

Academies Enterprise Trust

Independent learning provider



17–19 November 2015

Inspection dates

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Quality improvement arrangements are underdeveloped. Trustees do not have enough information about the quality of provision to enable them to challenge managers sufficiently.
- The starting points of a minority of apprentices are not effectively established or used to evidence the rationale for the choice of programme or level.
- Targets set for a majority of apprentices focus too much on the completion of activities, assessments and unit completion, rather than the development of skills, knowledge and further understanding.
- There is little evidence of targets set for English, mathematics and information communication technology (ICT).
- Apprentices do not have sufficient access to their progress-tracking information and as a result are not aware of the progress they are making.
- A majority of apprentices are not challenged sufficiently to improve their understanding of their subject beyond that of the qualification outcomes.

The provider has the following strengths

- Apprentices are valued by their employers and benefit from good support to develop new work skills.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieved their qualification is significantly above the national average.
- Apprentices develop their understanding of equality and diversity well through their daily work, which includes interaction with colleagues, parents and children.
- Apprentices work to a high and professional standard in all aspects of their work.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) is an educational charity with its head office based in Hockley, Essex. It sponsors 68 primary, secondary and/or special academies located across England and provides apprenticeship training in supporting teaching and learning, business administration and ICT.
- Approximately 22 apprentices are enrolled in the current year with the intention to grow that figure significantly in the coming years. All apprentices are employed for the duration of their apprenticeship.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve quality improvement arrangements by:
 - introducing robust observation of teaching, learning and assessment to develop trainers and assessors' skills more effectively and to ensure that on- and off-the-job learning is planned and delivered effectively
 - implementing improvement actions rapidly and in a timely manner.
- Use a range of assessment tools to identify apprentices' skills and knowledge in English, mathematics, ICT and their main vocational qualification at the start of their programme to help ensure learning is planned effectively.
- Set individual targets, liaising with apprentices' line managers, to ensure they can develop their knowledge, understanding and skills before assessment.
- Ensure tracking and monitoring of apprentices' progress consistently covers all aspects of their programme, including English, mathematics and ICT, to help ensure that apprentices make good and timely progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers demonstrate good aspirations to provide a high-quality apprenticeship programme to support their many academies. They do this by recruiting suitable apprentices who can progress to permanent employment in administration, supporting teaching and learning or ICT roles. However, AET has not yet been sufficiently effective in developing the apprenticeship programme and recruiting enough apprentices to achieve this objective. The numbers of apprentices have been consistently low since the programme commenced in 2012, although effective action is now being taken to better promote the use of apprentices to the large number of academies across the country. So far, too few apprentices have been recruited and not enough of them progress into permanent employment within AET.
- Quality improvement arrangements are not yet sufficiently robust to ensure all apprentices benefit from high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. The observation process does not ensure consistent assessment practice and does not yet monitor the quality of on- and off-the-job learning effectively. Feedback mechanisms do not yet provide sufficient qualitative data from apprentices and academy managers to help drive improvements. The establishing of apprentices' starting points in respect of their vocational skills is ineffective.
- Senior leaders and managers responsible for the apprenticeship programme are taking effective action to secure improvements. An effective evaluation of assessment practice and policy documents resulted in effective performance management of staff. Better qualified staff are now in post. Policies and procedures have been reviewed and updated and are more effective and good. Staff and apprentices now access better quality information from useful handbooks.
- The first full self-assessment report produced in August 2015 is self-critical and resulted in a detailed quality improvement plan with many actions and targets to improve. Inspectors agree with many of the judgements and actions. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these, and not all have been actioned.
- Managers use data well to monitor the achievements of apprentices and their destinations. Success rates for apprentices are very good and the majority have a positive destination. However, monitoring of the progress apprentices make during their programme is not sufficiently robust.
- Staff have good occupational experience and qualifications. However, continuing professional development plans do not focus sufficiently on developing individual teaching and assessment skills. Managers have plans to recruit specialist support staff for English, mathematics and ICT but these specialists are not yet in place.
- The promotion of equality and diversity throughout the organisation is good. Policies and strategic plans demonstrate a clear commitment to equality and diversity. Apprentices receive good-quality information at the start of their apprenticeship and work in job roles that help to enhance their understanding of key aspects such as supporting young people with diverse needs. Staff take effective action to check apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity during reviews. Managers are aware of under-represented groups on programmes and are implementing an action plan to try and address this.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The board of trustees has an adequate oversight of the apprenticeship programme, in particular the concerns during 2015 regarding the viability of the programme.
 - The executive board, responsible for operational performance, receives regular updates on the performance of the apprenticeship programme, and since June 2014 have been aware of the need to grow apprentice numbers.
 - The actions, support and challenge from trustees and leaders since the apprenticeship programme began in 2012 have not been effective in securing sufficient sustainable growth to ensure the apprenticeship programme is viable and delivered to a sufficiently high quality.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.**
 - The provider has robust policies and procedures to ensure safe recruitment and the safety of children. Staff and apprentices receive appropriate checks. All staff benefit from regular training, and apprentices receive good-quality information at the start of their programme, including for e-safety. Most apprentices work in academies where they enhance their understanding of safeguarding well.
 - Managers are implementing their Prevent duty well. Staff and apprentices have received recent training and most are improving their understanding of radicalisation and extremism well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. A majority of apprentices do not routinely benefit from planned learning activities and too much emphasis is placed on the assessment of skills. A very large majority of apprentices start their apprenticeship with high levels of academic ability and prior attainment.
- Assessors do not effectively establish apprentices' starting points to identify the rationale for the choice of programme or to plan learning. Apprentices complete a basic assessment of their English and mathematics skills, but in a minority of cases these assessments do not correctly identify their existing knowledge. The starting points of apprentices who are required to achieve an ICT qualification are not fully determined before they start their course. Business administration apprentices work towards the same units and have the same assessment model, which meets their job roles well. However, this does not always take account of their experience or prior learning.
- Assessors use online tools to check the majority of apprentices' progress towards their main qualification. However, not all apprentices and assessors have access to this tool and many rely on spreadsheets to monitor the progress they make. In a few instances, the monitoring of apprentices' progress in functional skills is insufficient to ensure they can complete on time.
- The setting of individuals' learning targets requires improvement. Assessors do set apprentices targets, but these tend to focus on the completion of tasks and units rather than the development of skills and knowledge. Apprentices' line managers are not sufficiently involved in the setting of targets. However, most apprentices have good help from their managers and teachers, who help them extend their knowledge.
- Apprentices develop their skills and knowledge well at work. Supporting teaching and learning apprentices make personalised mathematics displays. ICT apprentices support schools through a remote help desk and on-site support. They help resolve technical difficulties such as faulty interactive whiteboards and printers or hardware conflicts.
- The very large majority of apprentices benefit from good support from their line managers to develop new skills that contribute positively at work. For example, supporting teaching and learning apprentices learn to use mail merger to produce newsletters, observe teachers and interview governors to help develop a better understanding of teaching and learning in schools.
- Apprentices develop their awareness of diversity well. For example, an ICT apprentice working in an academy was confident to challenge inappropriate comments made by younger learners. Another apprentice keen to support younger learners with learning difficulties is visiting a specialist school to witness and learn from good practice.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Apprentices are motivated, show respect towards colleagues and behave well in their workplace. They enjoy their job roles and appreciate the difference the apprenticeship makes to their career aspirations. They are committed to completing their qualifications and take pride in their work. Line managers benefit from the skills and attitudes apprentices demonstrate in the academies.
- Apprentices acquire good employability skills, which are valued by their managers. The majority benefit from additional skills and qualifications, such as first-aid and fire-warden training. They value highly the experience of learning gained in the workplace.
- Assessors guide apprentices well while completing their qualifications. Line managers ensure work experience enhances their future employment aspirations.
- Apprentices produce good work to the expected level that meets their qualification aims. However, a large majority of apprentices do not improve understanding of their subject beyond the minimum requirement by having challenging targets set.
- Apprentices know how to protect themselves from forms of abuse and extremism. They are fully aware of the need to protect themselves and others, particularly when working in an academy setting where young and possibly vulnerable children are attending. Employee rights and responsibilities and the introduction to life in modern Britain are well understood by apprentices and discussed in depth during the induction. As a result they work well with colleagues in their academies, resulting in highly effective working relationships.

