

Aspire-i Limited

Independent learning provider

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|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Inspection dates | | 30 June – 4 July 2014 |
| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Requires improvement-3 |
| | Previous inspection: | Requires improvement-3 |
| 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:

- Although improving, the outcomes for learners are not sufficiently high.
- The quality of provision across subcontractors is inconsistent.
- Lessons are not always planned to meet the needs of all learners.
- Learners' targets are not sufficiently specific and measurable.
- The proportion of learners benefiting from work experience opportunities is too variable across the subcontractors.
- The development of learners' English skills is too variable.
- Written feedback on learners' work does not help learners to make rapid progress.
- The use of key performance indicators to performance manage the provision is weak.
- The progress towards completing quality improvement activities is not monitored closely and several recommendations from the previous inspection have not been resolved.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Provision that is focused on providing opportunities for the most disadvantaged and disaffected young people who experience significant barriers to learning.
- Good initial advice and guidance ensuring learners are on the correct programme to meet their needs.
- Swift and effective actions help to re-engage learners who leave.
- Very good pastoral support and effective links with specialist external organisations that help learners overcome significant barriers to their participation and success.
- The collaboration between subcontractors to provide a wide range of vocational options that meets learners' needs.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the development of learners' English skills by embedding them consistently in lessons.
- Improve the quality of written feedback and correction of learners' work, including spelling, punctuation and grammar, by ensuring that staff have the skills and confidence to do this effectively.
- Improve learners' work-readiness by providing all learners with the opportunity to take part in relevant and meaningful work experience.
- Plan lessons to meet individual learners' needs so that they all make good progress.
- Provide learners with specific and measurable targets so that their progress is monitored closely and they know exactly what to do to improve.
- Make better use of information learning technology to engage and interest learners.
- Collate and analyse the outcomes from observation of teaching, learning and assessment to identify the good practice that exists within subcontractors and share this to raise the quality of provision for all learners.
- Increase the clarity of quality improvement plans to include specific targets and milestones so that managers monitor progress effectively, prioritise actions that have the greatest impact on learners and increase the pace of improvement.
- Clearly define and articulate key performance indicators to improve the performance management of delivery staff and subcontractors; robustly monitor and record progress towards their achievement.

Inspection judgements

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| Outcomes for learners | Requires improvement |
|------------------------------|----------------------|

- Over the last three years, a greater proportion of learners have achieved their qualification but the success rate is still not good enough. The performance of subcontractors varies considerably with considerable differences in success rates for different vocational subjects. On hairdressing, beauty therapy and sport courses success rates are high. On health and social care, a concern at the previous inspection, success rates have improved considerably but require further improvement. However, in construction, and hospitality and catering they are poor.
- Retention is the main factor where outcomes are low. Improving attendance and retention has been a key improvement focus during the current year and internal data indicate that the revised processes have been successful in improving learners' attendance and reducing the number who leave.
- Both young men and young women are more successful than the average for similar providers and the gap between their performances has decreased rapidly since 2010/11. Success rates for the two largest cohorts, English and Pakistani, both show a three-year trend of improvement and are above the average for similar providers.
- Learners, many of whom have few previous qualifications and arrive with low confidence and self-esteem, develop good personal, social and employability skills. For example, childcare learners report increased confidence in writing reports and in speaking to colleagues, parents and/or carers. Carpentry learners develop good marking out skills and know how to use hand

tools safely while learners in animal care exhibit higher-level skills in safely handling ducks while checking them for health issues.

