

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Local authority

Inspection dates		17–20 March 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- good teaching ensures that the vast majority of learners achieve their course and personal goals
- learners develop their speaking and listening skills particularly well through preparation for work courses
- many learners move on to further learning such as other short courses offered by the service and functional skills provided by local colleges
- an increasing proportion of long-term unemployed residents are finding jobs as a result of the very good support from the Work Zones
- senior managers work very well with the local enterprise partnership (LEP), employers, other council departments and community and voluntary organisations to meet the needs of local people and local companies with recruitment in skill areas such as retail and customer service
- the council very effectively demonstrates its strong commitment to equality and diversity by successfully engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of learners on its programmes.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- the targets set for learners on courses that do not lead to qualifications are sometimes too vague to ensure learners are stretched to their full ability and understand the progress they are making
- written feedback does not always make clear to learners how they can improve
- teaching does not make enough use of opportunities across subjects and courses to develop learners' mathematical skills
- the quality improvement plan is not detailed enough to help managers monitor progress towards improvement effectively.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure individual learning plans are used consistently to set challenging targets for learners, help them focus on ways they can improve, and reflect on the progress they have made.
- Ensure that all written feedback to learners helps them understand how they can improve further.
- Develop learners' mathematical skills across all subject areas by improving lesson planning, including these skills in learners' personal targets, and encouraging teachers to share good practice.
- Set clear and measurable targets for achieving actions identified in the quality improvement plan so that managers can monitor progress accurately and take prompt action where this is too slow.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Chester West and Chester Council (CWaC) offers a range of programmes to support the life and work prospects of local residents, prioritising those out of work and most at risk of social and economic exclusion. This is mostly through entry and level 1 courses. The largest area of provision is preparation for life and work, followed by information and communication technology (ICT). About half of all learners enrol through the three Work Zones, centres that support those actively seeking employment. Most of these learners are referred through Jobcentre Plus. About a quarter of all learners are on short courses leading to a qualification, with a similar proportion on non-accredited provision. With the exception of learners enrolled through the Work Zones, and the small number on family learning courses, all learning is delivered by 23 subcontractors.
- Almost all learners achieve their learning goals, often starting from low levels of confidence and prior attainment. This includes learners on courses leading to a qualification. Learners on functional skills in family learning also achieve very well.
- The vast majority of learners following community learning courses that do not lead to a qualification achieve their course and personal goals. For some learners this represents a significant first step in learning. However, the extent of the progress these learners make is not fully reflected in assessment records because learners' personal goals are not sufficiently clear and specific.
- Service managers monitor the performance of different groups very closely, taking successful action to remedy variations in levels of achievement. There are no significant gaps in the achievement of different groups.
- The vast majority of learners complete their courses. Most learners attend regularly, although this is less consistent in the Work Zones and in a minority of community learning courses.
- Learners develop good skills and attitudes that enhance their prospects of future employability. For many, developing confidence and the motivation to seek employment is a crucial first step. The capacity to use computers effectively adds significantly to the work readiness of those who undertake a course in ICT.
- A significant and growing proportion of learners successfully gain employment, particularly following referral to, and support from, the Work Zones, and frequently after a long period out of work. This is making a very effective contribution to reducing the number of long-term unemployed residents in the local area.

- Support offered through the Work Zones helps learners prepare for applying for work in direct, practical ways such as curriculum vitae preparation and the development of effective interview techniques. Learners benefit from the good opportunities to take on volunteering roles to strengthen their skills in working effectively with others.
- A substantial proportion of learners move on to further courses both within and outside CWaC's provision, having acquired the confidence and motivation to pursue learning. This includes progression to college-based functional skills and other accredited courses. Most of this progression is at the same level, reflecting learners' wish to extend their understanding of other subjects, gain further accreditation, and strengthen future work prospects.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good which is reflected in the high number of learners who achieve learning goals and qualifications in functional skills, employability and information technology. In addition, learners acquire good personal confidence and social skills. Teachers make courses interesting and challenging, and as a result, learners are highly motivated, enjoy their learning and make good progress.
- Staff provide good personal and academic support to meet learners' needs. They are particularly sensitive to the needs of those who lack confidence in their own abilities or who face significant barriers to learning. Productive relationships between staff and learners result in learners feeling confident enough to ask for help or clarification with any problems they have. Volunteers provide very effective support to learners who need additional help in lessons, including those who speak English as an additional language.
- Teachers plan for learning thoroughly so that learners with different experiences and levels of ability can progress at a good pace. Many courses have flexible enrolments and different start and end points. Although this flexibility is a strength of the provision where it is responsive to needs, in some cases it results in irregular attendance. When this happens, teachers take action quickly to re-establish regular attendance.
- Teachers make learning enjoyable by using a wide range of stimulating and innovative activities, supported by good quality resources. For example, parents and children in family learning sessions use mobile technology including laptops, tablet computers and programmable robots to practise and learn about the information technology used in schools. Learners are keen to learn independently and teachers provide homework to develop their skills outside classes.
- Staff assess learners' starting points well on courses leading to external qualifications. This includes assessment of their skills in English, mathematics, information technology and personal confidence. Teachers on these courses set learners realistic, specific and timely targets that help them to progress well towards completing their qualifications. However, where courses do not lead to externally assessed qualifications, personal targets for learners are not sufficiently specific, challenging or measurable, and this makes it difficult for learners to know what progress they are making.
- Teachers give encouraging and motivational written feedback on work, which builds learners' confidence. However, too much feedback focuses on praise and not enough on areas to develop or improve. Teachers provide prompt and detailed oral feedback to learners about their completed work and performance. Learners on family learning courses and in the council's Work Zone facilities make good use of their individual learning plans to review progress against course and personal targets.
- Teachers provide adequate support to learners in developing English and mathematical skills that are relevant to their courses and useful in their work or home lives. In classes leading to preparation for work, collaborative team building activities develop learners' confidence in speaking, listening and discussion very well. Teachers effectively emphasise the importance of these skills in the workplace, making the link between good communication and employability. In some lessons, however, teachers do not make full use of spontaneous opportunities to

develop skills such as the use of different types of calculations or charts for working out pay rates.

