Worcestershire County Council

Local authority

Inspection dates		02 – 05 December 2014
Overall effectiveness	**This inspection:**	**Requires improvement-3**
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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 few learners aged 16 to 18 complete and achieve their qualifications, and too few progress to further education, training or employment

- individual targets for learners are not consistently of a high enough standard to help learners to make rapid progress

- the support for learners aged 16 to 18 is not sufficient to prevent many from leaving their course early

- council managers do not rigorously monitor the quality of courses provided by subcontractors, or set sufficiently high expectations for subcontractors, to reduce the proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 who do not complete their course

- managers and staff have not taken opportunities to share good practice across provision for adults and learners aged 16 to 18

- the council does not sufficiently evaluate the quality of provision and, for 16-to-18 provision, significantly overstates learners' achievements; senior leaders in the council do not sufficiently scrutinise or challenge managers' evaluation.

This provider has the following strengths:

- a high proportion of adult learners achieve their qualification or learning aim

- staff in the adult learning service identify local priorities for education and training well and ensure that courses help learners improve their personal skills and the skills they need to gain employment or to do their job better

- learners aged 16 to 18 gain an important insight into work as a result of the work experience that is built into their study programmes and traineeships

- learners with a wide range of abilities and experiences learn well together as a result of their tutors' high expectations and careful planning.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standards of teaching, learning and assessment in the programmes of study for learners aged 16 to 18 through more perceptive identification of weaknesses, robust actions to tackle these, and regular reviews of the impact of these actions.

- Strengthen the quality of individual and personal targets that tutors set for learners by defining a clear procedure, giving tutors models of good practice, training tutors and encouraging tutors to share their ideas and good practice.

- Plan learning programmes and lessons that enable individual learners, with different needs and abilities, to acquire relevant skills and knowledge in lessons and over time.

- Ensure that tutors, managers and support staff quickly identify when learners are at risk of leaving their course and take swift action to ensure fewer learners leave their course early.

- Improve the management of subcontracted provision for learners aged 16 to 18 by being more explicit about the council's expectations relating to the following: learners' outcomes; initial assessment; advice and guidance about progression; reporting on causes for concern; standards of teaching and learning; progression into employment, further education and training; and actions to improve provision.

- Monitor more closely the quality of provision for learners aged 16 to 18 in subcontractors by tracking each subcontractor's progress in meeting the council's expectations. Identify and share good practice across the two services that manage provision for adults and younger learners and tackle common challenges collaboratively. Use the experience and expertise in the adult learning service to improve the provision for learners aged 16 to 18.

- Ensure that the quality assurance processes are aligned with the production of annual self-assessment reports; all subcontractors should contribute fully to the council's self-assessment; all parties should act decisively to ensure improvements are made, and senior council leaders should scrutinise and challenge the judgements and evidence.

- Improve data management by making sure that data tools are clearly focused on the needs of managers so that, at every level, they can manage better the provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement

- Worcestershire County Council provides courses for over 3,000 adults in over 100 centres through its library and learning service. Most of these learners are on non-accredited, community courses. An increasing number of learners on accredited courses are taking English and mathematics qualifications. Approximately 300 learners aged 16 to 18 are on study programmes, mostly at level 1, managed by the council's directorate of children's services and delivered by nine subcontractors. A small number of learners are on traineeships.

- Outcomes for learners require improvement because the extent to which different groups of learners achieve is too variable. The proportion of adults achieving their qualification or learning aim is high but has fallen slightly in 2013/14 as a result of fewer learners staying until the end of their course. A very high proportion of those that stay to the end of the course achieve their qualifications or learning aims. More learners studying courses in health and care, information and communication technology (ICT), hospitality and catering and preparation for life and work achieve their qualification than in previous years.

- A majority of the learners aged 16 to 18 who start a study programme do not remain on their course until the end. Most of those who withdraw from their course do not move into an apprenticeship or employment with training.

- Adults are considerably more successful at completing and achieving their functional skills qualifications than younger learners and most complete and achieve. The proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 successfully completing their functional skill qualifications in English and mathematics is very low.

- Courses for adults are well designed to help learners develop skills they can use in their workplace and personal lives. Staff in the adult learning service astutely identify the skills that local people need and ensure appropriate courses are available for them. Adult learners are increasingly making good use of the support from tutors, library staff and web-based resources to search, apply for and secure employment. Adult learners develop their confidence well. For example, adult learners attending family learning courses develop the skills and confidence to help their children with their school work, and employed learners develop the computing skills they need in the workplace.

