

Medway Adult Community Learning Service

Local authority

Inspection dates		3–7 February 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate-4
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- On courses that do not lead to a qualification not enough learners make sufficient progress, and the systems managers use to monitor and report learners' achievements and progress are poor.
- Tutors do not consistently design lesson that develop learners' English, mathematics or employability skills well in lessons, nor promote their understanding of equality and diversity.
- Managers do not consistently plan or promote progression opportunities for learners, nor record accurately learners' destinations.
- Tutors do not adequately cater for the wide range of learners' abilities and knowledge in lessons, nor adopt suitable procedures to monitor and review the progress of learners and set them suitable targets.
- Tutors do not use information from initial assessment well to place learners on the most appropriate level of course.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Good accommodation and resources are used well by tutors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.
- Supportive tutors actively encourage learners to extend their knowledge, develop personal and social skills and build their self-confidence.
- Learners receive particularly good pastoral and welfare guidance and support.
- Expanding partnerships with other providers in the region create valuable opportunities for managers to share local market information and good practice, and to plan the curriculum better to meet the needs of learners.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the range of courses across the service provides better for the needs of the most disadvantaged members of the community.
- Plan and promote internal and external progression routes more thoroughly and improve the information that managers capture on progression.
- Raise the quality of information, advice and guidance to learners before and during their programme of study so they receive more detailed information on course content and progression opportunities.
- Use the results of initial assessment more effectively to place learners on the most appropriate level of course.
- Improve the standard of teaching, learning and assessment further, particularly by:
 - planning lessons better to challenge the more able learners
 - making better use of information and learning technology (ILT)
 - improving the quality of target setting, and using this information more effectively to help inform lesson planning and monitor learners' progress
 - providing learners with more constructive written feedback to help them make progress and improve.
- Make better use of naturally occurring opportunities in lessons to extend learners' use and understanding of English, mathematics, employability skills, equality and diversity.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Outcomes for learners across Medway Adult Community Learning Service (MACLS) require improvement. In 2012/13, the proportion of adult learners who successfully achieved their qualification improved on previous years, and was satisfactory. Success rates on most courses for adults leading to qualifications are generally at, or slightly above, the rates for learners nationally. Provisional data for the current academic year indicate success rates are continuing to improve, with the exception of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) where they have declined slightly.
- In 2012/13, success rates for the very small proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 were low, significantly below those for learners nationally. Managers have responded by removing provision for learners aged 16 to 18. The achievement of the very small number of apprentices is high; however, few successfully achieve their qualification within the agreed timescale.
- Too many learners on non-accredited courses enrol on the same course each year. Managers overstate the progress and achievements made by these learners and the quality of recording and reporting on learners' progress is often poor.
- Managers have good access to accurate and timely data on the performance of different groups of learners, which enables them to monitor any variations and take prompt action where required. As a result, there are no significant variations between the outcomes for different groups of learners.
- In the majority of lessons, the standard of learners' work is adequate. In the better lessons, learners engage actively in a wide range of appropriate activities, which enables them to develop their knowledge and insight well, and extend their personal and social skills where appropriate. For example, learners on counselling courses took part in detailed and insightful group work to share their ideas and explore themes in depth. French conversation students

engaged enthusiastically in discussion around current topical issues and extended their confidence and vocabulary well. The promotion of employability skills and the development of English and mathematics are inconsistent across the provision. A small proportion of learners on employability courses have good opportunities to meet and work with representatives from local businesses. These representatives support and encourage learners to make them aware of potential employment opportunities and help them prepare to apply for jobs and attend interviews. However, in too many other lessons, tutors fail to raise learners' awareness of, or to promote, the development of core skills that learners require to gain successful employment, or to develop their English and mathematics sufficiently.

