

Swindon Borough Council

Local authority

Inspection dates		2-4 October 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-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:

- The vast majority of learners attain their learning goals including, when appropriate, externally recognised qualifications. Learners also develop their confidence and preparedness to progress to other educational courses and either paid or voluntary employment.
- There are no significant differences in the success of different groups of learners and any identified gaps are closing. The service successfully recruits a higher percentage of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds than is present in the local population.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Tutors use their good subject knowledge and expertise successfully to motivate and inspire learners and most use a wide range of well-paced learning activities and resources to engage learners.
- Leadership and management, including governance of the service, are good. The programmes commissioned by the council from a variety of providers are closely aligned to the local authority's priorities and meet the needs of learners and the community well.
- The management of subcontractors is strong. Managers make good use of data in setting targets and monitoring performance, hold frequent meetings with the providers and use observations of teaching and learning effectively to establish and improve the quality of the provision.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The systems for collecting information on what all learners do after attending a course are not yet sufficiently effective. Not all learners receive good information, advice and guidance on what they might do next.
- Not enough teaching and learning are outstanding and too much require improvement. Tutors do not always use opportunities to improve learners' English and mathematics in subjects where this is not the main aim, and not all tutors provide suitable levels of challenge for all learners.
- Subcontractors do not all consistently fulfil all their contractual obligations, including taking more responsibility for their own quality improvement. There is insufficient sharing of best practice across the provision.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the systems to collect learners' progression and destination data in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision in supporting the council's aims.
- Ensure that the good information, advice and guidance, available to some learners, are available to all in order for them to make informed choices about their next steps.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding sessions and eliminate any which require improvement by sharing best practice identified through observation of teaching and learning and by continuing to follow up any identified areas for improvement. In particular, ensure that tutors all use a suitable level of challenge in their sessions so that all learners reach their full potential.
- Develop the mathematics and English skills of all learners by ensuring that tutors both plan how to embed this into teaching and learning and also use any naturally-occurring opportunities to do so.
- Further strengthen the management of subcontractors to ensure that they comply consistently with their contracts and take more responsibility for their own quality improvement.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for learners are good. The proportion of learners who achieve their course aims and personal learning goals is high and has risen year on year over the last three years. Data are based on robust definitions, making them meaningful and giving confidence in their reliability. The proportion of learners who achieve externally accredited qualifications is also high.
- Most learners make at least the progress that would be expected of them based on their starting points, with many being able to make positive changes in their lives as a result of the learning they have completed. For example, learners develop business and employability skills in cake decorating classes and improve family life and relationships through attending family learning courses.
- The standard of learners' work is good. Many learners master vocational skills quickly, producing high-quality pieces such as needlework and drawings in the early stages of their course. Learners on craft and other skills-based courses use vocational language confidently and correctly, for example in digital photography classes.
- Managers monitor the achievement of different groups of learners and there are no significant gaps. Where there are small differences in the achievement of different groups of learners, these gaps are closing. Where managers have identified poor recruitment from some groups in the local community, for example men, courses have been started specifically to attract them.
- Learners improve their English and mathematics on literacy, language and numeracy courses and many learners on family learning programmes become more able to assist their children with their school work. However, learners on courses in other subject areas do not always have the opportunity to improve their English and mathematics.
- The vast majority of learners make positive and significant improvements in their personal, social and employability skills. For example, many learners on family learning programmes are able to make improvements to family life, such as providing a more nutritious diet for their children, as a result of participation on their courses. Learners on employment-related courses improve their curriculum vitae writing and job application skills to enable them to submit more effective job applications, from which some successfully gain employment.
- Many learners progress onto further learning, into employment or other positive next steps, including volunteering. Learners' progression from taster courses onto longer courses is very high. However, while managers have set out a clear expectation in respect of reporting

progression destinations, not all subcontractors provide this information in sufficient detail. Reliable progression data are not therefore available.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, which is reflected in the good outcomes for learners.
- Tutors have high expectations and successfully use their good subject knowledge and expertise to motivate and inspire learners. Most tutors use a wide range of well-paced learning activities and resources to engage learners who then make productive use of their time. In most lessons, learners develop transferable skills and gain self-esteem and self-confidence. In weaker sessions, whole-class teaching inhibits the progress of more-able learners and fails to meet the needs of learners who require more support.
- Learners attend regularly and the majority arrive punctually. Learners work purposefully and explore and exchange ideas confidently with one another. For example, learners share knowledge and expertise in the use of cake decorating materials and techniques and more-able learners help other learners understand and use information and communication technology (ICT). In dressmaking, learners compare notes on their selections of fabrics for producing garments.
- Tutors provide good support for learners, both in and between classes; for example, in cooking and cake decorating, learners use telephone and email contact to help to resolve learning queries. However, support is not always clearly recorded in planning documents. Tutors successfully encourage and motivate learners to practise their new skills outside of sessions and develop and extend their knowledge and skills; for example, using ICT, practising art and craft skills and cooking with their children. Learners talk confidently about using their new skills and knowledge.
- Tutors do not always use the results of the initial assessment to plan and meet individual learning needs. They do not always have a good knowledge of learners' starting points. Most learners are not involved in setting targets to meet their personal learning goals and are not always clear about the purpose of learning activities and expected outcomes.
- The quality and consistency of accommodation and resources vary across teaching venues. Tutors make best use of available venues and resources, but non-functioning and limited equipment restricts learning opportunities in a small number of sessions. For example, some learners have insufficient access to computers which inhibits their opportunities to present their work. Insufficient attention is paid to reinforcing and promoting health and safety in some venues.
- Tutors' assessment of learners' work and progress in sessions is sound. In the best sessions, tutors skilfully use questioning to check learning and learners' understanding of their progress. In art and craft courses, tutors carefully observe learners' techniques and provide good, supportive feedback to develop learners' skills and expertise. Tutors consolidate learning through regular summaries and, in better lessons, learners monitor their own progress well through the effective use of learning logs.
- Tutors miss opportunities to integrate English and mathematics fully within all lessons beyond that required for the task in hand. In the better sessions, tutors effectively develop learners' speaking and listening skills, for example in commenting on one another's work. Learners gain confidence in speaking with their peers and discussing ideas such as how to support their children with homework.
- The majority of pre-course information, advice and guidance are effective in guiding learners to appropriate courses; however, a few art and craft learners found that the information provided did not always accurately describe the content and delivery of the course. Tutors do not routinely provide information about the availability and suitability of other courses, either within or beyond the council's provision.