- Work experience is incorporated well into programmes for learners aged 16 to 18 and they have a good range of opportunities to learn and practise skills that will help them when they gain employment. For example, a group of level 1 hairdressing learners provide a salon open day in their training room to develop their customer service skills before starting a work experience placement in local hair and beauty salons. Work placements for learners on traineeships are well planned, and learners develop skills that prepare them well for employment. Employers who provide work placements for traineeships are positive about the learners' skills and attitudes to work; early in 2014/15 two employers offered learners jobs as a result of their placement and a further two learners were offered apprenticeships.

- The collection of information about learners' destinations is comprehensive for learners aged 16 to 18. However, managers do not use data sufficiently to improve the quality of the courses and to ensure more learners successfully complete their course and progress into employment or further training. One third of those who start a course do not progress into education, employment or training when they complete their course.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment in adult and community learning programmes are good but require improvement in the study programme for learners aged 16 to 18. This reflects learners' successful achievements in the adult provision and the low proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 who achieve a successful outcome.

- Where provision is good, staff are enthusiastic, have high expectations for learners and set work for them that enables them to fulfil their potential. As a result of their tutors' support, learners are highly motivated, enjoy their learning and make good progress in developing skills and confidence. In the weaker parts of the provision, tutors do not motivate learners well, learners make little progress, attendance is poor and learners leave the programme early.

- In the better provision, tutors quickly get to know learners and are aware of their individual needs, recognising, for example, when learners' confidence or employability skills require development. Tutors plan a wide range of tasks that are appropriate for each individual's level of knowledge and skills. Learners receive good support from staff and employers on the traineeship programme for learners aged 16 to 18.

- In weaker parts of the provision, and particularly in parts of the study programme for learners aged 16 to 18, staff do not provide sufficient support to prevent learners from leaving the programme without achievements or positive destinations. Attendance by learners aged 16 to

18 is low, although, in the early part of 2014/15, many learners attend more regularly than learners in previous years.

- Where learning is least successful, tutors do not plan effectively for the very wide range of abilities of their learners. The work is either too easy for the most able or too hard for the least able; as a result, a small number of learners are not sufficiently motivated to complete tasks.

- Adult learners on community learning courses gain skills and confidence through participating in innovative learning experiences. For example, a group of learners improved their health and well-being through a series of outdoor activities. In another example, adult learners worked collaboratively on a local history project involving research skills and problem solving that developed their confidence to take part in teamwork.

- Staff create welcoming and safe learning environments in a wide range of community settings where learners feel confident to learn. One particularly vibrant centre, the Fairfield Centre, is very well resourced and much appreciated by learners. Across the provision a very small minority of settings are not conducive to learning, lack resources or are under-used.

- Most staff use information about learners' skills and knowledge well to identify the most appropriate course and support for individuals. However, in too many cases, staff do not set sufficiently detailed, short-term targets to help learners work successfully towards their longer-term objectives. In previous years, too many learners aged 16 to 18 were not placed on suitable learning programmes.

- Staff have frequent and useful discussions with learners about their completed work and performance. However, written feedback to learners often provides too little information for learners about how to improve their work. In a small minority of cases learners aged 16 to 18 do not receive sufficient or timely feedback and completed work is not marked.

- Most staff promote mathematics well to ensure learners develop skills they can apply in all aspects of their lives. However, not all staff develop learners' English skills. In a minority of cases staff do not correct spelling and grammar sufficiently in learners' work or provide sufficient opportunities for them to improve their vocabulary appropriate to their main area of learning.

- Information, advice and guidance are good in adult and community learning programmes with timely and appropriate information to guide learners' choice of course and progression to other learning or employment. Managers have taken action to improve information, advice and guidance for learners aged 16 to 18, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of this.

- Learners are respectful and supportive of each other and staff are sensitive to learners' individual needs; they create an environment of trust to support good learning. In a small minority of courses, tutors do not plan activities or topics to promote unequivocally equality and diversity.

Foundation English **16-19 study programmes** **19+ Learning programmes**	Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement as reflected in the high proportion of learners who do not achieve their qualification, particularly those aged 16 to 18.

- Most tutors identify accurately learners' skills and knowledge at the start of their course and use this information to place them on a course at the appropriate level. However, tutors do not always set targets based on this information, or encourage learners to set targets that relate to their aspirations for gaining employment.

- Many learners' targets are not sufficiently specific and form an unsubstantial base for tutors to plan lessons. As a result, tutors do not consistently plan activities that help learners gain the skills and knowledge they need. Tutors do not routinely review and record learners' progress towards achieving their targets. As a result, too many learners are not aware of the progress they have made, and what they still need to achieve to meet their individual targets.

- Most tutors demonstrate their high expectations of learners by setting challenging tasks that enable learners to develop and apply their English skills well. For example, in one session, the tutor successfully encouraged learners to manage their own group discussion about a current news topic, enabling them to develop their speaking and listening skills, and to respect different opinions. In another session, a small group of parents developed their own reading skills well, increasing their confidence and ability to support their children in learning to read. However, in a very small minority of sessions, tutors set work that is too difficult for many learners in the class.

