

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited

Independent learning provider

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|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Inspection dates | | 2 – 4 December 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:

- improvement actions have not had sufficient impact on learners' achievement of qualifications
- in lessons, tutors occupy learners with activities that are not always linked well to learning outcomes and fail to challenge the more able learners
- learners do not develop their English and mathematics skills well enough
- tutors do not mark learners' written work promptly or provide sufficiently detailed and helpful feedback
- quality assurance processes are not effective in ensuring that all staff meet the high standards required of them.

This provider has the following strengths:

- good personal support for disadvantaged learners, many of whom have significant barriers to learning and personal difficulties
- learners develop their confidence, communication and social skills very effectively
- well-chosen work placements help learners to develop their employability skills
- the standard of learners' practical hairdressing skills is high
- managers have increased considerably the proportion of learners who progress into further learning or employment upon leaving the programme
- careful selection of courses offered to meet the needs of local employers and maximise employment opportunities.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who achieve their intended qualifications by continuing to monitor closely the progress of learners and take swift action to support those at risk of leaving the programme early. Improve target setting during progress reviews so that learners are challenged.
- Make learning more effective in lessons by
 - ensuring that tutors set clear and suitable objectives for what learners are to achieve
 - tailoring tasks for individuals according to their abilities and prior knowledge so that all learners are appropriately challenged
 - checking learners' understanding more frequently and thoroughly
 - ensuring that learners are aware of the relevance of what they are doing and how to apply the learning in their everyday and working lives.
- Improve English and mathematics lessons by further developing the skills of staff and their knowledge of the qualification requirements. Include learners' development of English and maths as part of the lesson observation process.
- Ensure that tutors mark learners' written work promptly and provide sufficiently detailed and helpful feedback. As well as commenting on the efforts of learners, tutors should mark answers in detail and provide learners with clear guidance on strategies that will help them to improve their work.
- Implement quality assurance processes to monitor the work of staff. Improve the rigour of the lesson observation process and implement sharply-focused action plans for improvement.

Inspection judgements

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

- Two thirds of learners are undertaking hairdressing qualifications. The remaining learners are on business administration, customer service, information and communication technology (ICT) or employability programmes. Learners work towards functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics if they do not already hold GCSEs at grade C or above in these subjects.
- Most qualification success rates are low and below national rates. The provider's own data for 2013/14 show improvement in some subjects, including functional skills English and mathematics, which were above the national rates. However success rates in hairdressing, which is the largest vocational programme, were low due to learners leaving their programme early. Few learners have left their programmes early so far in the current year.
- Learners' attendance requires improvement. Staff record and monitor attendance effectively and follow up absences promptly, including attendance at work placements. However, information on learners' attendance is not used sufficiently well to set specific targets for improvement at progress reviews.
- Managers analyse data on learners' achievements and have identified that there are no significant variations in the performance of different groups of learners.
- Learners develop their personal, social and employability skills well, both in the training centre and at their work placements. Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited (STS) has increased the provision of work experience for learners, as recommended in the previous inspection report. Employers are very supportive and gradually introduce learners to situations and tasks that develop their confidence, communication skills and work behaviour.

Communication between STS and employers is frequent and effective in fostering good links between what learners do on placement and in the training centre.