- Staff do not identify, plan or promote sufficient progression opportunities for learners. Learners receive poor information, advice or guidance on either entry to, or exit from, the service. Consequently, too few learners make the progress they might to further study, to voluntary work or to employment.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. In the better lessons, tutors plan projects and homework well, which encourage learners to experiment, be creative and try new approaches. Learners complete stimulating activities where they develop and use research and self-reflection skills effectively. Community learning tutors set high expectations and encourage learners, particularly those following creative arts courses, to display work around the MACLS learning centres and in local exhibitions.
- In a minority of lessons, tutors do not design strategies to cater for the wide range of learners' abilities and knowledge in lessons. They do not plan sufficiently challenging activities to push the more able learners or those on leisure programmes who have studied the course before.
- Many of the more experienced and well-qualified tutors share their extensive subject knowledge well with learners and often have good strategies in place to check learners' understanding of key principles. These tutors foster a supportive and constructive group ethos where learners work productively in lessons and motivate each other well.
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective additional learning support, which helps them participate and succeed. Tutors ensure learning support staff and volunteers understand their role and generally deploy them well. However, on occasions, carers who accompany learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities take over the practical tasks, which restricts the learners' development.
- The effectiveness with which tutors use information and learning technology (ILT) to engage and develop learners' knowledge and understanding varies significantly. The more effective tutors, for example those supporting some of the languages and employability courses, use the technology well in their teaching, making highly effective use of interactive whiteboards, online learning activities, the internet and the virtual learning environment (VLE). However, on a significant minority of courses tutors make little use of ILT or the VLE to enhance the learning experience.
- Initial assessment procedures require improvement. Those learners enrolling on courses leading to a qualification complete thorough initial assessment tests, but most do not receive the results promptly, if at all. Too often staff place students on too low a level of course. As a result the course does not challenge learners sufficiently. Learners on community learning courses self-assess their starting point, but this process is cursory because many learners judge themselves as fully competent rather than identifying skills they could develop to a higher level.
- Tutors do not consistently apply procedures to monitor and review the progress of learners and set them suitable targets. A minority of learners agree suitable targets with their tutors that enable them to measure their progress and achievement well. However, many learners' targets lack measurable outcomes, or the outcomes are too broad or non-existent. This restricts learners' ability to track their progress, assess the skills they have acquired, or to review the development of their social and personal skills.

- Learners receive very positive verbal feedback and praise from tutors, affirming their achievements and progress. This helps motivate learners and develop their confidence. Tutors, however, do not give learners sufficient constructive and developmental feedback on written work to aid their development.
- Mathematics and English tutors contextualise their subjects very effectively with meaningful and everyday examples. For example, this helps mathematics learners to apply proportions, percentages and volume accurately in everyday learning activities. Community learning tutors, however, rarely plan the development of learners' English, mathematics or employability skills into lessons despite the wealth of opportunities that arise.
- Learners benefit from good pastoral care and support before and during their courses. Tutors consider carefully learners' barriers to participation and try to help learners address these. Learners receive strong welfare support, for example referrals to food banks or help and advice with travel costs to lessons.
- Since the last inspection, managers have made modest improvements in arrangements for advice and guidance to learners, particularly on accredited courses, but these still require further improvement. Many learners taking English courses are unclear about the course level on which they enrol, or the examination requirements of the course. Learners receive insufficient advice and guidance to help them progress, for example into employment or to more advanced learning.
- Although most tutors consider how to promote equality and diversity in lessons, they do not always deliver or integrate this consistently. There are, however, some examples of good practice, particularly in English, ESOL and modern foreign languages, where tutors recognise and celebrate diversity well. In these lessons, tutors encourage learners to reflect on topics associated with promoting an understanding of equality and diversity when discussing topical news stories and current events within the context of the subjects they are studying or when practising their language skills.