- The provision of work experience has improved but the proportion of learners participating is low with too much variation between the subcontractors. Those learners that do undertake work experience benefit from increased work-readiness. For example, learners on food preparation and cooking courses develop good customer service skills, prepare meat and vegetables for the deli bar, and check stock levels in the kitchen to advise the chef about purchasing requirements.
- Most learners begin their programme with low skills in English and mathematics and are lacking in confidence. Learners with the greatest difficulties in English and mathematics successfully develop their skills through short courses where success rates are generally good. For those taking qualifications at levels one and two, the success rates are low. Provider data for the current year do not indicate any improvement for levels one or two and the success rates across subcontractors varies significantly from good to poor.
- Progression rates for learners are increasing with the majority of learners progressing to further education or apprenticeships when they complete their programme and a small but significant number entering employment. However, the rates of progression are too variable across the subcontractors.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies too much between subcontractors as reflected in the significant differences in learners' outcomes. Where learning is effective, lessons meet individual needs well and links between theory and practice are good, supporting relevant practical skills development. Tutors employ effective strategies to check learning, monitor progress and promote independent learning.
- In the less effective lessons, learners do not have relevant individual objectives and tutors do not use a sufficiently wide range of approaches to meet the needs of all learners or encourage them to work at their own pace. Learners become bored and make slower progress when lessons are too long or where a limited range of teaching activities fails to provide adequate stimulus.
- Learning resources are generally good but some accommodation is overcrowded. Most learners have access to information learning technology to support their studies but not all subcontractor staff use technology well, limiting the variety in learning activities and disengaging learners. Too few learners develop their employment-related skills through work placements.
- Pastoral support is very good. Learners across all subcontractors understand what is expected of them and behaviour is good. Ground rules are clear and attendance is monitored closely. Staff understand the barriers their learners face to engaging in education. Their expectations of learners are realistic but sufficiently challenging and motivational. Learners with all subcontractors benefit from good, individual attention from the tutors. However, the learning support offered in lessons is too often unplanned.
- Staff use initial assessment results appropriately to develop individual learning plans; English and mathematics assessments satisfactorily identify development needs. However, many resulting targets are insufficiently specific. In most subcontractors, tutors do not utilise initial assessment results well to plan lessons. Tutors frequently provide generic targets for the whole group, focusing heavily on qualification requirements rather than individual needs.
- Progress reviews vary too much in quality. Where they are completed well, staff appraise learners' progress carefully and evaluate previously agreed targets systematically. In weaker reviews, learners' progress is recorded poorly; targets lack challenge and are not sufficiently specific or measurable. Too many reviews contain spelling, typographical and punctuation errors.

- The standard of assessment is satisfactory. Tutors assess learning in most lessons and learners know what they need to do to improve. However, the range of assessment methods is often narrow. The quality of written feedback consistently requires improvement. Occasionally, learners receive motivating comments but too often tutors do not correct inaccuracies in learners' work or explain what needs to be done to improve their work for resubmission.
- Mathematics teaching is good; learners in most of the subcontractors benefit from interesting tasks, which improve their skills and develop their mathematical vocabulary. Tutors generally promote mathematics effectively within vocational training. For many learners it is the first time they have made any progress in mathematics and can apply these new skills to their everyday life. The development of learners' English skills is too variable. In better lessons, teachers embed English skills effectively; learners understand the importance of these skills to their future employability. However, not all teachers embed English skills systematically in lessons or correct learners' spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors rigorously to help learners understand their mistakes and improve.
- Where staff deliver both English and mathematics lessons too few have the qualifications or experience to deliver both well. Where learners already hold level 2 mathematics and English qualifications, the opportunity to maintain and improve their skills and knowledge are not provided consistently.
- Learners across the subcontractors receive good information, advice and guidance throughout their programmes. Learners have a clear understanding of their career aims and how to achieve them. Work between subcontractors, specialist agencies and employers helps to ensure learners remain motivated and engaged. Useful advice on future options is offered during progress reviews and at the end of learners' programmes.
- Staff understand learners' cultural and religious beliefs well. Most subcontractors translate this into practice, for example through offering prayer rooms during Ramadan. Visual promotion of equality and diversity is consistently good. Learners and tutors respect each other. Induction provides learners with a comprehensive overview of equality and diversity, however, learners do not benefit from reinforcement at their one-to-one reviews.
- Many lesson plans contain generic statements promoting equality in learning; too few staff plan to develop learners' understanding within specific activities, although pockets of good practice exist, it is not shared across the partnership. Most staff do not use naturally occurring opportunities to reinforce learners' understanding in class.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The senior management team has worked well with local enterprise partnerships, employers, regional networks and external advisory bodies to deliver a range of courses that meets the needs of both learners and the local economy. Their ambitious vision in conjunction with their willingness to engage the most disadvantaged learners is having a beneficial influence to the residents of West Yorkshire. However, since their previous inspection, Aspire-i leaders and managers have not made improvements at a sufficient pace to fully resolve all the areas for improvement.
- Governors and managers promote the vision of the provider well and their desire to be an outstanding training provider is evident although the pace of change to achieve this is too slow and the quality of provision and learners' outcomes across the subcontractors is still too variable. Differences in key performance targets set by the provider in management and quality improvement documents provide inconsistent messages to staff and partners.
- Governance is supportive and plans are in place to increase the number of board members to broaden its skills and expertise. They do not receive data in a format to enable them to

