (ILT) in their sessions.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for learners require improvement, both on courses for qualifications and on non-accredited, social and personal development courses. ▪ Overall success rates have improved little over the three years. In subject areas, too many success rates are no better than the national average for similar providers and require improvement. There is considerable variation in the level of success across, and within, subject areas, with some cases of declining performance over three years, as, for example in the intermediate level Certificate in Adult Literacy for English. ▪ Around three quarters of the provision is for learners on courses leading to qualifications. On these courses, too few learners stay the course and pass their examinations. On non-accredited courses success rates are reported to be high. However, systems used to arrive at this figure, which were not well developed at the previous inspection, are still not fully reliable. ▪ The overall achievement of qualifications for the relatively small number of apprentices is high. However, only half of these learners complete their studies within agreed timescales, which is poor. ▪ Learners gain important communication skills and are able to express themselves, listen and interact with others effectively. They develop good work-related habits, such as regular attendance and good timekeeping, which improve their chances of securing and sustaining employment. ▪ Learners use their newly-acquired skills in English and mathematics well in their daily lives. For example, they become more assured in helping their children with homework. Learners whose first language is not English develop their vocabulary well and gain confidence in speaking. With these gains they are better able to talk to their children's teachers and apply for jobs. ▪ There are no significant variations in how well learners from different groups achieve. The service analyses success data to determine any significant achievement gaps for their learners and has worked well to narrow the few gaps it has previously identified. 	

- Learners often make good progress on their courses. Most achieve appropriate or good standards in their work, including in their practical activities. Their overall attendance is satisfactory and gradually improving.
- Learners are well motivated, enjoy their studies and often attain their personal learning goals. They value the benefits of studying alongside others and are proud of their achievements. Many obtain a qualification for the first time in their lives. They develop their skills well and often apply them in their work with their families and in the community. Learners on employability programmes are particularly successful in gaining employment.
- Many learners develop the confidence and enthusiasm to study further. They progress well to further courses, often at higher levels, largely within the service. Although there is considerable evidence of particular learners' successful progression when leaving the service, as was the case at the last inspection, there is no systematic tracking of leavers' destinations or further progress.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment overall require improvement. This reflects the need to improve the outcomes for learners on many courses where too many do not benefit from good teaching.
- Teaching and learning in employability programmes are mostly good and meet the needs of individual learners well. Here, tutors introduce different activities that motivate learners and enable them to become more competitive in the job market. Elsewhere, the quality of teaching is too variable and teaching is not tailored sufficiently to meet the individual needs of learners.
- In the better sessions tutors use questioning well to increase the challenge for learners as their knowledge and understanding develops. Enthusiastic tutors inspire learners and raise their level of confidence.
- In the less effective sessions tutors do not explain basic ideas well enough and learners struggle to follow the rest of the session. In settings where tutors are working with vulnerable learners they do not always apply their subject knowledge effectively.
- Overall, tutors provide satisfactory feedback to learners on their work. Feedback for learners is good in employability programmes. However tutors do not always identify and correct errors when marking learners' work.
- Functional skills are promoted sufficiently in sessions. Specialist tutors provide good additional support for individuals to develop their English and mathematics. However, in apprenticeship programmes, functional skills are not related to the vocational training programme, which inhibits learners from applying them in the workplace.
- The initial assessment of learners' needs is thorough, but too often it is not used to inform teaching. As a result, tutors are not aware of the specific learning needs of all learners and do not sufficiently account for these when planning and delivering sessions.
- In non-accredited learning the recognition and recording of the progress and achievement of learners are not robust. Targets are insufficiently precise to be measurable, whilst others are not sufficiently challenging to learners.
- Tutors use the available resources well to support their teaching. Where partners contribute to programmes this enhances their relevance to learners, for example through simulating job interviews. However, the lack of availability and use of ILT in sessions limits the ability of tutors to capture learners' interest.
- Care and support meet the needs of most learners effectively. They are good for learners whose circumstances make them more vulnerable and for those on employability courses. Tutors advocate well on behalf of learners where needed. For example, one tutor negotiated with staff from Jobcentre Plus to ensure that attendance at appointments did not prohibit learners from attending courses.

