Further Education and Skills inspection report

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Inspection Number: 423423

URN: 54229

Rutland County Council

Local authority

Inspection dates		4–7 February 2014
Overall effectiveness	**This inspection:**	**Requires improvement-3**
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Leaders have been slow to take effective action to ensure that the working and learning environment is free from possible hazards at its main centre at Catmose College. In recent months, senior managers have commissioned a specialist health and safety report to deal with the staff anxieties about the impact of the centre's environment on their health and its potential impact on learners.

- Strategic management of the provision is weak. Senior leaders have not taken adequate action to secure the future of the service including setting a clear strategy for curriculum that would best meet the wider future needs of the county council or the area covered by RALS.

- Self-assessment is not sufficiently timely for managers and staff to make improvements in subsequent years. Managers start work on the self-assessment late in the year.

- Personal learning objectives for a minority of learners in their learning plans are not specific. It is difficult to measure the exact progress the learners make.

This provider has the following strengths:

- The well-motivated learners achieve good and improving outcomes. They develop further their personal, social, employability and vocational skills that they use to benefit themselves, their families and communities.

- Highly professional and skilled tutors use their skills and expertise very well to provide good and improving teaching, learning and assessment. They use the findings of initial assessment well to provide well-paced individual and group teaching and learning that challenges most learners.

- The service has a strong focus on developing the English, mathematics and employability skills of its learners. Tutors plan their lessons to promote and reinforce these skills to all learners.

- Subject area management is good for all strands of learning. The increased focus on improving outcomes for learners and teaching, learning and assessment by managers and tutors has started to improve the learning experiences of most learners at a good pace.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Take swift and decisive action to ensure that the learning and working environment is free from possible hazards at the main site at Catmose College. Working closely with the users of the campus, take prompt action to ensure that staff and learners are fully aware of the actions that you are taking to deal with the potential problems in the working and learning environment.

- Provide clarity on the future direction of the service through conducting an analysis of the best possible options for learners and staff. Clarify that options such as partnerships, merger or collaboration with local service/s that share the service's mission and values have been considered to consolidate and enhance the learning offer to meet the county council or the region's needs. Finalise the draft strategic plan for the adult learning service, disseminate to staff and complete the proposed procurement process to achieve strategic stability for the service.

- Conduct self-assessment regularly, prepare the self-assessment report in good time and ensure the report has a clear plan of action with targets to raise the standards.

- Stay focussed on improving teaching, learning and assessment to outstanding levels by:
  - providing stretch and challenge for all learners to improve their performance
  - greater involvement of employers to link theory and practice
  - setting sharp and measurable personal objectives for learners so they know how to improve.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good

- Learners develop good personal, social, vocational and employability skills, which leads to them having a better quality of life, improving their lifestyle and raising aspirations for themselves and their families. Learners gain confidence, make friends and overcome social isolation to improve their mental and emotional wellbeing. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities develop independent living skills and they make useful contributions to their communities through raising money for local charities and promoting local services by distributing leaflets.

- Community learners achieve their personal objectives well. Older learners enjoy watercolour painting and researching the work of artists from around the world. Parents enjoy physical activities such as kickboxing with their children to ensure that their children benefit from an active life. Storytelling and 'Stay, Play and Learn' lessons run with a local children's centre to enable parents to learn and practice skills that prepare their children well for school.

- Most apprentices develop confidence and useful skills that they can easily use in many employment sectors. They progress well in their learning or at work. Most gain permanent employment, promotion or a higher-level apprenticeship. The standard of apprentices' work is high. This helps employers for example, to provide information technology (IT) services to a greater number of businesses and care apprentices to provide better care to nurseries and parents. A minority, improve business efficiency through producing high-standard information and business reports.

- Achievement of apprenticeship framework for most apprentices in the first year has been low, mainly due to the late introduction of the Functional Skills. Managers and tutors have taken effective action to teach Functional Skills alongside the main programme and the service has invested in new resources and staff training. As a result, current apprentices are making good progress and are on track to achieve all aspects of their qualifications within the planned period.

- Success rates for a minority of learners in the subject areas of early years and playwork, health and social care and providing teaching and learning support are high. By achieving additional qualifications such as paediatric first aid, safeguarding, health and safety, and managing positive behaviour, apprentices improve their employability, knowledge and skills to help them provide a better service to the schools, nurseries and adult care.

- Learners develop strong English and mathematics skills. They use the skills well in their daily lives, for example by writing letters, improved budgeting and helping their children with school work, including spelling and simple mathematics. Success rates for army personnel in English and mathematics are very high. Most gain promotion and improve their prospects of employment in civilian life when they leave the army.

