

Bestland Solutions Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		4–7 November 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
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:

- too many learners make slow progress towards achievement
- trainers do not ensure that information, advice and guidance, and induction, enable all learners to fully understand their programme or plan for further learning opportunities
- individual learning plans are not sufficiently focused on developing learners' English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills
- new performance management systems, including those for staff training and development have yet to show beneficial impact for learners
- managers have not yet established systematic long-term quality improvement planning arrangements.

This provider has the following strengths:

- learners develop good vocational skills and knowledge
- the standard of learners' work in their jobs and portfolios is good
- learners receive good workplace coaching and support
- assessment is thorough and tutors provide good oral feedback
- senior managers have a clear vision that all staff understand and commit to well
- managers and trainers promote safeguarding and equality and diversity well.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve initial assessment to ensure that staff collect all relevant information and use it to plan learning better in English, mathematics, ICT, job-related tasks and personal skills. Ensure that all employers are involved fully in meeting individual learners' needs and in induction
- Implement the new performance management systems and use these to monitor better the quality of learners' experience and ensure timely and effective training for staff.
- Develop and implement a quality improvement plan, with clear performance indicators and milestones to drive improvement. Ensure this is sharply focused on the impact on learners.
- Ensure all learners make good progress by continuing further the improvements made in assessment planning.
- Improve the provision of information, advice and guidance at all stages of the learners' journey by providing clearer information on progression routes and additional learning opportunities.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bestland Solutions Limited gained an apprenticeship contract in April 2013, and has rapidly increased the number of learners since. Currently, 273 apprentices are on programme, the majority of who are working towards level 3 qualifications. Approximately one third of all apprentices are in each of the administration and the early years and playwork subject areas, with a further quarter working towards supporting teaching and learning in schools qualifications; the remainder are on the small ICT programme. ▪ Success rates to date are too low for the small number of learners who left within the first year. Too few successfully completed their qualification on time, particularly in business administration where there were most learners. The majority of current learners are now making good progress towards achievement, although a small minority continues to make slow progress across subject areas because of delays in assessment. For example, a small number of ICT learners are making slow progress because their assessors visit them too infrequently in the workplace. ▪ The large majority of learners remain in employment at the end of their apprenticeship, but too few of these learners progress on to higher-level apprenticeships. However, most of those who leave their jobs progress on to further education and training. ▪ Learners make good progress in developing their vocational skills and knowledge. They become more confident at work and improve their performance in their job roles. They learn skills in aspects such as child development, child behaviour, telephone skills, communication with customers, teamwork, as well as ICT skills, for example the use of spreadsheets. ▪ Learners produce a good standard of work for their qualifications, writing good quality and detailed assignments. They demonstrate good initiative in carrying out online research for information to improve their knowledge and understanding of legislation. ▪ Learners make adequate progress in their English, mathematics, and ICT qualifications, which trainers now introduce earlier and more effectively into the programme. Most learners work towards English, mathematics and ICT qualifications at the level based on their prior attainment. However, they do not make sufficient progress in developing specific skills because their areas of need are insufficiently defined at the start of their learning. 	

