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13 November 2015

Mrs Heather Taylor
Head of Neighbourhoods and Learning Service
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Town Hall
King William Street
Blackburn
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Short inspection of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Sustainable Neighbourhood Services

Following the short inspection on 15 and 16 October 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in February 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education and training in the service since the previous inspection. You and your team have developed provision well to contribute to the key strategic priorities of the council in targeting provision to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged members of your community. In doing this your managers have developed strong partnership working to provide coordinated activities. Your team sustains and promotes a culture of ambition and aspiration for learners who have, and are, experiencing very challenging circumstances; for many you are providing a real opportunity for them to succeed for the first time. The provision is strongly focused on developing employability and personal skills to prepare learners for the next steps of progressing into further education, training, volunteering or employment.

At your previous inspection, inspectors commended you and your team on the excellent strategic direction and strong multi-agency working, providing a well-targeted and responsive provision. The good teaching and learning led to good achievement of qualifications by most learners. You and your team have maintained these strengths. Inspectors also identified that you should improve: the quality of teaching and learning, making better use of information and learning technology;

the support for learners with specific needs; your initial advice and guidance; and the monitoring of learners' progression.

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve these weaknesses. The impact is clear:

- while the quality of teaching and learning has continued to improve and this has led to high and improving success rates, not enough teaching and learning is outstanding
- support for learners has improved and, consequently, those learners with additional support needs have high rates of success in line with their peers and above those found nationally for similar groups
- improved arrangements for initial advice and guidance and the better monitoring of progression have been reflected in the good progression for the majority of learners, most of whom start their course with low aspirations and self-confidence.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements for safeguarding learners are appropriate; a range of people with professional expertise in the multi-agency safeguarding hub investigate any concerns. All staff and elected members have taken safeguarding training. The majority of staff and the elected members have received appropriate Prevent training and a further event is planned for all new staff. Community police, neighbourhood teams and adult learning are co-located in neighbourhood centres, making it easier to respond to wider community concerns. All disabled learners and those with learning difficulties receive risk assessments from a member of staff who has specific responsibility for this task and who liaises with partners such as adult social care to minimise and manage risks. All staff have current Disclosure and Barring Scheme checks and safer recruitment principles are adhered to.

The learner handbook provides a good introduction to safeguarding, equality and diversity, and health and safety. Safeguarding is embedded throughout courses; learners showed good understanding of safeguarding issues, for example, through promoting the understanding of parents about e-safety and the potential of grooming or radicalisation through social media. In one class, a learner was developing a story sack that included a story written by her and a finger puppet game to raise her daughter's awareness of road safety. Recent changes to computer safeguarding restrictions have caused problems, for example, for visually impaired learners with configuring the computer with larger fonts.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, managers and elected members have a good understanding of the main strengths and areas for improvement of the service. The self-assessment process is inclusive of all staff, and learners' views are used well to inform judgements. Quality improvement plans are frequently monitored using red, amber and green ratings to measure the progress being made against individual actions. The responsibilities of staff are identified clearly, providing good staff ownership of quality improvement activities. However, some of the quantitative targets in the quality improvement plans are not sufficiently specific and measurable to provide sufficient challenge.
- Teaching and learning sessions are structured well, provide good access to high quality resources and learning environments and are taught by lively, engaging and knowledgeable tutors. Learners often lacking in confidence are supported well to develop their self-belief and aspirations for the future. Consequently, learners develop good employability skills and growth in their self-confidence.
- As well as longer observations, managers and observers use unannounced short visits to lessons effectively, and, consequently, managers have an accurate picture of the quality of classroom learning. Observers ensure that they identify the development needs of tutors accurately and that appropriate training is put in place. The proportion of good or better teaching, learning and assessment is improving year on year although, as recognised in the self-assessment report, there is too little outstanding teaching. Inspectors and observers findings from joint observations agreed. However, in a few observations inspectors gave greater weighting to the impact of teaching styles and the learning that had taken place in judging the effectiveness of the lesson. Managers use good links with other local authorities well to provide validation and act as a critical friend. A few jointly observed sessions demonstrated insufficient embedding of mathematics and a lack of challenge for the small minority of most-able learners.
- The retention and success rates for learners are good and improving, with most learners achieving their qualifications successfully. Success rates show no significant gaps for different learner groups, for example by ethnicity, age, gender or learning difficulty and disability. All achieve well and above national rates for similar groups. For example, one third of learners have identified learning difficulties and disabilities and they achieve as well as their peers. The process for recognising and recording the progress and achievement of learners on non-accredited courses is rigorous and these learners make good progress and achieve well.
- Retention was low on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision in 2014/15 leading to low success rates. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the reasons for this and they have implemented appropriate actions to improve it. Early indications are that the actions are proving successful.

- The progression of learners is good with the majority having destinations in further education, training or volunteering and a minority in employment. Most of the learners targeted by the service are not ready to progress straight into employment. Managers have worked hard to capture destinations data more effectively and to analyse them to reflect learners' progress. Links with partners and external agencies are developed well to support learners' progression. Most learners benefit from individual guidance meetings and the National Careers Service staff visit each group to provide advice and guidance. Strong working relationships with Jobcentre Plus and good knowledge of local employers are used well so that learners can take up new employment opportunities. However, a small minority of learners interviewed reported that they did not have enough information about progression opportunities.
- Reporting to the elected members is frequent and covers learners' achievements, progression and destinations and the outcomes from the observation of teaching and learning. However, the data provided are aggregated at too high a level and do not give enough detail to enable effective support and challenge. Elected members do gain a good view of the quality of the service through their involvement in the moderation of the self-assessment report and through unannounced visits to centres and classes. Leaders rightly recognise that governance arrangements require improvement. Plans are in place to broaden the composition of those providing governance to include representatives with educational expertise.
- Adult learning forms part of the sustainable neighbourhood services within the council. The provision contributes to achieving the council's strategic priorities around employment, health and well-being and economic well-being, particularly within the most deprived wards. Venues are located in the heart of target communities, delivering courses from a wide range of venues including schools, children's centres, community and leisure centres. The co-location of neighbourhood services provides a well-integrated approach to providing a range of services to meet the needs of the community. The provision is effective; the large majority of learners live in targeted wards. Partnership working is strong; for example, a joint initiative with the mental health services delivers relevant courses for people with moderate mental health issues to develop their leisure skills and improve their well-being.
- A growing number of learners progress into volunteering work to meet the needs of the local community and develop their own employability and personal skills. Partners share information and good practice to ensure best use is made of these volunteers. For example, health service partners have developed peer support volunteers for substance abusers.
- For 2014/15, the English and mathematics provision changed significantly; the service no longer offers discrete classes and learners are guided to appropriate

courses at local colleges. Learners develop their English and mathematics skills through their main course and they can achieve unit accreditation.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- governance provides greater support and challenge by rapidly implementing the planned changes and reviewing the range and depth of performance data provided to elected members in performance reports
- observations of teaching and learning have a strong focus on the impact of teaching on learning and the progress of learners
- the effectiveness of the changes to the ESOL, English and mathematics provision is closely monitored and any emerging concerns are swiftly addressed
- IT protocols and network security settings do not disadvantage any learners.

Yours sincerely

Mike White

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by the service development manager as nominee. We met you, your senior leader, middle managers and one elected member. We visited four sites with members of your staff to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at learners' work. We spoke with learners across the sites. We held meetings with learners, managers, staff and partners and reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, from your own learner survey and by seeking the views of learners during on-site inspection activity.