- Learners with declared learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve good outcomes and their rates of achievement have increased. Managers and tutors have been effective at identifying and narrowing the achievement gaps through highly effective targeted support. The number of learners from minority ethnic groups is too low for a meaningful comparison of achievement data.

- Although most learners make good progress to achieve their broad personal objectives, tutors do not help learners to be more specific in identifying their objectives. Consequently, it is not always easy for learners to recount their specific achievements. Staff and learners focus strongly on completion of qualifications and do not reflect sufficiently on the wider application of these skills in life and work.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and as a result, learners achieve good outcomes. Staff promote a professional work ethic. As a result, learners attend regularly and punctually, make good use of their time to learn and enjoy their activities.

- Enthusiastic tutors and assessors are experts in their subjects and they are suitably qualified. They plan well-paced lessons with a good range of activities and well-presented materials, to meet closely different learning styles and needs. Tutors provide a good amount of interactive activities to encourage teamwork and engage all learners. They use targeted questions well to check learners' progress and to reinforce their skills and extend their knowledge.

- Tutors are confident users of a good range of information learning technology (ILT) to stimulate learning and encourage learners to develop independent learning. For example, learners on a watercolour course research artists from various countries online to develop their tone and colour techniques, while apprentices frequently use emails to seek advice or feedback on their work from their assessors. Learners with learning difficulties use digital cameras effectively to record their work.

- While most tutors provide a good learning experience for learners, a small minority do not use extension activities to stretch the most able learners. In these lessons, tutors fail to engage shy learners fully to contribute to discussions. In a few instances, tutors and assistants step in too quickly to help learners. As a result, learners do not always receive sufficient time to reflect on their work or complete work on their own, or learn from their mistakes.

- Staff are highly effective at assessment. They identify learners' starting points promptly and monitor their progress with frequent assessment and detailed verbal feedback. Learners are keen to know how well they have developed new knowledge. However, staff are not adept at working with learners to set specific targets against their personal learning objectives. Measuring precise progress against broad objectives becomes difficult. Assessors do not encourage apprentices fully to reflect on the skills they have learnt and to demonstrate their competence.

- Learners benefit from timely and useful feedback from their tutors. This helps them understand what they need to do to improve their work. However, assessors do not routinely seek employers' views on the performance of apprentices in the workplace. This leads to apprentices being insufficiently aware of how they can apply their new skills fully in their current workplace or in different employment sectors.

- Tutors pay good attention to the development of employability and Functional Skills in lessons. Through skilful questioning, tutors take advantage of all opportunities in lessons to reinforce the importance of English and mathematics to check and improve learners' understanding. This helps learners seeking employment prepare better for job interviews and complete well-focused curriculum vitae. However, on vocational courses, tutors do not fully develop learners' mathematical skills.

- Learners receive timely information, impartial advice and highly effective guidance. The comprehensive information helps learners understand the requirements of their chosen career and progression routes available. However, staff do not provide learners with accurate information on the entry criteria, for example on access to nursing courses at local further education providers.

- Learners receive good personal support for their social and emotional needs. For example, those facing challenging personal circumstances improve their confidence by attending lessons and develop effective personal and communication skills to help them cope better in different social settings. Unemployed learners receive highly effective help to adapt or develop their curriculum vitae to complete online job applications and skills checks.

- Tutors promote equality and diversity well in lessons. Learners feel safe in their friendly groups. Tutors carefully set learning activities relating to topical issues and current affairs. As a result, learners broaden their knowledge of the wider world, improve their communication skills or lead lives that are more independent. For example, learners with learning difficulties discussed how safety and relationships could affect teamwork. Staff pay particularly good attention to the health and safety of their learners in the classroom.

Foundation English **Apprenticeships** **Community learning**	Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and lead to good outcomes for learners. Tutors set high standards and have helped learners to have high expectations. Initial assessment is thorough. Tutors use this well to establish learners' starting points and appropriate levels of learning quickly. They plan lessons exceptionally well to support the individual needs of learners.

- Tutors are well qualified and experienced. They use their subject knowledge well to engage learners into learning. The impact of family learning is excellent. Parents at a 'Stay, Play and Learn' session develop self-belief, positive attitudes to learning and high levels of confidence. They play purposefully with their children and understand the language of mathematics by following recipes and measuring quantities of ingredients in cookery lessons. Parents understand and develop pre-reading strategies to improve their children's readiness for school.

