

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

Local authority

Inspection dates 17–20 November 2015

Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Leaders and managers set and achieve extremely ambitious objectives for the service. Governance is outstanding and results in a very good level of informed and intelligent challenge regarding the quality, success and continued financial viability of the provision.
- Managers place a high priority on continuously improving the standard of provision. Staff feel valued and have a very good understanding of how their work supports the service's objectives and serves the community.
- The service's work to engage with disadvantaged communities in Oldham is outstanding. The service delivers programmes to successfully engage those who are least likely to participate in learning.
- Managers' close and highly effective collaboration with community partners and particularly effective use of available data have resulted in well-planned and priority-focused provision.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding and result in the vast majority of learners successfully completing their courses and achieving their qualifications.
- Tutors' outstanding promotion of collaboration, tolerance and mutual respect in the classroom creates an environment in which learners feel welcome, safe and valued.
- Learners develop excellent literacy and numeracy skills and teachers integrate English and mathematics very successfully in lessons. Success rates are very high on functional skills English and mathematics. The vast majority of learners studying functional skills pass at their first attempt.
- Success rates are consistently very high and much higher than the respective national rates. The proportion of learners achieving their qualifications within planned timescales is consistently very high.
- Almost all learners make excellent progress from their starting points and develop good, relevant skills. Attendance is excellent and learners work in a positive culture of inclusion and respect.
- In a minority of community learning classes, tutors' target setting for learners and feedback to learners is not yet sufficiently detailed to ensure that all learners know the progress they are making and how to improve.
- The arrangements to monitor learners' destinations require strengthening.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC) manages Oldham Lifelong Learning Service within its Economy and Skills Directorate. The service provides programmes throughout the borough. The service offered a range of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities, funded by the Skills Funding Agency, to 5,619 adults in 2014/15. Programmes are offered in six main centres and up to 60 community venues. Programmes are available in 10 subject areas with the most popular programmes being English and mathematics; preparation for life and work; English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); and health, public services and care. Approximately half of the courses lead to qualifications.
- The unemployment rate across Oldham borough is higher than the rate for the North West of England and the national average. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education or training is higher than the North West average. Fewer young people gain grades A* to C at GCSE including mathematics and English than the average in the North West and the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the monitoring and analysis of learner destinations to ensure that the high levels of success in motivating hard-to-reach learners to re-engage with learning and increase their chances of employment or career advancement are fully recognised and celebrated.
- Share good practice in setting learners' targets so they are all specific and measurable and provide detailed feedback to ensure all learners, particularly those on community learning courses, are constantly aware of their progress and what they need to do to achieve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Leaders and managers set and achieve extremely ambitious objectives for the service to provide a very high-quality, responsive curriculum in collaboration with a broad range of partners. High expectations over the years have resulted in sustained and very high success rates. The clear objectives for the service align closely with those of the council and are set within a well-developed strategic plan which is understood by managers and staff. The service's plans reflect local and national priorities particularly well.
- Managers place a very high priority on continuously improving the standard of provision; they have very high expectations of the well-qualified and vocationally experienced staff. Arrangements to monitor their performance are extremely thorough and rigorous. Staff feel valued; they have a very good understanding of how their work supports the service's objectives and serves the community. Staff benefit from excellent support to develop their professional skills. Regular and well-targeted training widens their understanding of new topics such as the promotion of British values in the curriculum.
- The self-assessment process is excellent. Managers draw on a broad range of evidence to analyse the success and impact of programmes, making highly effective use of the views of learners and partners. Validation of the report is particularly thorough, including service staff, learners and partners. The resulting report is extremely self-critical, leading to very well-focused improvement plans which have maintained the outstanding provision since the previous inspection. Managers have a very good understanding of the service's strengths and areas where improvements are needed although in a small number of instances, such as the monitoring of support in lessons, this has not yet brought about the required change.
- Close and highly effective work with a broad range of partners, including Jobcentre Plus, the National Careers Service, employers, voluntary sector organisations and the local college, ensures that partners understand the service's objectives very well and can contribute to the service's success, for example through collaboration on programme planning and delivery or the development of progression routes. The impact of the particularly effective collaboration with the careers service can be seen in the high standard of information, advice and guidance.
- Managers use data management information extremely well to monitor performance carefully and to highlight where action is needed. For example, 2012 data analysis highlighted concerns about retention and success, particularly in English and mathematics classes. Support was introduced as part of the classroom offer to all learners, which was increased or decreased as needs emerged. This strategy of earlier and more focused support has increased retention and success over a sustained three-year period on English and mathematics courses and supported the development of excellent provision.
- The service's work to engage with disadvantaged communities in Oldham is outstanding. The service targets support at the most vulnerable and offers programmes to engage those who are least likely to participate in learning. Very good use of labour market and other data informs the planning and location of provision. Staff work particularly well to develop responsive and flexible curricula to meet identified learner, community and employer needs. For example, a pre-employability training course developed in partnership with a local company has led to the majority of learners moving into employment with that organisation.
- The service promotes outstanding collaboration, tolerance and mutual respect within the classroom; staff create an environment in which learners feel welcome, safe and valued. High levels of training and information ensure that staff and learners have a very good understanding of their roles and expected behaviours. Learners feel confident in practising their skills in an understanding and safe environment
- Arrangements to monitor destinations data require strengthening to ensure the capture and analysis of more relevant information to inform priorities for future action.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governance is outstanding. Elected members and senior officers provide a very good level of well-informed and intelligent challenge regarding the quality, success and continued financial viability of the provision.
 - Reporting arrangements are thorough and all involved value the resulting discussions on how the service can improve further.
 - The cabinet and the elected member have a good understanding of the range and quality of the borough's adult and community provision and how it contributes to council priorities. They take a keen interest in ensuring that all learners receive an outstanding experience and as a result they can make a more positive contribution to the local area.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Well-informed managers have excellent links with external agencies and access to the council's multi-agency safeguarding hub, which they use well to deal with referrals and to protect vulnerable learners.

