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29 December 2015

Mr M Browne
Post 16 Adviser, School Improvement Team
West Berkshire Council
West Street House
West Street
Newbury
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Dear Mr Browne

Short inspection of West Berkshire Adult and Community Learning Service

Following the short inspection on 25–26 November 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 December 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have taken successful action to maintain the service's strengths and have made good progress in remedying areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. Leaders are fully aware of what still needs to improve and have agreed suitable and challenging actions to raise standards further. Your role to oversee provision for all adults across the district, which has been introduced since the previous inspection, has strengthened significantly the service's leadership capacity. You have enhanced further the outstanding range of courses by responding rapidly to requests for new courses from partners representing local communities.

Learners still achieve well. They develop good skills and gain confidence, which helps them to achieve qualifications and their learning and personal goals. Managers' very effective training for staff has resolved inconsistencies in tutors' and learners' recording of learning goals and the monitoring of learners' progress. This was a recommendation from the previous inspection.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains good. At the previous inspection, leaders and managers were tasked with raising the standards of teaching and learning further by improving the rigour of observations of teaching. They

strengthened these observations to provide a greater focus on learning. Managers identify more accurately what tutors teach well and where they can improve. They use this incisively to identify topics for the annual tutor training. However, managers do not observe enough learning sessions at an early stage in each course, which delays improvement.

Developing ways to track the next steps that learners take when they have completed courses was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Managers have yet to identify where all learners progress to once they finish their studies. Where you have gathered information about learners' next steps, this shows that a significant number gain employment, volunteer or progress into further education.

Within the last year, leaders and managers introduced apprenticeships through a subcontract with a local training company. There are currently six learners, mainly employed by West Berkshire Council. This programme has generally been implemented well but it is too early to judge its full impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective and fit for purpose. They monitor thoroughly each subcontractor's safeguarding policies, risk assessments and training to ensure learners are safe. Leaders and managers maintain very productive partnerships across West Berkshire Council and with external agencies. This helps them to identify vulnerable learners and place a high emphasis on their safety and well-being. They collaborate productively with organisations that have expertise in the Prevent duty and use these links to good effect in helping subcontractors to understand their responsibilities. Tutors receive memorable training on safeguarding, radicalisation and extremism which results in most having a good understanding of how these apply to the adults they teach. A few tutors have not yet completed this training.

Inspection findings

- The service offers an outstanding range of courses, which was a key strength at the previous inspection. Leaders and managers set a clear and widely understood strategy for adult and community learning. They use a wide range of feedback from partners, alongside West Berkshire Council's priorities, to ensure the provision accurately reflects local communities' needs.
- Partnership working is outstanding. Leaders and managers place a strong emphasis on ensuring all learners can access learning by increasingly working with a more diverse range of organisations, including those that hold learning sessions in care homes and children's centres. As a result, more learners from

identified priority groups participate in learning, such as those who are disabled or have a learning difficulty, the unemployed and those with low education levels.

- Leaders and managers judge the quality of learning sessions very accurately, using their findings to prioritise suitable improvement actions. They hold very effective annual tutor training which has helped tutors to teach topics such as English and mathematics more confidently. During a pottery learning session, learners used geometry to calculate accurately the size of tea light holders they were making.
- Leaders and managers do not observe learning sessions early enough in each course. This delays their identification of what needs to improve and subsequent improvement actions, particularly on short courses that last six weeks or less. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is still good, but the service has yet to achieve its ambition for this to be outstanding.
- Most learners agree very detailed individual learning and personal goals with their tutors at the start of their course. Learners on family learning courses are highly motivated by their weekly achievements, denoted by different colour stickers on their individual learning plans. A few tutors do not develop individual goals sufficiently well with learners to measure their progress.
- Learners receive very useful feedback from tutors to help them to improve their work and to review their progress. Most learners make good, or better, progress. In a watercolour learning session, learners offered critiques of each other's artwork, which helped them to reflect on ways to improve their own skills.
- Learners develop good skills, knowledge and personal attributes. They apply their newly acquired skills well within their personal and home lives. Family learning learners use different strategies to manage their children's behaviour and to teach them basic mathematics and reading skills in preparation for school.
- Tutors motivate and inspire learners to succeed. This helps many learners to overcome significant, and often multiple, barriers to learning such as homelessness and mental health issues. Learners participating in a bicycle repair course not only gain technical skills and knowledge but develop teamworking and communication skills to help them progress into volunteering roles.
- Leaders and managers have not yet tracked the destinations of all learners after they finish their courses. Their actions to find out about all learners' next steps are not sufficient to judge the full impact of the provision. However, for those learners whose destination is known, a significant number have gained employment, returned to education or have begun volunteering.
- Learners' achievement is consistently good. Learners attend regularly and enjoy their courses.
- The small number of learners who take qualifications achieve these well. Achievement is outstanding by learners taking English, mathematics, team-leading, support work, and health and safety qualifications.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- managers carry out earlier observations of learning sessions to identify tutor training and development throughout the year
- all learners have suitable individual learning goals so that tutors can check their progress properly
- managers gather more complete information about the next steps that learners take when they have completed courses to check how well provision is helping them.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Rodgers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors assisted by you, the Post 16 Adviser, as nominee carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with managers, staff and learners and looked at past and current work. They observed learning sessions. Inspectors reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, quality improvement plans, strategy, learners' achievements and safeguarding.