- Tutors praise learners well for their achievements during sessions. However, written feedback is insufficiently detailed. Although most tutors routinely mark learners' work, they do not sufficiently correct learners' spelling and grammatical errors, or provide comments that identify specific areas for improvement. As a result, too many learners do not know what they need to do to improve the quality of their written work.

- Learners benefit from good opportunities to develop their information technology skills during sessions. A group of adult learners have learned keyboard skills and how to use presentation software. As a result, they are able to apply these skills in completing job applications and during job interviews.

- Information, advice and guidance require improvement for learners aged 16 to 18. These learners do not receive sufficient information, advice and guidance during their study programmes to enable enough of them to progress to further education and training or employment. Staff routinely provide adult learners with information, advice and guidance about opportunities to progress to further education and training. However, a few adult learners do not receive sufficient information, advice and guidance about further learning opportunities early enough.

- Tutors promote equality and diversity well. Learners demonstrate high levels of mutual respect for each other's cultural backgrounds and religious traditions during sessions. For example, in one session, learners had an informative discussion about the different ways in which they celebrate religious festivals such as Eid and Christmas. The majority of tutors routinely embed equality and diversity in their sessions. For example, in a session in which learners were writing letters of complaint, the tutor successfully encouraged them to make reference to the needs of disabled people when visiting different premises.

Foundation mathematics **16-19 study programmes** **19+ Learning programmes**	Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good leading to learners producing work that is mostly of a high standard; the majority of learners who complete their course achieve their qualification. However, too many learners leave before they have finished their course.

- Learners make good progress during sessions, developing their mathematics skills and levels of confidence in using mathematics to solve problems. The skills they develop increase learners' opportunities for gaining employment. Learners who are already employed can explain how they apply the mathematics they have learned in their work. Adults are particularly positive about how they are now able to help children and grandchildren with their education. Learners feel pride in their achievements and gain a great deal of personal satisfaction from their learning.

- Tutors support learners very well in lessons. In small classes they use the time well to provide effective individual activities and guidance to learners. Tutors identify and record learners' particular support needs well and use this information very effectively to plan resources, questioning and activities. Tutors make good arrangements for learners to catch up if they miss sessions and make sure they have all the learning materials required for independent study. Learners practise applying their emerging knowledge and understanding well by completing homework diligently.

- Learners demonstrate high levels of motivation and work hard to complete their work to a high standard. Tutors very effectively inspire and challenge learners to achieve their potential. The council provides very good opportunities for learners to attend a short taster course which has led to many progressing to a mathematics qualification.

- Learners prepare well for their examinations by practising questions frequently and gain a good understanding of how to apply their knowledge to mathematical problems in examinations. However, this is sometimes at the expense of spending time developing their deeper understanding of the principles and rules of mathematics. For example, learners do not have enough opportunities to use resources that they can manipulate and visualise to get a better grasp of a particular concept.

- Tutors are very welcoming and ensure that all learners feel comfortable and confident to attend and take part in lessons, to ask questions and to learn from their mistakes. Tutors ensure learners with disabilities have the equipment they need to take a full part in sessions. However, tutors do not plan to promote diversity sufficiently in sessions and so activities do not extend learners' appreciation of diversity.

- Tutors assess learners' starting points effectively and also identify well the areas of mathematics where learners need to acquire more knowledge and skills. Learners have the appropriate targets to ensure this happens and they make progress in their weaker areas. However, the quality of the targets tutors set varies in precision, so that not all learners are able to reflect on how well their new skills help them in their personal lives and at work.

- Most learners are very clear about how they need to improve as a result of the comments tutors make during class and after they have completed homework. Tutors provide very clear information to learners at the beginning of their course to ensure they know the skills and knowledge they need to acquire.

- Learners develop their English skills alongside their mathematics well. Tutors highlight spelling and pronunciation of difficult words so learners feel confident using different mathematical terminology. Where learners use computers in their mathematics lessons they also develop good computer skills.

- Learners make good use of the council website, library facilities and their tutor for information about progression routes. Tutors effectively guide learners towards help and support when required. Learners have access to a good range of written information about courses available.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- The leadership and management of the adult learning are good, but for learners aged 16 to 18 significant aspects of leadership and management require improvement and some are inadequate. The team managing the provision for adults is highly effective, as a result of working collaboratively, and ably support the adult learning manager. Senior managers are not sufficiently aware of the quality of provision for young people in the companies subcontracted by the council and do not adequately challenge these companies to raise the standard of their provision.