- Information, advice and guidance are good. Learners receive helpful information and advice before and at the start of their programme so that they understand the options available to them. Teachers give clear information about progression routes within the service and into further training and employment. Staff are sensitive to learners' individual needs and create an environment of trust and harmony to support good learning. The majority of teachers create welcoming and safe learning environments and have good class management skills. For example, they skilfully adapt approaches to discussion to build confidence when working with vulnerable learners such as those with mental health issues.
- Teachers promote equality and diversity well, providing a caring, supportive, and inclusive environment. Learners with a wide range of abilities and from different backgrounds receive a high level of support to overcome any personal barriers to learning. Learners speak highly of the service they receive. Teachers make very effective use of carefully chosen collaborative classroom activities. For example, an activity that invited learners to discuss issues arising from different cultures coming together was handled in a mature and accessible way, with learners describing with confidence the benefits of diversity. Learners with mobility issues are supported well in accessing information technology in Work Zones. A pottery class for visually impaired residents develops creative skills and promotes social inclusion.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders of the council have set a clear strategic direction for the service. Service managers have implemented this very well to provide high quality education and training that raises the aspirations of local residents and improves their quality of life. Directors and elected members take an informed and active role in the work of the service, asking searching questions of service managers and holding them to account.
- The service works successfully through the local enterprise partnership (LEP) to deliver provision that equips long-term unemployed residents with skills for work and helps local companies fill gaps in recruitment. For example, the service works closely with Jobcentre Plus to deliver a good employability programme through the Work Zones; managers liaise effectively with other council departments to target family learning towards those most in need; work with a housing trust provides training opportunities in construction and recycling for unemployed tenants.
- Service managers have successfully established productive and well-coordinated partnerships in the voluntary and community sectors. These serve the broader health and well-being of local residents, including families in difficulty and those with mental health needs.
- Curriculum leadership and management are good. CWaC chooses subcontractors and partners carefully to ensure they meet the stated priorities in the curriculum plan. Service managers work very well with employers and with other council departments to assess the training required for available posts, plan individual courses and train learners so that they are able to access jobs. A significant number of learners gain work through this process. The local zoo, for example, has recently recruited learners as a result of this initiative.
- Self-assessment is good. It involves staff and partners, uses learners' feedback well and is largely accurate. For example, the report identified the inconsistent quality of individual learning plans and target-setting for learners as an area for improvement, a judgement that inspectors confirmed. Managers have used self-assessment well to improve the quality of teaching and learning, safeguarding and the promotion of equality and diversity. However, the quality improvement plan is not fully effective as a tool to drive and monitor improvement as it lacks detail in parts and some impact measures are not clear enough.
- The service manages performance well, making good use of a wide range of high quality data to evaluate the quality of provision and the match with CWaC's strategic aims. For example, the

service took the decision to withdraw the apprenticeship programme in 2013, provision inherited from a former borough at the time of a council merger.

- The service applies its rigorous quality assurance procedures to ensure that subcontractors meet the expected standards prior to enrolling learners and that learners achieve well.
- Clear lines of accountability enable service managers to tackle individual underperformance well. The lesson observation process is effective at accurately identifying and improving areas for development.
- CWaC promotes equality and diversity very well. The service targets and successfully recruits learners from a wide range of backgrounds, the very large majority of whom are disadvantaged and have very specific needs. These include learners with very low self-confidence, the long-term unemployed, and those with mental health issues.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Appropriate and regularly updated training, comprehensive risk assessment and preventative action make a very effective contribution to keeping learners and staff safe. The large majority of staff have a good understanding of safeguarding issues. The council has a robust and well-implemented safer recruitment policy which is also applied to subcontractors; however, they do not check the level of training of the subcontractors' designated person for safeguarding. The service has created a safe environment for learners. Learners are aware of the safer internet policy. Service managers liaise well with the council's safeguarding team to ensure that policies are revised regularly and updated to take appropriate account of the changing perception of threats, including those of extremism, child sexual exploitation, and female genital mutilation.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Provider name

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	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Community learning	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority							
Age range of learners	19+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,840							
CEO	Steve Robinson							
Date of previous inspection	January 2011							
Website address	www.cheshirewestandchester.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+
	1	1,829	N/A	121	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								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	1950							
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:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mid Cheshire college ■ Au Fait ■ West Cheshire College ■ CCDT ■ Impact ■ Changing Lives in Cheshire ■ EPNAVCO ■ Passion for Learning ■ Youth federation ■ CHAWREC ■ In total CWaC contracts with 23 subcontractors 							

Contextual information

Cheshire West and Chester has a population of 331,000 spread over 354 square miles. The historic tourist destination of the City of Chester is within the borough, as well as the industrial town of Ellesmere Port, the towns of Northwich and Winsford and a number of market towns including Neston, Frodsham and Tarporley. There is also a large rural area covered by the borough including many small villages and farming communities.

At the time of the inspection the unemployment rate was 5.3% which is lower than both the Great Britain figure (6.5%) and the North West (7.4%). The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimant count in the borough has fallen rapidly over the last two years from 3.4% in February 2013 to an historic low of just 1.2% in February 2015, this compares to 2.0% for Great Britain and 1.9% for the North West.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jan Smith HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Skills and Employment 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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