Community learning

19+ learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment in community learning require improvement. On courses that do not lead to a qualification, managers report outcomes for learners as high. However, the processes to determine and report on progress on these courses are under developed and managers do not apply them consistently across all courses. As a result, the outcomes data overstate the achievements of learners.
- In the best sessions, learners benefit from positive and motivational support and skilful demonstrations from tutors. The resources in workshops and studios are good. In creative project work, such as art, pottery and stained glass, tutors use a broad variety of strategies to engage and motivate learners and provide for their different needs, levels and rates of progress. In these lessons learners take pride in their work, which is of a high standard. Many display and sell finished work in local exhibitions and craft fairs.
- In a minority of weaker lessons, tutors do not plan to ensure the activities and support meet the needs of all learners. As a result, lesson activities fail to stimulate the more experienced and confident learners; less able learners have to rely too much on peer assessment and support to help them progress.
- Tutors do not always use learners' initial assessment to plan learning activities, set appropriate personal targets or assess their progress. Managers do not regularly monitor, review or record progress across the community learning courses. As a result, learners are not always clear of their priorities for development, or how well they are progressing.
- Tutors possess appropriate vocational qualifications and experience for the courses on which they teach. While most tutors provide effective and informative verbal feedback to learners, they

do not always provide suitably detailed and insightful written feedback to enable learners to reflect on their areas for development and improve.

- Tutors develop learners' critical thinking and decision-making skills well, which enable them to evaluate their own and other learners' work. However, tutors fail to develop suitable strategies to improve learners' English, mathematics and employability skills.
- The quality of information and guidance for learners requires improvement. Learners are able to access adequate details on the range of provision available across the service to determine the suitability of a course. However, during their programmes of study, learners have too little access to information or guidance on the wider progression opportunities on to further training and employment. Many learners, particularly on leisure-based courses, return to the same course over many years, and do not progress.
- The range of courses available in community learning focus predominantly on leisure activities and fail to reach the most disadvantaged communities, or those learners identified in the community learning strategy. Managers do not capture information on learners' progression or destinations, therefore the information cannot inform curriculum planning.
- The promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. Tutors are very sensitive to the needs of learners; however, in most lessons they do not extend or develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity. Tutors' attention to health and safety across all community learning courses is very good, with particularly close monitoring of learners' well-being in exercise and fitness classes.

Foundation English

Requires improvement

19+ learning programmes

- Teaching, learning and assessment in foundation English require improvement, as do the outcomes of these learners. Tutors do not design lessons that consistently meet the needs of all learners. In the most effective lessons, tutors place learners on the appropriate level of study and use their experience and expertise to plan stimulating activities, which develop learners' knowledge and understanding well. However, tutors regularly fail to stretch and challenge more able learners.
- The majority of learners make good progress in developing personal skills such as self-confidence, responsibility and communication with others. Tutors are adept at encouraging less confident learners to overcome any initial reluctance, to participate more fully in group activities and to present their ideas and thoughts to others with increasing confidence. Tutors are also good at promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and support between learners. For example, tutors regularly require learners to prepare and deliver short presentations on their topic of choice. While learners are sometimes a little anxious about this initially, tutors support them, and other group members provide positive feedback and encouragement. As a result, learners' skills develop and learners grow in confidence.
- Tutors work well with learners in many lessons to set academic and personal targets that are specific, challenging and relevant. However, in a significant minority of lessons, learners' targets are too vague, reviews do not take place regularly and tutors do not involve learners enough in setting targets or reviewing progress. Punctuality in a small minority of lessons is poor, with a few learners arriving late and causing disruption to learning.
- The quality of feedback to learners is inconsistent. Many tutors regularly provide positive verbal feedback and encouragement to learners in lessons and use questioning techniques well to enable learners to progress and grow in confidence. However, the quality of feedback is not consistent across all the provision. In particular, feedback written on learners' written work does not always provide sufficient detail to help them progress and improve.
- Learners benefit from the expertise of well-qualified and experienced staff, as well as good accommodation and physical resources that support the learning experience.