challenge senior managers to improve outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- The observation of teaching, learning and assessment is improving through the development and implementation of a more rigorous system, and managers have a more accurate understanding of the quality of lessons being delivered but it is not yet sufficiently embedded to judge its full impact. Inspectors observed too much variation in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the provider and subcontractors.
- The structure of the appraisal and performance management system is satisfactory. Appraisals and quarterly one-to-one meetings set annual staff targets. However, target-setting is not specific enough to allow managers to plan fully improvements within the provider and subsequent monitoring and recording of these targets require improvement.
- The management of subcontracted providers is improving; the proportion of learners being retained on programme and successfully achieving their course is higher. The number of subcontractors has reduced significantly. However, there is still too much variability in the performance of subcontractors and Aspire-i do not effectively target areas for improvement and record these appropriately during the management of subcontractor performance meetings.
- The self-assessment process makes good use of subcontractors' and learners' views and the most recent self-assessment report is mostly accurate in identifying the key strengths and areas for improvement. Quality improvement plans include the main challenges facing Aspire-i but these plans do not make sufficient use of milestones to allow leaders and managers to evaluate progress towards achieving actions. Success measures do not always sufficiently reflect the impact of the improvement on learners' experience.
- Managers have a satisfactory understanding of the study programme as do subcontractors. Planning to enable learners to take GCSE English and mathematics where appropriate has been slow. Managers and staff are working hard to ensure that all learners have access to work experience; despite significant growth in work placements only a minority of learners have participated.
- Aspire-i is a very inclusive organisation where equality and diversity are embedded within its values. They ensure that subcontractors have appropriate policies and procedures in place to support learners. Good use is made of external organisations to provide the specialist help to support the diverse needs of learners. Participation from minority ethnic groups reflects the local population and there are no significant negative variations between the achievements of different groups.
- Managers and staff implement safeguarding policies and procedures well. They have effective systems in place to monitor and record areas of concern and provide appropriate support when issues arise. Two designated safeguarding officers ensure learners' safeguarding needs are met. Aspire-i has a single central register for the recording of Disclosure and Barring Service checks and these are renewed every three years.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Aspire-i Limited

| 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 | N/A | N/A | 3 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Outcomes for learners | 3 | N/A | N/A | 3 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| The quality of teaching, learning and assessment | 3 | N/A | N/A | 3 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management | 3 | N/A | N/A | 3 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

| Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Grade |
|---|-------|
| Employability training | 3 |

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|---|---|-----|-----------------|-----|----------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|--|
| Type of provider | Independent learning provider | | | | | | | | |
| Age range of learners | 16-18 | | | | | | | | |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | 978 | | | | | | | | |
| Principal/CEO | Mrs Caroline Harrison | | | | | | | | |
| Date of previous inspection | January 2013 | | | | | | | | |
| Website address | http://www.aspire-i.com | | | | | | | | |
| 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+ | |
| | 237 | N/A | 59 | N/A | N/A | 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 traineeships | 16-19 | | 19+ | | Total | | | | |
| | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | | | | |
| Number of learners aged 14-16 | N/A | | | | | | | | |
| Full-time | N/A | | | | | | | | |
| Part-time | N/A | | | | | | | | |
| Number of community learners | N/A | | | | | | | | |
| Number of employability learners | N/A | | | | | | | | |
| Funding received from | Education Funding Agency (EFA) | | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accent Regeneration and Community Partnerships ■ Age UK ■ Barnardo's ■ Bradford Foyer ■ Forster Community College ■ Motiv8 ■ Panache Training Academy ■ PRISM ■ Woodspeen | | | | | | | | |

Contextual information

Aspire-i Limited (Aspire-i) is a 'not for profit' organisation and delivers a number of publicly funded contracts. This inspection focused on the study programme. Aspire-i provide the study programme for learners aged 16 to 18 through qualifications in a wide range of vocational subjects, alongside functional skills, and subcontracting most of the provision to nine subcontractors.

Bradford had a population of just over 520,000 in 2011, a figure expected to increase significantly at both ends of the age range. The district has a large and established Asian Pakistani community and a significant number of more recent immigrants from Eastern Europe. The most deprived local authority in West Yorkshire, the population includes a higher proportion of people recorded as economically inactive than for the country as a whole, and an average weekly take-home pay lower than the national average. The proportion of residents with no qualifications is higher than for Yorkshire and Humberside and for England as a whole.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Mike White HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the quality 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 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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