- Tutors provide high-level support in good time to help learners develop skills that help them to perform as well as their peers, which helps narrow gaps in achievement. Most individual targets deal with specific elements of language learning, but in a small minority of lessons, tutors do not take full advantage of group learning as most learners are working on their individual targets. Learners do not have sufficient opportunities to learn from each other.

- Assessors seek employers' views on the performance of their apprentices, but they do not plan sufficiently well to include employers' assessments of the standards the apprentices have

reached. Consequently, the apprentices do not receive the full benefits of direct feedback from their employers and fail to appreciate fully the high standards of the work that the employers may expect from them.

▪ Tutors' feedback to learners is purposeful. This supports learners to develop good skills and make good progress. By making frequent references to work based practices, tutors enable apprentices to understand better the impact of clear communication, teamwork and the possible financial implications for missing agreed targets at work.

▪ The development of English and Functional Skills is particularly good. Learners develop skills to help them understand the difference between formal and informal communication and letters for personal and business use. Learners understand fully how persuasive text influences and shapes opinions and beliefs in advertising and debates. By making appropriate use of information technology and other resources, learners reinforce learning in everyday situations.

▪ Information advice and guidance are good. Learners are highly motivated and fully appreciate the importance of English including Functional Skills to their daily life and career progression. For example, military personnel have clear progression in sight such as promotion to higher ranks after achieving qualifications in mathematics and English. Timely support helps learners achieve their qualifications. Staff are particularly sensitive in meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia.

▪ The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff select appropriate equality themes and plan lessons to embed these themes into learning. This enables learners to develop a wider knowledge about diversity in their community. For example, a member of the Chinese community visited a family learning lesson to explain the importance of the New Year celebrations. Learners gained knowledge of how to welcome others using a Chinese greeting. Staff meet appropriately learners' individual needs. Learners consider that staff value them and they respect each other.

Foundation mathematics **Apprenticeships** **Community learning**	Good

▪ Teaching, learning and assessment are good with examples of outstanding teaching and this correlates with the good and improving outcomes for learners. Tutors conduct a thorough initial assessment of the learners and enrol them to the appropriate level and programme. They use assessment information well to inform planning of lessons to meet the individual learners' needs.

▪ Learners are well aware of their starting points and their broad objectives that they record in their individual learning plans regularly to monitor their own progress. However, tutors do not help learners sufficiently to clarify and set specific social and personal learning objectives in their individual learning plans. In the absence of specific personal objectives, it is difficult to measure learners' progress accurately. Individual learning plans have a strong focus on achieving the target qualification and not on consolidation and extension of skills.

▪ Tutors are skilled, experienced and highly ambitious for their learners. They motivate and inspire learners very well. Tutors know their learners well and plan lessons in detail taking full account of their starting points. They stretch and challenge learners using a range of stimulating and interesting learning activities to encourage learners to apply new skills in real life and work situations.

▪ Tutors make good use of skilful questioning to check understanding and encourage learners to reflect on their own skills' development and assess their progress. They encourage learners to work more independently and extend their learning outside of lessons through regularly set

homework and through the internet and other IT resources. Tutors provide additional feedback to support and improve the learners' skills. They assess learners' progress regularly and accurately.

- Learners use a good range of well-designed and well-presented materials to make learning fun and interactive. Tutors use a variety of teaching approaches and pace the lessons well according to the needs of the group. They encourage learners to work closely with their peers, supporting and challenging each other to explore possible hypotheses and become critical thinkers. Learners are inspired, enthusiastic and determined to achieve.

- Learners make good progress in developing their language skills not only using correct mathematical terms but also in using English effectively to understand complex questions, record mathematical information, interpret solutions, research data and to demonstrate their calculations.

- Information, guidance and support are good, with tutors being able to provide learners with links to a range of specialist providers. Learners from the military benefit from the excellent support from specialist staff to enable them to explore promotion and work opportunities in civilian life as a direct result of their achievements in mathematics.

- Tutors promote equality and diversity well within the curriculum. Tutors create a safe and comfortable environment with a culture of respect and inclusion. For example, tutors adjust activities to accommodate a range of health and learning needs such as anxiety and dyslexia.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- Staff and learners share high expectations. Leaders of the service have high ambitions for learners and a clear vision of excellence. Recent improvements and greater involvement of staff in quality improvement have resulted in good outcomes for learners and better teaching, learning and assessment. The vision for the service to meet the needs of the population of the county is clear. Targets for specific courses and groups of learners are also clear and challenging.