- Safeguarding training for all staff, developed in conjunction with the Oldham Safeguarding Board, is updated every three years. Staff have been subject to appropriate disclosure and barring checks, records of which are maintained centrally within the council.
- 'Prevent' training has increased staff awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and improved their confidence in how to recognise risks and how to increase learner understanding and address issues raised. Learners' raised awareness has led to them gaining a better understanding of how to identify risks and what actions to take, as well as understanding communications from their children's schools regarding the 'Prevent' agenda.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding, as reflected in the outstanding outcomes for learners. Staff have very high expectations of learners and focus on meeting the needs of the hardest-to-engage and most vulnerable learners in the community. Learners have easy access to venues in local communities, particularly in Oldham town centre, Coldhurst and Turf Lane. Learners from diverse communities work extremely well together in very inclusive, high-quality learning environments which keep them interested in learning and help them make good progress.
- Tutors are well qualified and make very good use of their expertise to plan lessons that engage learners and develop their knowledge and useful skills, for example developing problem-solving skills through role play activities and discussing how bullying in schools could be tackled. As a result, learners confidently apply their new learning to practical situations.
- Learners' development of employability skills is outstanding. They develop and put into practice the skills required to gain employment or to set up their own business; for example, selling decorated cakes at a local market or selling jewellery online. Learners with English as an additional language quickly develop good English speaking skills so that they can explain confidently how to promote themselves when applying for jobs.
- Learners are extremely keen to learn and enthusiastic about their lessons, attendance is excellent and many arrive early. Their work is of a very high standard and they make good progress. Learners confidently explain and demonstrate their new skills, for example how to use functions in a spreadsheet and how to make a Kumihimo braid for use in a decorative bracelet.
- Learners for whom English is an additional language make very good progress in developing their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. They develop good levels of confidence and are more able to communicate at home and with healthcare professionals. As a result of learning and their increased confidence, many learners have high aspirations to become interpreters, tutors and role models in their communities.
- Most tutors use questioning skilfully to check learners' knowledge and understanding. Learners on a teaching assistants' course are encouraged to ask questions during recaps at the start of lessons so that they develop the skills they will need in the classroom.
- Target setting on courses leading to a qualification is good. Tutors and learners use initial assessments well to set aspirational targets which are reviewed at least fortnightly. In the majority of lessons, learners and tutors make very good use of the learner diary to monitor ongoing progress and achievement.
- Tutors' feedback to learners is good. Learners receive regular written feedback which they find useful and motivating. In the majority of cases tutors' feedback to learners is detailed and accurate and provides sufficient detail so that learners know how to improve their work. However, in a minority of community learning classes, inspectors reviewed a few examples of marking that consisted of a series of ticks. Very occasionally tutors did not highlight or identify spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Tutors give encouraging verbal feedback to motivate learners and provide good guidance that speeds up their learning.
- Learners benefit from very good support arrangements. Tutors assess their needs early and ensure that support is in place quickly. As a result of effective learning support in the majority of lessons, learners who need extra help make at least the same progress as those who do not.
- Tutors' integration of the development of learners' English and mathematics skills, in the majority of lessons, is very good. One example is encouraging learners to focus on the use of shapes when drawing animals and birds. Tutors place a strong focus on developing learners' ability to use subject-specific terminology correctly in, for example, information and communication technology (ICT) and adult social care courses.
- Learners make outstanding progress in English and mathematics lessons. For example, in a mathematics lesson learners discussed the meanings of personal allowances, gross and net pay before calculating net pay using percentages. Learners on an English course, preparing for progression to functional skills courses, developed their skills by writing and sharing with the group their 'learning journey'.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