- The quality of initial assessment is inconsistent. While tutors accurately assess the academic level of individual learners at the start of the course, on occasions they enrol learners on courses that are too easy, given their level of English when they join. As a result, these learners lack sufficient challenge in lessons to achieve their full potential.
- Tutors accurately identify the additional needs of individual learners, and any potential barriers to learning, and put suitable support systems in place. Additional learning support is effective and enables learners with disabilities or learning difficulties to participate fully. Learners value the respect and help they receive from tutors.
- Information, advice and guidance require improvement. Learners are often not fully clear about the requirements and expectations of their course prior to enrolment. In addition, they are frequently unclear of the progression options that they might consider on completion of the course. Tutors do not integrate employability skills sufficiently well to improve learners' capacity to seek or gain employment. Progression rates are low. While many learners achieve their main objectives, few successfully progress on to the next level of study or into employment.
- Tutors promote equality and diversity in lessons well, for example through discussions around different cultures and religious festivals.

Foundation mathematics

Good

19+ learning programmes

- Teaching, learning and assessment in foundation mathematics are good, which is reflected in the good outcomes for learners. Most courses show an improvement in success rates over time and the majority are now at or above the rates for learners nationally. Learners produce good standards of work and are able to apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge to everyday personal and social situations. Retention rates, attendance and punctuality are good, indicating learners' motivation and engagement in their programmes of study.
- Care and support for learners are good and learners value and benefit from tutors' support to overcome barriers to learning. This helps learners make good progress and motivates them to achieve their learning goals.
- Tutors are well qualified and experienced and use their skills and knowledge well to motivate and engage learners. Tutors skilfully contextualise mathematics to everyday life and successfully encourage learners to discuss and explore different mathematical strategies and techniques. This results in learners using their new skills effectively and with confidence. For example, learners are able to calculate the amount of materials needed in home decorating projects.
- Learners build progressively on previous learning and knowledge, participate well in class and develop good collaborative skills. They are confident in working outside the classroom to practise and develop their mathematical skills. Learners enjoy their learning and are able to give examples of how they have made progress since joining the course, for example in understanding how to convert fractions to decimals.
- Most learning materials are clear and well produced, but tutors make too little use of information and learning technology within sessions to stimulate learning. In the small number of sessions where this is done well, tutors encourage learners to access valuable and engaging activities on various websites, which help capture the learners' interest and support their learning.
- Tutors pace most lessons well, planning and executing tasks to ensure learners grow in confidence as they progress. Most tutors have a good understanding of learners' individual needs, and in the better sessions use a wide variety of activities to maintain interest and promote learning. Where learning is less effective, it is often because the pace of learning is too fast. As a result, learners struggle to understand and make progress.
- In a minority of lessons, tutors and learners use the results of initial and diagnostic assessment well to set and review individual learning targets. However, too many individual learning plans

only contain general targets, for example 'to pass the exam', and these do not help learners track and monitor their own progress.

- Tutors use verbal feedback and questioning well to motivate and develop confidence, and assess learners' progress. However, written feedback to learners does not provide sufficient detail on how to improve; comments are mostly limited to encouragement and praise.
- Learners develop good speaking and writing skills within mathematics sessions. For example, learners present their mathematical solutions to the rest of the group, they write sentences to describe their analysis of graphs and share these with other learners.
- Information, advice and guidance to learners require improvement. Pre-course information is satisfactory but not all learners receive the results of initial assessment until after they enrol. Teachers and support staff provide insufficient information about course content and progression routes.
- Tutors manage learning activities well to provide safe and friendly learning environments. Planning by tutors indicates that they consider how to promote equality and diversity in lessons; however, few tutors carry this out well within their teaching.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- MACLS has a clear strategy to provide adult learning in the community, focusing on learning for life, work and well-being. Since the last inspection, the service has successfully completed a major restructure in support of its aim to raise the quality and standard of provision. Managers pay close attention to outcomes for learners and the impact of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Data are used effectively to set demanding targets for the service and staff monitor progress carefully.
- Since the last inspection, managers have made reasonable progress in improving the quality of the provision. The service's priorities link closely to those of the council. An improvement board, chaired by an elected member, has been set up, with clear objectives and performance indicators. The board provides the service with appropriate scrutiny and good support. Council leaders have a strong commitment to the continued development of the service and now have a clearer understanding of MACLS' strengths and the areas it needs to improve.
- Observations of teaching and learning are generally thorough and accurate. Since the last inspection, managers have strengthened the process, with sound arrangements now in place to moderate judgements. All observers receive suitable training. Managers use the observation reports well to identify any gaps in tutors' skills and prioritise professional development to help raise standards.
- Staff have access to appropriate professional development and training opportunities. Staff are well qualified and experienced, they work well together to support learners and share good practice.
- The council has recently committed funds to improvements to resources and accommodation, which are now good. New facilities include the installation of information and learning technology (ILT), laptops, whiteboards and video equipment. Tutors are using this technology with increasing confidence and impact.
- The self-assessment process is satisfactory; it involves all staff and incorporates learners' views. A partner organisation moderates the report, which is largely accurate and effectively identifies most strengths and areas for improvement. The self-assessed grades match those of inspectors. Managers are being increasingly effective at implementing quality improvement initiatives, and monitoring progress. This is beginning to lead to improvements in the overall quality of the provision. However, many of the service's revised quality arrangements are recent and have not had sufficient impact on key areas for improvement.
- The progression of learners to further study or employment requires improvement. Both the information and guidance given to learners and the progression routes available to them are

