

Medway Adult Community Learning Service

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Local authority

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Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Medway Adult and Community Learning Service (MACLS) is part of Medway Council and provides a range of part-time education and training opportunities for adults from its centres in Rochester, Gillingham and community venues. The prevailing qualification and skills levels of the local adult population is significantly below the national average and MACLS prioritises the provision of literacy, numeracy, language and entry to employment courses. The service also provides a range of personal and community development courses, and workforce development provision. Much of this is in partnership with other local organisations and agencies.

Ofsted inspectors conducted a monitoring visit in September 2013 to explore the progress being made in meeting the recommendations of the last inspection in February 2013. At that inspection, outcomes and quality of teaching, learning and assessment were judged to require improvement. Overall effectiveness and effectiveness of leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit which were the areas for improvement at the last inspection.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made to improve self-assessment and improvement planning to bring about improvements more quickly?

Reasonable progress

The last inspection considered that self-assessment was not used effectively to evaluate the performance of the service and self-assessments of curriculum areas did not always identify key weaknesses.

MACLS now has a clear process in place for all the stages of self-assessment, starting with course reviews and actions plans. Managers have received appropriate individual support and training in how to evaluate their work and assess effectiveness of teaching and assessment. Tutors and support staff now have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to self-assessment and have taken an active role in contributing positively to post-inspection action plans.

The timescales and procedures are clearly set out enabling improvements to be made more promptly during courses based on learners' views. The wider involvement of learners, senior staff and elected members to review and challenge end-of-course action plans is well planned. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these actions.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving success rates and reducing the proportion of learners that leave their courses early or do not complete within the planned timescales?

Reasonable progress

At the time of the last inspection, the service had not done enough to improve the proportion of learners completing their courses successfully. Too few learners studying for qualifications stayed until the end of the course and passed their examinations.

Successful measures have been introduced to improve retention, and monitoring of attendance, for example, by more thorough and routine follow up of absences. Tutors are more accountable for the success of the learners they teach through more regular review and analysis of learners' attendance and progress. Monthly data monitoring meetings ensure retention rates are reviewed and prompt actions taken where learners are at risk of leaving through poor attendance. Data supplied by the provider at the time of the monitoring visit show a significant increase in retention rates and improved success rates, especially English and mathematics with high grades.

The collection of progression information on learners has improved and tutors are now taking more responsibility for collecting information about what learners do when they complete their courses.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has been made to improve teaching, learning and assessment

Significant progress

At the previous inspection too much teaching, learning and assessment required improvement. Too often tutors did not support learners well enough to enable them to extend their knowledge and skills and did not give helpful enough feedback.

The service has introduced several carefully-planned actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment, including a significant amount of training for tutors which had not been a priority before the inspection. A sharper and stronger focus by managers on teaching, learning and assessment, a restructure of the service, an improved system of observation of teaching and learning, the moderation of judgements and the sharing of good practice are helping to bring about key improvements in teaching and learning. For example, clearer identification of learning outcomes and better planning have resulted in more effective teaching and learning.

The introduction of a comprehensive assessment process when learners start and more fit-for-purpose individual learning plans have been significant factors in

achieving this improvement. These plans have clear and specific targets and are now closely monitored by learners and tutors.

Feedback and assessment are more informative and helpful to learners. Learners confirm that more regular individual feedback in class is enabling them to make good progress. Some employability tutors immediately put their recent training into practice by using quizzes at the end of each session to check learning and prepare for the next sessions.

The support for learners has improved through more effective deployment of resources, such as providing laptops, and availability of extra help, for example for learners with dyslexia. The service used a questionnaire very successfully to provide specific help for learners at risk of disengagement, ensuring that 16 out of 17 recipients successfully gained their qualifications.

A major investment in information and learning technology resources, with ready support from the information technology department, has enabled tutors to extend the range of activities provided in lessons to better meet learners' needs and maintain their interest. Tutors have gained confidence in using learning technologies in the classroom, including the use of electronic media for vocational courses, such as the development of electronic portfolios. Learners have a better understanding of their assessments and how to make improvements through the effective use of digital technology to record work.

The virtual learning environment has been remodelled and provides a more accessible resource for learners and tutors. Learners report the benefits of this provision and its redesign have helped them to catch up on missed lessons or to review the content of a lesson to help with independent study.

How much progress has been made in improving the recording and recognition of the achievement of learners on non-accredited courses to ensure appropriate stretch and challenge for all learners and reliability of data on outcomes?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, the recording of the progress and achievement of learners on leisure and non-examination courses was not accurate. Some targets were too imprecise and others did not challenge learners enough.

The service has introduced new procedures to record progress and achievement and raised expectations of tutors and learners as a result. Tutors have received helpful training in effective target setting and completing individual learning plans, bringing the best of approaches in, for example, employability and work skills courses and those used by partner providers.

Individual learning plans for learners on leisure and non-examination courses starting in September reflect a more accurate picture of learners' starting points, their goals and how they intend to achieve them. Targets are much clearer and specific to each individual learner. As a result, the measurement of progress is easier for both tutors and learners. Learners now have a better understanding of the process, and the significance and value of the approach; they readily engage in setting targets and appreciate the help tutors give them in completing this task. They acknowledge that targets are challenging and closely aligned to the main course aims, but personalised to their circumstances. However, this process is new and it is too soon to evaluate its effectiveness.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

What progress has been made in communicating information effectively with the local authority and increasing impact of feedback and accountability? Significant progress

The last inspection noted that leaders and managers did not keep the local authority sufficiently well informed of the service's effectiveness. As a result, there was not the appropriate challenge needed for improvement and to ensure that the service was fully accountable for its performance.

The council's education and training portfolio holder and other senior staff are now involved more closely in scrutinising the service's performance through regular and informative reports. An improvement board, set up after the last inspection, has carefully and regularly reviewed monthly data and performance targets. Training for officers and elected members has been effective. They understand the information presented and ask thoughtful and searching questions. They are now involved appropriately in the self-assessment process through the improvement board. An example of the impact of greater engagement is the increase in resources to improve the service through more support and posts such as a community coordinator and upgrading of buildings and classrooms. For example, learners are benefiting from several refurbished classrooms with better information and learning technology resources and surroundings conducive to learning.

How much progress has been made in sharing good practice exhibited on the better performing courses more widely? Significant progress

The last inspection recommended that the service should increase retention and success rates on courses leading to qualifications by building on the good practice exhibited on the better performing courses.

Skills for Life and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) tutors have shared their expertise on learning plans and good practice service wide. Tutors are working constructively and productively with external partners to share good practice in a local Medway partnership group. Within the service, good practice is now being

shared more systematically through the follow up to the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, the introduction of the observation of teaching, learning and assessment review database and regular monthly meetings. As a result, lesson planning is more effective, leading to learners being better engaged and involved in lessons more productively.

How much progress has been made in using feedback from learners to make improvements?

Reasonable progress

While the service gained the views and involvement of learners through regular surveys, the rate of response, although satisfactory, was not high. The collection and use of feedback from learners have been revitalised and responsibility for developing the learner voice given to a designated member of staff.

As a result, learners on English, mathematics and language courses have contributed well to shaping their courses, for example giving feedback to trainee tutors on their microteaching sessions. More recently, activities are being formalised through an annual calendar of events, offering a clear timetable promoted to learners and tutors through course information and the service's directory of courses.

Good practice used in programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is being replicated more widely. For example tutors, in response to requests from learners, helped a group with learning disabilities to put on a very successful Managing Money course at a major local venue to meet a specific need. Other activities have included a 'wish tree' and 'you said...we did' briefings.

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