- Learners' attendance is excellent and the service has a very effective system of following up learners who do not attend to encourage them to return to learning. Punctuality is good; many learners arrive early and are keen to start learning.
- Learners receive outstanding impartial advice and guidance before they enrol, which helps them to make very informed choices as to which course to follow. Excellent ongoing impartial advice is readily available to ensure that learners can consider a good range of further courses offered by the service and other local providers to ensure that options selected are appropriate to their needs and ambitions.
- Learners develop a very positive attitude towards their learning and they appreciate their teachers' help, guidance and support. Learners are proud of their work; for example, making a sensory cushion with a mix of colours, textures, buttons, zips and laces for adults with dementia.
- Learners develop very good social and employability skills. Learners on an introductory course, in partnership with a local school, overcame language barriers to improve their communication skills, self-esteem and confidence. Learners on a teaching assistants' course recognised the visible change and development in their peers as their course progressed. However, in a small minority of classes learners did not display respectful listening skills during discussions or during periods of tutor input.
- Learners learn how to keep themselves fit and healthy. Learners on a 'let's bake' course use practical baking skills to enhance health and well-being for themselves and their families and gentle exercise courses improve learners' well-being and fitness.
- Learners are safe and say that they feel safe. A group of ICT learners recognised that their awareness of e-safety and the ways in which they can avoid being targets of e-fraud had been successfully raised. Teachers use current news topics well to raise learners' awareness of the risks from radicalisation and extremism. One topic introduced by a tutor led to an informed discussion between learners about some of the issues and enabled learners to better understand information they had received from their children's schools concerning radicalisation and extremism.

Outcomes for learners are outstanding

- Success rates on accredited programmes are consistently high and most are higher than the respective national rates. The proportion of learners achieving their qualifications in planned timescales is consistently very high. Retention and achievement are both much higher than the respective national averages. Almost all learners who enrolled in 2015/16 have remained on their programme/course. Success rates for learners are very high on all qualifications at all levels. Different groups of learners achieve equally well when analysed by gender, ethnicity or disability.
- Success rates are very high on level 1 and level 2 functional skills English and mathematics. The vast majority of learners following functional skills pass at their first attempt.
- Success rates are above the national rate in health, public services and care; ICT; retail and commercial enterprise; and preparation for life and work, and are close to the national rate for the few learners in arts, media and publishing and in business administration.
- Learners make extremely good progress from their starting points. They are enthused by learning and keen to progress further. Learners significantly improve their self-esteem and develop a wide range of good practical, personal and employability skills. They display great confidence in practising and demonstrating their new skills in the trusting learning environments in which they study. Many learners develop good skills that successfully prepare them for their intended job role or for career advancement. They recognise the usefulness of their new skills and how they significantly improve their career prospects and job performance. This has led to learners adapting and using their new knowledge and skills in their personal lives.
- Learners have good opportunities to progress from community learning classes to nationally recognised qualifications that improve their chances of gaining employment. The service has introduced useful 'bridging' courses to aid their transition. For example, learners on ESOL courses progress to English functional skills classes. The vast majority of learners continue to further study on programmes offered by Oldham Lifelong Learning. Many unemployed learners progress into jobs as a result of the skills and behaviours learned on programmes.
- Most learners have a very good understanding of equality and diversity and show extremely high levels of mutual respect and tolerance. Most learners have a good understanding of safeguarding and the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	5,619
Principal/CEO	Lynda Fairhurst
Website address	http://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200227/lifelong_learning

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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	2,689	0	369	0	80	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14-16	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"> ■ The provider contracts with no subcontractors 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Bob Busby, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Judith Hamer	Ofsted Inspector
Lynne Paxton	Ofsted Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Patrick McKinley	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the Senior Manager, Oldham Lifelong Learning Service, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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