- Most staff are well qualified for their roles. Those who are not are working towards appropriate teaching qualifications. Staff use their experience well to enthuse learners and make learning relevant to their aspirations.
- Equality and diversity are satisfactorily promoted in sessions. In the good sessions tutors pick up on classroom discussions and use the everyday experiences of learners to explore cultural differences. While equality and diversity are discussed during the induction process for apprentices, they are not reinforced during their programme.
- The majority of sessions take place in a safe environment. However, in a minority of practical sessions, tutors pay insufficient attention to learners' safety and fail to take the necessary steps to minimise the risks. The health and safety of vulnerable learners are very carefully monitored and risks to them are managed well.

Employability training	Good
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- Teaching and learning are good, which reflects the high number of learners who progress into employment, further training and volunteering roles.
- Tutors' energy and skills motivate learners to attend well and engage in sessions. Through recognising and celebrating their learning at public events and in the local press learners become enthused to make further progress.
- The majority of sessions are of good quality and include a good range of interesting and relevant activities that engage learners well. Teaching effectively develops their understanding of the workplace and the expectations therein. Learners successfully change their habits and routines so that they are better prepared for the world of work.
- Tutors use their experience well to conduct lively discussions which support learners to extend their thinking and consolidate their previous learning. In the best sessions a good range of activities are used effectively to support and challenge all learners. Learners are encouraged to practise their newly-learnt skills to support each other within sessions.
- The use of resources to support teaching and learning is satisfactory. Partners create realistic interview situations, which help learners develop confidence and skills, and on occasions lead to offers of employment. However, ILT resources are insufficient in bringing the workplace to life in the classroom.
- Learners are skilfully guided through job application and interview processes. Learners for whom English is not their first language recognise their improved language abilities and apply for roles which match the qualifications they have gained in their countries of origin, rather than lower level roles.
- Guidance and support for learners are good. Tutors support individual learners through tutorials and guide them well to apply for relevant employment opportunities. The diverse nature of the learners and their support needs are recognised by staff and a range of effective strategies are used to enable learners to attend and succeed.
- Initial assessments are routinely carried out at the start of the courses; however, these do not always lead to learners being placed appropriately on the correct level of course. Individual learning plans are used consistently across programmes, but they do not always enable learners to identify and record their personal learning goals and their progress towards them adequately.
- Verbal feedback to learners is very effective in supporting them to extend their knowledge, review prior learning and apply it to their individual circumstances. However, the marking of written work is often too superficial and does not identify well what learners need to do to improve.
- Functional skills are promoted satisfactorily within courses. Reading and writing are promoted in all sessions and learners are encouraged to use new words and discover their meaning in relation to the workplace. Tasks which improve learners' financial management skills are used well in sessions for learners whose first language is not English. While these learners have the option to take external accredited examinations, the numbers who do so is very low.

- Equality and diversity are effectively promoted through teaching. Topics are sensitively handled by tutors, for example through exploring workplace stereotypes. Resources reflect a range of cultures and backgrounds.

Foundation English and mathematics	Requires improvement
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- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, which is reflected by a significant minority of learners who do not complete their courses successfully. The majority of learners make reasonable progress and feel more confident about their skills and their employment prospects. Learners develop useful skills that contribute to their economic and social well-being.
- Tutors have high expectations for learners and motivate them to develop useful skills. For example, one numeracy learner proudly described how she helped her mother to calculate the best option between two estate agents’ fees with different commission rates. Tutors support learners effectively to progress onto higher levels of study.
- Tutors are highly qualified. Volunteers and learner support assistants provide additional support for learners and give them valuable individual attention which helps them to participate fully in sessions.
- Planning for learning does not support learners’ achievement. Although initial and diagnostic assessment is thorough it is not used to create personalised goals for each learner. As a result, too often the individual needs of learners are not met.
- Learning plans are limited to recording the topics covered during sessions and the overall learning goals for the group. Tutors do not record learners’ starting points in sufficient detail to identify gaps in their skills or specific areas for development. They do not monitor learners’ progress well and do not identify their next steps sufficiently. Learners receive insufficient written feedback from their tutors.
- The best tutors use a good range of activities that help learners develop their communication and team work skills. For example, learners used data to create graphs and then helped each other to understand the results. Tutors skilfully design tasks which enable learners to understand formulae through interesting and useful activities.
- In less effective sessions tutors do not explain basic concepts clearly, exercises are too complicated and learners become confused. Tutors do not provide work that is appropriate to learners’ abilities. As a result, many learners are not sufficiently challenged and they are not supported to extend their skills through more complicated tasks.
- Resources are good and are often developed from materials which are familiar to learners. The use of ILT is insufficient which limits the variety of learning materials available.
- Equality and diversity are not sufficiently promoted on all courses and are integrated well in just a few sessions. For example, in a session where learners developed their communication skills they discussed the cultural differences in maintaining eye contact.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
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- Leaders and managers set a clear strategic direction for the service. This is reflected well in the programmes available for learners. Provision closely reflects the council’s aims of tackling unemployment, supporting families and contributing to the health and well-being of the community. The vision for the service is understood well by staff who work effectively to tailor provision to meet local needs.
- Senior leaders in the local authority are unable to ensure that the service is fully accountable for its performance. While they routinely receive and scrutinise information on the performance of the service, they do not have sight of a sufficient breadth of information on the quality of the provision to provide effective challenge and accountability.