- Managers effectively collect and analyse data to monitor achievement by age, gender, ethnicity, and learning difficulty and disability. No gaps in achievement exist between the different groups of learners who have completed their learning to date.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The two subject areas inspected are two of the three largest areas by learner number, and reflect the majority of the provision. Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, which is reflected in the slow progress that too many learners have been making in their learning programmes.
- Use of initial assessment to plan learning to meet individual needs requires improvement. Trainers do not use results from diagnostic tests for English and mathematics sufficiently well to identify specific skills development needs. Trainers take care to ensure learners are in a suitable job role for their qualification and level. However, they do not assess and record learners' personal and social skills with sufficient detail to plan learning and measure progress effectively.
- A minority of employers have insufficient involvement in learners' qualifications. In the best examples, employers provide additional training to support the teaching assistants, and frequently attend reviews to discuss their progress. ICT apprentices attend useful workshops at the training centre that are interactive and improve learners' knowledge well. However, poor planning has resulted in learners completing certain modules many months before sitting their tests.
- Trainers focus insufficiently on improving learners' English and mathematics skills, and concentrate instead on preparing learners to achieve their functional skills qualifications. Workshops are now being introduced, but these still focus primarily on preparing learners for tests rather than raising their skills levels.
- Learners benefit from good workplace support from trainers and line managers. Trainers provide good personal support, set high expectations for learners and effectively encourage and motivate them to achieve their qualification. Learners' rates of progress are now good overall, although a small minority of current learners have not achieved their qualification by the date planned.
- Trainers provide effective coaching during workplace visits to support learning. Good discussions take place around a range of topics and learners make good progress in their understanding. Employers provide good on-the-job learning, and experienced colleagues often take an effective mentoring role to support learners.
- Assessment is thorough and robust with detailed and high quality observation reports. Learners produce a good standard of evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Trainers provide good oral feedback so that learners know how they can improve. Short-term action planning for evidence collection is now mostly effective. Questioning techniques are good; trainers check learners' understanding thoroughly, making learners expand upon their answers to become confident in their knowledge. Trainers often use email well to communicate with learners, but they do not always provide enough formal written feedback so that learners have a record to remind them of what they have done well and what they need to do improve.
- Initial information, advice and guidance require improvement. Although improvements are being made to induction, a small minority of learners struggle to recollect their induction information. Initial contact from trainers is, at times, too infrequent to support their initial progress. Good care is taken to ensure learners are on the correct programme and qualification to match their job role, but in a very few instances the job role does not sufficiently match the main qualification aim. An exit interview takes place to evaluate the learning programme and promote progression opportunities. However, managers recognise that this is ineffectively applied in a minority of cases, and that learners do not receive sufficient advice and guidance on progression to further learning opportunities.

- Trainers promote equality and diversity well. In subject areas such as supporting teaching and learning in schools, and early years and playwork, learners produce good pieces of work to meet the requirements of their qualification and develop a good understanding. However, the reinforcement of learners' understanding during trainers' visits and progress reviews requires improvement in a minority of cases. In the majority of instances, trainers lead useful discussions on topics such as barriers encountered by people with disabilities. However, other trainers in the minority, use closed, rather than exploratory, questioning which does not check learners' understanding effectively.

Training to provide learning support

Requires improvement

Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, which is reflected in the small number of learners who have so far achieved their qualification within the planned time. Over the past year, however, managers have introduced a number of improvements to raise standards. As a result, learners are now making good progress. Trainers monitor their progress weekly to ensure that no learners are at risk of failing to complete their courses on time.
- Initial assessment has not been effective in informing plans to meet individual learning needs and requires improvement. Where a need for support is identified, action plans are drawn up, but these consist mainly of completing practice papers for functional skills. Trainers do not sufficiently track individual aspects of mathematics and English that require improvement over the course of the qualification. Learners in possession of grades that exempt them from functional skills do not receive sufficient encouragement to develop skills at a higher level. However, workshops for all three functional skills are now in place for learners, and are helping them to make good progress with their functional skills. In one case the trainer visited the learner weekly to assist with ICT which the learner was finding particularly difficult. Another trainer is arranging for learners to take tests on a Saturday to avoid conflict with domestic commitments.
- Learners develop skills which are particularly useful in their workplaces. For example communications, ICT, research and independent learning are invaluable in dealing with the practice and theory of support in the classroom. Learners have a good standard of work in their portfolios, with particularly good reflective accounts of their learning. Learners research very well to give good quality presentations for their English functional skills. The further development of their communication skills enables learners to develop their abilities to contribute to group discussions.
- Learners benefit from good assessment practice. Trainers have high expectations and use skilful questioning to allow apprentices to demonstrate and extend their knowledge. Detailed feedback informs learners of what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Where appropriate, trainers use electronic feedback well so that learners can reflect on their learning more effectively. Trainers frequently bring in additional material to encourage reflection. For example, one trainer issues learners with current findings on protecting children while discussing their duty of care.
- Trainers do not provide initial advice and guidance sufficiently well to inform learners of the best choice of programme or progression routes. For example, one learner who already has level 3 qualifications is on a level 2 programme. Trainers do not sufficiently signpost learners to progression routes after completion of their qualification. Induction is too short to allow learners to assimilate all the information given to them. Some learners do not have a sufficient understanding of all aspects of their apprenticeship. Managers have recently improved the induction content and approach, but it is too early to judge the impact of the changes.