- Apprentices feel safe in their working environments and have good relationships with their line managers with whom they can raise any concerns. They have confidence that concerns are actioned appropriately and in a timely manner.
- Apprentices' attendance at work is good. They are punctual and well prepared for their daily tasks. They undertake learning through online material to improve their understanding of English, mathematics and ICT.
- A majority of apprentices achieve their English, mathematics and ICT functional skills qualifications. They gain and develop good personal, social and employability skills through working in a team and having discussions with parents at academy open events.
- Apprentices do not routinely benefit from impartial advice and guidance at the end of their apprenticeship. On induction, they receive information on possible careers within the trust and the prospects available to them, but progression opportunities at the end of their apprenticeships are limited.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- The proportion of apprentices who achieved their qualification in 2014/15 is significantly above the national average and has remained high for the last two years. Current apprentices are making the expected progress towards completion of their qualifications. The proportion who completed their apprenticeship qualification dipped slightly in the last year, but is still above that of other providers nationally.
- Apprentices benefit from good support in their workplace. Line managers and colleagues assist them to develop a good understanding of their work, and the majority complete their qualifications within the expected timescales.
- There are no significant performance gaps between different groups of apprentices, and managers have intervened effectively to ensure that 16–18-year-old apprentices now achieve as well as their older peers. However, those few apprentices who require extra support do not achieve as well as their peers.
- The majority of apprentices who have to complete their English and mathematics qualifications achieve well. However, a small minority do not complete their ICT functional skills qualification early enough.
- Many apprentices undertake additional roles and responsibilities. Employers trust them to carry out important roles in the academies in which they work. For example, an apprentice working towards the supporting teaching and learning apprenticeship took on the responsibility of working in the academy's behavioural unit. This led to a promotion in that area on completion of the apprenticeship.
- Apprentices gain good-quality vocational skills and their work is valued by colleagues. For example, apprentices in ICT become very adept at identifying and repairing faults in ICT equipment. They have also set up an industry-standard online fault reporting system that is accessed by academy staff across the country. Business administration apprentices take on the responsibility of maintaining confidential records.
- The proportion of apprentices who have a positive destination into further training or sustainable employment is high. However, the number of apprentices who gain employment within academies is too low and does not meet one of the key objectives of the apprenticeship programme for the trust.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	25
Principal/CEO	Mr Ian Comfort
Website address	www.academiesenterprisetrust.org

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)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	4	5	3	10	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							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Stephen Hunsley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mary Aslett	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Adkins	Ofsted Inspector
Harpreet Nagra	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Elliott	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the retention and recruitment manager, 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. 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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