- The standard of learners' practical hairdressing skills is high. The salon is suitably equipped and provides a positive learning environment. Members of the public use the salon, providing learners with valuable experience of working with paying clients in a supported environment. Their practical skills are of real value to their work placement providers, and several learners have been asked to spend more time in the workplace in the busy weeks before Christmas.
- Learners' progress in developing their knowledge and skills in classroom-based lessons is too slow. In functional skills and business administration, learners are making insufficient progress.
- The proportion of learners who have progressed into jobs or further learning upon leaving the programme has risen sharply in the last two years but requires further improvement. In 2013/14 just over half of leavers progressed positively with the majority moving into employment, including apprenticeships. An additional two learners moved from living in care settings to living independently.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement, as reflected in the low qualification success rates and the slow progress of learners in functional skills and business administration. In recent months staff turnover and absence in the small team has impeded managers' progress in raising quality.
- STS provides very good personal support for learners and this helps to retain them on the study programme. Tutors know their learners and their personal circumstances very well and provide specific support to help them overcome the often considerable difficulties in their lives. STS liaises well with external support agencies to tailor the learning programmes to accommodate their personal and domestic circumstances.
- Tutors are effective at managing the challenging behaviour of learners well during lessons and throughout the training centre, including those who have autistic spectrum and attention deficit disorders. Tutors help learners to develop the mature attitudes and behaviours expected of them in the workplace. Tutors treat learners respectfully and sensitively. Learners appreciate the relaxed atmosphere in the training centre and its contrast with their previous experience at school. Learners enjoy the programme and talk positively about the difference it has made to their lives.
- In too many lessons, learning is insufficient. Tutors focus on keeping learners engaged in activities, without placing sufficient priority on what they are learning or why. Tutors expect learners to remember facts without providing them with strategies to help their recall or develop their understanding. For example, in ICT learners do not understand the concepts that underpin the tasks they are doing or how to apply the skills in different situations; in English, they are unaware of the impact of errors in the use of homophones when writing. Tutors do not assess learning sufficiently well in theory lessons, relying too much on superficial questions and accepting too readily brief responses from learners.
- Tutors provide very effective practical coaching and demonstrations for hairdressing learners in the salon. Learners develop good vocational and communication skills through dealing with clients under the close supervision of staff. They enjoy their practical work and become increasingly motivated about their future careers in the hairdressing industry.
- In the better lessons tutors promote independent learning well by encouraging learners to research topics on the internet and find answers for themselves. Tutors also encourage learners to use dictionaries and reference books.
- Initial assessment results are used well to plan individual programmes and determine support needs. However, they are not always used effectively when planning lessons. Too often,

learners of varying abilities are given the same tasks to do in lessons. The more able learners finish their work and wait unoccupied while the rest of the class complete the task.

- The development of learners' English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Learners continue to make the same mistakes and are not improving their skills quickly enough. The teaching of functional skills is not closely linked to the requirements of the qualifications and learning is not sufficiently focused on the application of skills. For example, tutors concentrate too much on the definitions of grammatical terms, and not enough on their use in an everyday context.
- Tutors' feedback to learners on their written work requires improvement. In functional skills work is not marked promptly and feedback relates to the efforts made, rather than what learners need to do to improve. However in hairdressing, feedback on written work is clear, accurate and helpful.
- STS has improved its recruitment and initial assessment processes and this ensures that those it accepts onto the study programme have a genuine chance of success and that the company can meet their support needs effectively. Previously STS had an 'open door' policy, but found that many learners accepted onto the programme were unsuitable and left early.
- Staff provide learners with accurate and appropriate information on their progression options. Many learners have definite views on their future career paths. Where they are undecided, STS provides work experience and tasters to help learners make suitable choices on their next steps. Staff ensure that learners are fully aware of the work placement element of the programme from the outset to prepare them well and foster a positive attitude towards the experience. Learners access good and helpful information provided by the National Apprenticeship Service and the National Careers Service on available opportunities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Managers have made good progress in implementing some aspects of the business improvement plan which was drawn up to address the recommendations in the previous inspection report. They include increasing the provision of work placements which are now available in hairdressing, catering, retailing and administrative settings, and increasing the proportion of learners who progress into further learning or employment upon leaving the programme. The availability and use of management information on learners' targets and progress has also improved; data reports are now available readily and used effectively to monitor learners' progress.
- In the last six months further progress has been hindered due to staff turnover and absence, resulting in the study programme manager covering teaching duties and being less available to carry out quality assurance and managerial tasks.
- Quality assurance arrangements require improvement. Managers have not undertaken sufficient monitoring to ensure that staff have carried out the improvements expected of them. For example, managers recognised that target setting at learners' progress reviews was an area for improvement so provided appropriate staff development. Insufficient follow-up checks of progress review records have been undertaken to ensure that staff have implemented the good practice presented to them during training. Similarly, managers asked staff to improve the quality of recording in learners' personal files. Follow-up checks have not been carried out systematically to ensure compliance with the request.
- Observations of teaching, learning and assessment have not been effective in raising the quality to a good standard across all programmes. Feedback to staff following observations of assessments, reviews and learning sessions is constructive and developmental. However, grades awarded in lessons are sometimes too generous and feedback is insufficiently critical. The form manager's use to record lesson evaluations does not include feedback on how well the tutor has