- Trainers set clear specific targets during quarterly reviews of learners' progress to extend their knowledge further. For example, one apprentice was set the target of explaining how to assess and manage risks both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Learners benefit from effective support from both employers and trainers. Shadowing and discussions with members of staff on matters such as risk assessment and managing challenging behaviour encourage learners to extend their learning. Schools offer learners training for safeguarding, inclusion, and the promotion of equality and diversity. One school, where the teaching assistant has taken on the supervision of playtime activities, has brought in a qualified physical education teacher one day a week to support and develop the learner.
- Trainers promote learners' understanding of equality and diversity effectively, with a particular emphasis on diversity. For example, in one school, the teaching assistant helped with examining cultural practices in two different countries as well as teaching the children to say 'hello' and 'goodbye' in different languages. Trainers test learners' understanding of equality and diversity matters during reviews well. For example, a trainer asked one learner to explain how she explained to children that some did not attend school assembly for religious reasons. One trainer is using cultural developments in China to discuss gender issues.
- Learners have a good working knowledge of safeguarding and feel safe in their workplace. One school has included the learner in safeguarding training for governors and for staff so that she understands it from multiple points of view.

Administration

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, as demonstrated in the low outcomes for learners. However, learners currently on programme are making good progress and the large majority are on target to complete their apprenticeship programmes on time.
- Trainers have high expectations for all learners, motivate them well, and provide good support to help them complete their courses and secure permanent employment. Learners enjoy their studies and appreciate the additional care and support they receive from tutors.
- Planning for learning requires improvement. Trainers do not use their skills and experience well enough when they plan learning and assessment activities to stimulate learners' interest and meet their individual needs in the workplace. A minority of trainers do not plan enough learning activities that encourage the development of learners' personal, learning and thinking skills as part of their programmes. Trainers do not always plan learners' programmes in partnership with employers to set tasks relating to the learner's job. This demotivates learners and they do not make sufficient progress in their learning. Where planning is more effective, trainers link aspects of the learners' qualifications to tasks undertaken in their job roles. For example, one learner produced a feedback form to use with customers in an information technology supplies company and resulted in its adoption for routine use by the employer.
- Trainers provide effective coaching in the workplace, helping to improve learners' job skills and meeting employers' needs well. Learners grow in confidence, develop good vocational skills, and enjoy their learning. Learners present their work well and to a good standard, clearly taking pride in what they produce. Trainers assess learning effectively, making good use of questioning techniques and extending learners' existing knowledge well. For example, trainers give learners tasks using the internet to research topics related to their job. However, a small minority of trainers fail to use these techniques frequently enough to assess all learners' progress and learning. Trainers give clear and helpful verbal feedback to learners, but do not record sufficient written feedback for learners in their assessed work so that they are able to understand what they need to do to improve.

- Arrangements for the assessment of English and mathematics skills require improvement because learners do not always received a suitable initial and diagnostic assessment. Trainers do not assess learners' English or mathematics levels where they have already achieved the desired level of qualification for their apprenticeship framework. Trainers are not then able to identify areas where learners can improve their skills. Newly introduced workshops now allow learners to develop skills in English, mathematics and ICT but it is too early to assess the full impact of these.
- Productive relationships between trainers and employers ensure that everyone is involved in learners' reviews to ensure that they are all up-to-date with learners' progress. However, the reviews are not always sufficiently thorough to monitor their progress in their job role as well as their qualification, and on occasion, reviews take place in venues that lack the privacy needed to discuss learners' progress confidentially.
- The use of information and learning technology and other learning resources requires improvement. The majority of trainers encourage learners to use their work computers and online resources effectively to extend and develop their knowledge. For example, one learner demonstrated how she had developed her own filing system for her course work and had researched hyperlinks to access information quickly. However, trainers on a minority of occasions miss opportunities to use information and learning technology resources to develop learners' ICT skills further. Clear and well-presented printed resources provide a good structure for learners' portfolios.
- Recruitment, induction, advice and guidance require improvement to meet the needs of learners. Trainers provide good support through which learners can explore and discuss apprenticeship opportunities and prepare them well for interviews. However, they do not always contact new learners quickly enough once they have started their programmes, and there is a delay in starting learning in the workplace. Induction is very paper based and involves filling in forms rather than preparing learners for the workplace.
- Learners' understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding is good. Trainers reinforce equality and diversity well in coaching sessions. One learner was able to recognise examples of indirect discrimination in the workplace confidently. Safeguarding arrangements are good and trainers extend learners' knowledge in the workplace using examples in the employers' staff-welfare policies.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement, as reflected in outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Bestland Solutions Limited has been through a period of significant upheaval because of staffing difficulties. Despite recent changes in senior management and restructuring, staff remain enthusiastic and have high expectations of learners, who they support well. Leaders provide an ambitious vision and a strong commitment to sustained improvement; they make frequent, supportive visits across regions.
- Strategic planning requires improvement because managers have yet to establish a sufficiently clear range of key performance indicators to measure, for example, success rates and the effectiveness of the provision. The organisational structure now provides clearer roles and lines of accountability, including responsibilities for robust monitoring of learners at risk of not finishing their studies on time. Leaders have recently begun to place greater emphasis on the evaluation and monitoring of quality and performance.
- Performance management has improved and is now good. Managers are effective in using appropriate procedures for tackling under-performance. Managers and trainers now monitor learners' progress more effectively during their recently re-introduced monthly one-to-one meetings. Standardisation meetings are starting to improve the sharing of better practices.