under developed. The service is increasingly focusing on curriculum planning and the development of more and better progression routes. Provision for community learning does not target the most disadvantaged learners. The curriculum has too much emphasis on leisure and hobby courses, many of which have little or no opportunity for progression. A new post of community coordinator is enabling contact with a range of organisations, to identify local needs and interests and to extend the potential for partnership working.

- Managers generally plan and manage learning programmes well. Planning is increasingly targeting skills, employability, health and social inclusion to try and meet local and national priorities. Managers are starting to use relevant data and information more effectively to review and plan the provision. However, managers do not currently track or monitor accurately internal or external progression or destinations for learners once they complete their courses. As a result, managers are not yet able to confirm accurately the extent to which the provision is meeting local and national needs and improving the life chances of learners.
- MACLS has very effectively developed a successful partnership with Jobcentre Plus to provide tailored employability skills programmes. Partnership working within the local authority, such as with local children's centres, includes a range of programmes that enable learners to develop new skills and gain relevant qualifications. There are early signs that productive partnership working with the local college is beginning to have a positive impact on increasing the range of provision and progression routes available to learners. Additionally, MACLS' senior managers have recognised that the classroom-based provision for the small number of learners aged 16 to 18 was not sufficiently effective and have transferred these programmes to the college.
- The service is effective at promoting inclusion. Learning centres create welcoming, inclusive and accessible environments. Adults returning to learning receive encouragement and support to help them gain confidence and participate in learning. The service successfully recruits a minority of learners from groups that are traditionally under represented in learning. However, the over-dominance of leisure community courses limits the opportunities to extend provision to the most disadvantaged learners.
- The promotion of equality and diversity varies in quality. Recent well-conceived initiatives include the introduction of a calendar to raise awareness of different cultures and a focus group to raise the profile and promotion of equality and diversity. Staff receive appropriate information on equality and diversity at their induction and in subsequent training; however, there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity in most learning sessions.
- Managers give suitable attention to health and safety arrangements; they carry out appropriate risk assessments and promote safe working practices. The service meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. However, managers do not systematically monitor and confirm tutors' timely completion of the online safeguarding training.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Medway Adult Community Learning Service

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
Outcomes for learners	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Community learning	3
Foundation English	3
Foundation mathematics	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: 0							
	Part-time: 3775							
Principal/CEO	Neil Davies							
Date of previous inspection	February 2013							
Website address	www.medway.gov.uk/educationandlearning.aspx							
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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Part-time	-	1241	-	675	-	-	-	-
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	4	3	6	12	-	-		
Number of community learners	1207							
Number of employability learners	84							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Winfield							

Contextual information

Medway Adult and Community Learning Service serves the needs of Medway including Strood, Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham. 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 has no qualifications, higher than the average for the South East of England; however, a higher proportion of adults than nationally holds intermediate and advanced qualifications.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Peter Nelson 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, the previous inspection report and the reinspection monitoring visit 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 relevant 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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