promoted equality and diversity in the lesson or the development of learners' English and mathematics skills.

- Performance management arrangements are effective in setting targets for staff and tackling underperformance appropriately. Tutors have regular meetings with the study programme manager to discuss the progress of their caseload of learners. Arrangements for staff development are appropriate, including functional skills training for staff to improve their own skills.
- The self-assessment report records accurately many of the key strengths and some areas for improvement. However it focuses too much on describing actions taken to improve the provision, and too little on the impact of these actions on learning. The self-assessment process involved staff fully and the views of learners and employers were also considered when arriving at judgements. The business improvement plan does not include impact measures. For example, in relation to improving the ability of staff to teach English and mathematics the plan notes that tutors have attended training and lesson observations have been undertaken more frequently, but it does not include information on how the impact on teaching and learning is measured.
- STS provides individual study programmes that meet learners' career aims and aspirations very well. STS enjoys good links with hairdressers in the locality, many of whom provide learners with work tasters and placements. STS is successful in securing appropriate and timely placements that are linked well to learners' career aims. For example, when joining the programme one learner expressed his unusual desire to work as a funeral director. Staff organised a work placement in a local funeral parlour and the learner is thriving and progressing well. In response to the needs of the information technology (IT) industry STS is currently exploring the inclusion of social networking and digital media into its IT courses.
- STS successfully promotes its programmes to both male and female learners and having closed its horticultural programme last year, has now introduced an ICT programme, which has attracted male learners. In addition, three male learners are on the hairdressing programme.
- Staff promote equality and diversity effectively throughout the company, and protect learners well from harassment, bullying and discrimination. Staff have undertaken appropriate update training on equality. Staff cover equality and diversity topics comprehensively at learners' induction and include them in the on-going enrichment programme. However, staff do not always take opportunities to promote equality and diversity during lessons or reviews.
- The safeguarding of learners is good. Learners feel very safe in the training centre and know what to do should they have a safeguarding concern. STS place a good emphasis on e-safety and learners are well aware of the need for caution when using social network sites. For example, learners are taught how to set the privacy settings on their social network pages. Staff have undergone appropriate training in safeguarding and are well aware of their responsibilities and required actions should an issue arise. Safeguarding concerns are dealt with appropriately.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) 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 |
|---|----------|
| Employability Training | 3 |

Provider details

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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 | 61 | | | | | | | |
| Principal/CEO | Ms Claire Bradshaw | | | | | | | |
| Date of previous inspection | June 2013 | | | | | | | |
| Website address | www.stsmansfield.co.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+ |
| | 26 | N/A | 19 | 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"> ▪ N/A | | | | | | | |

Contextual information

Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited delivers the study programme from its training and administrative centre in Mansfield. Learners undertake vocational programmes in hairdressing, business administration, ICT and customer service in addition to functional skills and employability courses. The training centre includes a hairdressing salon which is open to the general public. In addition to the study programme, STS delivers apprenticeships through a subcontracting arrangement with another learning provider. Most learners live in the local area. The proportion of school leavers in Nottinghamshire who achieve five or more GCSEs at grade C or above is lower than the national average. Unemployment in Mansfield is higher than the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Patricia Hornsby AI

Two additional inspectors, assisted by the Study Programme 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 area 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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