- Too many areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and monitoring visit have not been successfully addressed. Inconsistencies in the outcomes for learners remain. The recognition and recording of learners' progress and achievement on non-accredited courses, the recording of the progression of learners and weaknesses in setting targets for improving provision are all long-standing weaknesses that have not been tackled.
- Self-assessment is not used effectively to evaluate the performance of the service. Managers do not consider all of the available evidence to inform their views of the relative strengths and areas for improvement of the service. Self-assessments of curriculum areas vary too much in quality and do not always capture key weaknesses.
- Improvement planning is not cohesive. The quality improvement plan for the service does not sufficiently reflect all of the areas requiring improvement and does not inform activities to raise standards. While all curriculum areas have quality improvement plans in place, in some, target setting is weak and key areas for improvement are not always identified.
- As a result of deficiencies in self-assessment and planning for improvement, there is a chequered history of delivering a better quality experience for learners. There are notable and important successes in securing change, such as the alignment of the curriculum to better meet local needs; learning programmes delivered through children's centres have been reviewed and revised well to reflect learners' circumstances and aspirations.
- The service has improved the scheme for observing teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection. Curriculum managers accurately identify key strengths and areas for development and use the information well to inform staff development and improve the quality of sessions. However, in 2011/12, only two thirds of tutors were observed, significantly limiting the value of the scheme. Coverage for 2012/13 so far is better.
- The service works very effectively with partners to ensure that the curriculum reflects local priorities. Programmes are adapted well, for example to develop the skills and behaviours essential to learners' prospects of employment.
- The views of employers, learners and stakeholders are sought regularly and help shape the curriculum well. For example, the timings and locations of sessions are changed to meet the needs of local people better. Employers and learners rate highly the support and help that they receive from the service.
- The service promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily. It successfully recruits learners from disadvantaged communities and those with low educational attainment. Learners from minority ethnic communities participate and achieve well in their studies. Data are analysed to determine any significant achievement gaps for learners and the service has worked well to narrow the few that it has identified.
- The service meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Appropriate pre-employment checks are undertaken when recruiting staff. Its safeguarding policy, when recently tested, proved to be robust. New on-line training for staff has very recently been put in place, but the uptake of this is not yet widespread and no deadlines exist for staff to complete this training.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Medway Community Learning

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Employability training	2
Foundation English and mathematics	3

Provider details

Medway Community Learning	
Type of provider	Local Authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time:
	Part-time: 4,088
Principal/CEO	Sue Hopkins
Date of previous inspection	January 2009
Website address	www.medway.gov.uk/educationandlearning/adultlearning

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)								
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	10	1413	9	382	2	82	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	9	3	6	12				
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	969							
Number of employability learners	107							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency, Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Additional socio-economic information

Medway community learning service is located in the local authority's chief executive's department. The population of Medway is predominantly of White British background but with an increasing proportion of the community from minority ethnic groups. Average earnings of residents are below the average for the region. Medway is ranked within the 41% most deprived boroughs nationally according to the index of deprivation 2010. The 2011 census identifies that just under a quarter of the population of Medway have no qualifications; higher than the average for the south east of England. A higher proportion of adults hold intermediate and advanced qualifications than nationally.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jon Bowman HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four 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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