- Tutors and learners treat one another with fairness and mutual respect in safe learning environments. In the best sessions, tutors promote equality and diversity within the curriculum. The service provides programmes which meet the needs and interests of the diverse community it serves. However, learning materials do not always promote awareness of wider cultural differences.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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- Leadership and management are good; senior council officers and elected members provide strong governance and share an ambitious vision for adult and community learning in Swindon. The council's comprehensive adult learning plan sets a clear direction, aligning adult education to support the council's wider priorities of economic regeneration and employment and skills.
- The council is actively pursuing even closer partnership working within the borough, with the initial aim of a single adult learning plan for all providers in receipt of Skills Funding Agency funding to support adult and community learning. The intention is to eradicate duplication and ensure the most effective use of the available funds to meet local needs. It is too early to judge the impact of this measure.
- The flexible commissioning model used to subcontract the provision to a wide variety of organisations ensures that the courses available to the learners are readily accessible in the areas of highest deprivation or concentration of groups in most need. Council staff use data well to set recruitment and performance targets for the providers and as a performance management tool when monitoring how well they are achieving them. Regular data returns allow for accurate reports to senior officers and elected members, inform management decisions and contribute to the self-assessment process.
- The management of subcontractors is strong. Managers hold regular performance monitoring meetings with all providers to ensure they are fulfilling the requirements of the contract. They also have frequent informal contact with the providers. However, as yet, not all providers take sufficient responsibility for their own quality improvement or make full use of the guidance in the comprehensive provider handbook.
- Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are robust. Council officers risk assess and prioritise observations of teaching and learning effectively. They conduct joint observations with college staff of the provision subcontracted to their colleges, drawing on the colleges' expertise. The service has recently improved its observation report format, which now clearly cross references judgements to the Common Inspection Framework. It also now grades first observations for new staff and has introduced no-notice observations in order to gain a more accurate oversight of the quality of teaching and learning. Observers systematically follow up observations by discussions with tutors on the impact their action points have made on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Managers use contributions from the providers, combined with their own data analysis and quality management work, to produce a robust and self-critical, and largely accurate, self-assessment report. The subcontractors' and service's staff engage well in the self-assessment process.
- The curriculum and learning programmes meet the needs of learners and the local community well. In addition to the targeted and focused provision, the service is maintaining the universal and more traditional adult education offer and is actively exploring a fees policy, which will enable it to continue to do both within the limited central funding allocation.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Council staff are subject to Swindon Borough Council's policies and procedures regarding equality and diversity and safeguarding. The very comprehensive and newly-revised provider manual, which forms part of the commissioning contract with the subcontractors, is very clear in stating what is expected of providers and gives a wealth of useful suggestions as to how to achieve it.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Swindon Borough Council

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	19+ Learning programmes	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
Community learning	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority							
Age range of learners	19+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: Nil							
	Part-time: 2,693							
Principal/CEO	Mr John Gilbert							
Date of previous inspection	January 2011							
Website address	sburnett@swindon.gov.uk							
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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	535	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	535							
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:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Elite Progression ■ New College, Swindon ■ Swindon College ■ Swindon Library Service ■ Smiley Cats ■ Mussaret Tanweer ■ Learning Curve ■ Fitzpatrick's Gym 							

Contextual information

Swindon Borough Council is a unitary authority encompassing the former railway town, some of the surrounding rural areas and one small market town. The borough has a population of some 212,000. Unemployment rates are comparable with the national average, but below those for the South West region. Educational attainment at GCSE of school children in the borough is consistently lower than both regional and national averages. Most of the population is White British, but over 6% are Asian, amongst whom there are significant numbers of Goans and Nepalese. There are also an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 migrants from Eastern Europe.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Cliff Rose HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Commissioner - Routes to Employment 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 and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions and studied related documentation. 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 area 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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