- Heads of service and elected members strongly support the provision and provide good strategic leadership. They receive regular reports on the provision and they mostly act authoritatively when appropriate. For example, the council took decisive action to cancel the contract for a subcontractor of provision for learners aged 16 to 18 as a result of poor performance. However, their governance role in evaluating the quality of provision is not effective and other subcontractors, that have not provided courses of high enough quality, have not been sufficiently challenged to improve.

- Managers use the adult budget very effectively to maximise learning opportunities. The highly effective integration of the library and adult learning services has contributed significantly to the continuance of government-funded provision for adults. The council's ambition to expand adult learning is clearly evident in the continued growth of community and family learning and establishment of the Community Learning Trust.

- Quality assurance arrangements for adult provision are mostly well developed and understood by staff. The collection of learners' views is routine and the results used effectively. A well-established review process that operates throughout the year supports early actions for improvement. Managers monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment closely; informal and formal observations, as well as specific training, are routine.

- For provision for learners aged 16 to 18 the council relies too heavily on subcontractors' own views about the standards they achieve. Bi-monthly meetings are not rigorous enough to identify or challenge emerging concerns. However, subcontractors are very positive about the support they receive from council staff if they need practical advice or help.

- Managers appraise adult learning staff appropriately and good performance management arrangements are in place. In addition, at least one member of staff at each library is teacher-trained, and closely monitors the performance of part-time tutors.

- Accommodation and resources for learners are constantly under review and improving, for example, by creating new learning rooms in libraries with laptops and notebooks. One subcontractor recently moved premises so that learners aged 16 to 18 now benefit from a well-equipped and stimulating learning environment.

- Annual self-assessment reports available at the time of inspection, are too descriptive and lack evidence to support judgements. The adult learning self-assessment report is more robust, but the analysis of outcomes for learners and leadership and management require improvement. The self-assessment report for provision for learners aged 16 to 18 significantly overstates learners' outcomes and does not provide sufficient analysis of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Leaders and managers have not explored opportunities to tackle common challenges and to share good practice and resources across the two provision types. Collaborative working in adult learning is good and in 16-to-18 provision examples are beginning to emerge. The subcontractor steering group that meets every two weeks is proving effective at improving these opportunities.

- Data and management systems are good for 16-to-18 provision. However, managers do not use all the available data on learners to hold subcontractors to account for the quality of their provision during regular monitoring meetings. While the data systems for adults have been poor, there are signs of significant improvement. However, improvements in the production of accurate data remain slow.

- Adult and traineeship programmes are carefully designed and responsive to community need. Many focus well on identified areas of deprivation including young people not in employment, education or training. Collaboration with external partners is good and the foundation and traineeship provision meets the aspirations of Local Enterprise Partnerships.

- Most learners aged 16 to 18 following study programmes attend useful work experience; staff and employers effectively reinforce the importance of improving a broad range of life skills, such as communication skills and punctuality. Staff routinely emphasise the importance of improving English and mathematics skills to learners, but examination results are poor. In adult learning,

the proportion of adults studying functional skills is increasing as the council increases its efforts to improve the mathematics and literacy skills of the population.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is good for all age groups and types of provision. Staff receive compulsory training, and staff mostly promote equality and diversity well in the classroom. Teachers promote tolerance and respect, and issues of bullying and harassment are dealt with appropriately. Throughout the year, libraries regularly have displays and events that support a wide range of equality and diversity themes.

- Safeguarding is good and promoted well. Students feel physically and emotionally safe, and arrangements for keeping them safe are good. During learners' induction there is a strong emphasis on safeguarding. Staff receive compulsory training and learners know who to approach if an issue arises. Disclosures are few but dealt with appropriately, including the maintenance of registers and appropriate checks on staff.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Worcestershire County Council									
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			4	3	2			2
Outcomes for learners	3			4	3	3			2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3			3	3	2			2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3			4	3	2			2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Foundation English	**3**
Foundation mathematics	**2**

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,385
Principal/CEO	Mr Colin Barnett
Date of previous inspection	23 December 2011
Website address	www.worcestershire.gov.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	**Level 1 or below**		**Level 2**		**Level 3**		**Level 4 and above**	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	121	778	0	33	0	12	0	2
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**			
	29		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14-16	13							
Full-time	13							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	2,252							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	- Archway Academy - Barnardos - Homestart Community House - Vestia Community - Workingrite - Youth Development College.							

Contextual information

Worcestershire has a large rural population although approximately half live in urban centres. Unemployment is lower than the national rate and a higher proportion of the population is economically active than the national rate. In 2012, some 60% of 16 year olds gained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above compared to a national rate of 59%. The proportion of the population with no qualifications is slightly higher than the national rate of 9%.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Steven Tucker HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three 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, 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

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk

Employer View is a new website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too.

To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.