- Self-assessment is reflective, honest, and clearly identifies most aspects for improvement. Managers make good use of the available data to analyse the performance of each programme and region. However, they have not yet completed the quality improvement plan to set clear improvement goals and timescales. They do not yet collect and use the views of their learners and employers sufficiently to review and plan programmes.
- Staff development requires improvement. Managers do not yet sufficiently facilitate the sharing of good practice between staff and across centres. For example, staff do not yet use the intranet enough to share materials and practices. Managers have not yet taken sufficient action to ensure trainers enhance their own skills and confidence in developing their learners' functional skills.
- Arrangements for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment now cover most aspects of the learners' experience. Observation records usually provide sufficient evidence to support the grade. Although action plans following the observations now link to suitable professional training and development, the quality of action planning with trainers requires improvement. Teaching, learning and assessment are not yet consistently good across all regions and vocational areas.
- Staff are experienced in coaching and assessing learners in the workplace and are generally well qualified for their roles. The majority are now starting external courses to update their qualifications, knowledge and practice. Leaders are now more effective in developing the management skills of those colleagues newly in post and in keeping closer checks on performance.
- Leaders and managers have successfully planned and established a curriculum that meets the needs of learners and the local community. For example, in a school, because of the success of one apprentice as a teaching assistant, other school support workers are now undertaking the same qualification. Managers carefully match candidates to suitable apprenticeship vacancies that provide good opportunities to extend learners' skills and knowledge.
- Managers and staff actively promote equality and diversity. All staff complete training in equality and diversity and are expected to update their knowledge. As a result, staff and learners understand their roles and responsibilities well. For example, on teaching assistant and childcare programmes, learners research their employers' policies and are suitably challenged to reflect on practice when working with children with special educational needs. The provider has been successful in recruiting more female candidates to ICT provision and more male learners on to childcare and teaching assistants' programmes.
- Safeguarding is good. Managers and staff promote safety and welfare effectively and learners feel safe and secure on the premises and at work. Staff receive good training to recognise and respond to any incidents. The designated safeguarding officer has received relevant training for the role and the two regional managers are now on a level 3 safeguarding training course. Managers have productive links with specialist support agencies and work with them well to help young learners with complex needs enter and complete their apprenticeships. For example, despite low confidence and self-esteem, young learners with mental health or housing difficulties successfully complete their qualifications and continue to work with employers after the end of their apprenticeships. Risk assessments carried out in the workplace are timely but do not sufficiently pay attention to safe use of the internet.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Bestland Solutions 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	-	-	-	-	-	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
Training to provider learning support	3
Administration	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16-18 , 19+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full time: 0							
	Part time: 273							
Principal/CEO	CEO Mr Jeremy Gilbert							
Date of previous inspection	No previous inspection							
Website address	www.tasgroup.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+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	73	37	75	88	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
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:	None							

Contextual Information

Bestland Solutions Limited, which operates under the name Training Associates, is an independent learning provider delivering apprenticeships to all age groups and classroom learning to unemployed adult learners. Founded in 2003, the company began as a subcontractor to Learndirect, providing classroom based learning in Southampton. Following expansion, the company now operates seven learning centres across Hampshire, Sussex, London, and Milton Keynes and employs 102 members of staff.

The company began to offer apprenticeships in 2011 as a subcontractor and obtained a direct contract with the Skills Funding Agency in April 2013. The principle apprenticeship frameworks delivered, both at intermediate and advanced levels, are administration, supporting teaching and learning in schools, early years and playwork and information and communication technology.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Gary Adkins
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One lead inspector and three 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 past 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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