- Managers respond to tutors' underperformance robustly and effectively. Leaders and managers have created a positive culture that enables staff to make good use of their qualifications and industrial experience to help learners. Resources for learning are good. Staff training focuses appropriately on improving teaching, learning and assessment.

- Operational management of subject area in all strands of learning is now good. After a slow start to implement an apprenticeship programme, the pace of change has accelerated this year to positive effect. For example, staff made swift and effective changes to increase the very low success rates for the first year of apprenticeships. As a result, current apprentices are making expected, or better than expected, progress. Observations of teaching, learning and assessment are robust and the judgements matched with the inspectors' judgements.

- Self-assessment is not timely and delays the rate and speed of improvements. Managers do not develop the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan until well into the following academic year, making improvements a year late. However, the recent review of the service in April and May 2013 was timely and highly effective.

- Staff use data sufficiently well to manage the provision and identify areas for improvement. Managers are well aware of performance at course and individual learner level.

- Staff are extremely effective at engaging with learners to obtain their views of the quality of provision. Learners respond enthusiastically to the questionnaires. Staff take effective action to deal with issues that learners raise. The engagement with employers requires further development. Staff respond promptly to employers' requests to improve the service. However, employers do not routinely engage in the progress reviews of their apprentices.

- Rutland Adult Learning Service's (RALS) programmes meet the needs of the current learners well particularly of improving English, mathematics and employability skills. Staff prepare lessons to reinforce these skills in most subject areas. However, the promotion of mathematics is not as good as the other subjects. Learners recognise fully the importance of English and mathematics and make good use of these skills to improve their prospects of gaining employment or promotion.

- The service is not meeting the wider learning needs of the local community. For example, the service is aware of the unmet needs in the locality for family learning, ESOL in the local military establishments and provision at satellite centres of the children's centre. However, it has no firm plans to meet them. Senior leaders have not provided leadership to work with other providers of informal adult learning such as the library and museum service. Partnerships with other providers to share good practice or to identify and meet needs are weak.

- Leaders have not ensured that plans for the future of the provision are sound and based on a thorough evaluation of the service's own strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats. Instead, senior managers have instigated reviews in response to managing the funding agency requirements. They have not been proactive in identifying the right priorities and provision for the future of the service. They have prevaricated for far too long. Decision-making is not sufficiently rigorous, transparent or consistent.

- Staff promote equality and diversity extremely well throughout the organisation. Good training of staff underpins their strong awareness of diversity issues. Managers monitor extremely well the impact of their work on equality and diversity, they deal swiftly and effectively with any issues that occur. Learners develop a very good understanding of equality and diversity. They learn about the customs and practices of other cultures and learn a few basic phrases to make others feel at ease.

- Rutland County Council (RCC) meets the statutory requirements for the safeguarding of learners. Learners have a clear understanding of safeguarding issues and are well aware of how to keep safe. RCC follows safe recruitment practices and conduct checks on the suitability of its staff. Staff work well with learners to identify specific risks in lessons and ensure actions are swift and effective. During the inspection, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities worked well with staff to deal with a fire alarm to evacuate in swift and orderly manner.

- Since their move to the new site in February 2011, staff and middle managers have reported an increasing catalogue of problems with health they experience when working at the site. Leaders did not take concerted action until late 2013 when they arranged for investigations of air quality of the environment. The report showed that the air quality was poor. However, leaders have not carried out a full investigation of the environment. They have not explicitly informed the learners about the possible dangers in the environment.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Rutland County Council			

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Foundation English	**2**
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: 153
	Part-time: 1,521
Principal/CEO	Ms Carol Chambers
Date of previous inspection	March 2011
Website address	http://www.rals.org.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	2	N/A	0	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	67	N/A	122	N/A	10	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+
	15	24	6	80	N/A	N/A

Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A
Full-time	N/A
Part-time	N/A
Number of community learners	274
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:	▪ Rutland County College.

Contextual information

Rutland County Council (RCC) is the smallest mainland unitary authority. The Rutland Adult Learning Service (RALS) provides learning on behalf of the County Council. The service provides most of the courses from Catmose College campus at Oakham. It also uses a number of outreach and community venues including primary schools, Ministry of Defence establishments, village centres and libraries to provide learning.

Rutland is a rural county with a population of 37,000 living in rural towns. On the deprivation index, Rutland ranks 148 out of 149 county councils with pockets of relative deprivation. According to the census of 2011, 1.9% of the population were from minority ethnic groups. In December 2013, 0.9% of the working age people were claiming unemployment benefit.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Harmesh Manghra HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the adult learning and quality development 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 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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