

West Sussex County Council

First reinspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first reinspection monitoring visit to West Sussex County Council following publication of the inspection report on 16 December 2015 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

West Sussex County Council (WSCC) contracts directly with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to provide both accredited and non-accredited learning for adults and young people aged 16 to 18. The council subcontracts delivery of the whole provision to Aspire Sussex Limited (ASL), a charitable not-for-profit organisation. Learning centres are sited in key areas of need including Burgess Hill, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Southwick and Crawley.

The purpose of this visit was to establish what initial steps managers have taken to improve provision, in response to the previous inspection, and to set key priorities for the next visit.

Themes

**Ensure that appropriate safeguarding checks are made and recorded for all teachers, volunteers and learning support assistants needing them.
Provide all staff with appropriate safeguarding training including on the 'Prevent' duty.**

At the previous inspection, WSCC had not suitably checked the backgrounds of all teaching staff to ensure that all learners were safe, and in particular those aged 16 to 18 or learners with disabilities and those with learning difficulties. At this visit WSCC had a record of background checks, including criminal records checks where appropriate, on all teaching staff for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities (ALDD) and those involved in the provision of community learning. However, records were not complete for all ASL teaching and administrative staff.

Managers have made good progress in introducing systems and training for staff to ensure learners are not at risk of radicalisation or extremism, but this work is at an early stage and it is too soon to judge whether these actions have made an impact. WSCC keep a record of staff who have received safeguarding training. However, managers do not ensure that the training records include all volunteers, learning support assistants and members of the ASL board of trustees.

Priorities for improvement

- As part of the agenda to protect learners from the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism, help teachers to know and understand their learners well. Develop effective procedures to gather information about

learners' specific problems which prevent learning, individual support needs and personal circumstances.

- Ensure that the programme of mandatory safeguarding and 'Prevent' training is completed by all staff and comprehensive records of attendance and dates of training are kept.

Ensure that comprehensive records of safeguarding incidents, including actions taken and outcomes, are maintained, scrutinised by senior managers and escalated to relevant authorities where appropriate.

At the previous inspection managers' records of safeguarding incidents were judged to be weak. They did not record the actions taken, or dates and people concerned in sufficient detail. At this visit it was apparent that WSCC managers had done little to remedy this weakness. It is important that issues raised are resolved appropriately.

Aspire staff maintain a safeguarding log which contains brief details of incidents. Actions are not always clear and outcomes lack sufficient detail. Records were confusing as several of the entries examined by inspectors contained reference to ongoing reviews but had been recorded as completed. Inspectors were not assured that incidents, actions and outcomes were monitored sufficiently by WSCC senior managers.

Priorities for improvement

- Managers must ensure that comprehensive records of all actions and outcomes relating to safeguarding incidents are comprehensively recorded, and that records show clearly which incidents have been resolved successfully. Incidents should be scrutinised and analysed systematically by WSCC senior managers to identify any trends.
- WSCC managers should rapidly ensure that comprehensive and effective arrangements are in place to ensure learners' safety continues to be a priority.

Senior WSCC and Aspire managers should ensure that thorough risk assessments of community venues are carried out and a safe environment is provided for learners.

Managers' and teachers' completion of community venue risk assessments were weak at the previous inspection and a few venues were not sufficiently secure. WSCC senior managers have a clear responsibility to ensure that venues used by ASL to deliver community and family learning are secure and safe.

Security at some community venues remains poor and any member of the public can enter these buildings with no security checks. In a few venues visited by inspectors, space is provided for vulnerable older learners but rooms have no windows or vision panels, no bells to alert the teacher of a visitor, no locked doors and no signing in record to meet fire safety requirements. A few teachers had not completed risk assessments for subjects requiring technical skills and tools that necessitate

adherence to safe working practices. No risk assessments were completed for individual learners who may have more challenging physical barriers to learning.

Learners receive sensitive and careful consideration of their health and safety from teachers, with good individual attention given to learners in physical fitness classes who have specific joint or posture complaints. Learners report an awareness of their health needs and pain thresholds, and teachers adapt tasks to suit individual needs well. Poor heating at some venues is uncomfortable for a minority of learners.

Priorities for improvement

- Develop an appropriate policy and a protocol for risk assessment that set out clearly expectations, timescales and review dates.
- Develop a more robust and detailed risk assessment process for the adult education and community venues used. Ensure that risk assessments and factors that mitigate against identified risks are comprehensively recorded.
- Ensure that, where appropriate, teachers carry out a risk assessment for individual learners who have specific disabilities/and or learning difficulties, including any risks to other vulnerable learners.

Ensure a more thorough monitoring of contracts and performance, and analyse data more incisively, to measure the impact of actions being taken to improve the provision.

At the previous inspection, governance by WSCC was reported as weak. As a result, governors had not effectively challenged leaders' decisions, for example on the programmes ASL offered to learners aged 16 to 18.

WSCC senior managers are represented on the ASL board of trustees. However, WSCC, as the SFA main contractor, continues to take insufficient responsibility for managing the contract. Aspire is the main contributor to the self-assessment and quality improvement planning processes; WSCC senior managers do not sufficiently oversee and manage the process. The WSCC contract management team have good management information systems in place to record progress against key performance indicators, such as learners' achievements, retention and participation rates. Regular meetings with ASL managers ensure that this level of detail is maintained accurately to meet funding requirements. However, WSCC managers do not interrogate the data sufficiently to monitor achievements by different groups of learners and are therefore unable to pinpoint areas for improvement.

Aspire uses a wide range of activities and events to gather information from learners including surveys, compliment boxes, a 'wish tree' and focus groups to gain the views of learners and enable them to influence the development of provision. WSCC managers do not routinely check the effectiveness of such activities as a useful tool to improve provision. 'You said, we did' posters are displayed at venues to inform learners of the results of their feedback, and termly satisfaction surveys are generally

very positive. The needs of the community are carefully considered in the development of courses, including provision for vulnerable groups and minority ethnic learners, but any complaints received are not routinely viewed by WSCC managers or analysed to identify risks.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that representatives on the board of trustees are provided with clear and accurate information and challenge fully all aspects of the provision of learning. WSCC contract managers should use the information to inform an evaluative self-assessment and effective quality improvement plan.
- Improve the monitoring of contracts and provision including analysis of learners' retention and achievements by subject, level and group. Ensure that differences in participation and achievement between groups of learners are clearly identified, and plans put in place to close gaps and increase achievements.
- Oversee ASL's decision-making processes regarding the development of, and improvement to, provision more effectively, including the analysis of complaints.

Improve learners' achievements in English, mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

In the previous year, managers took suitable action to improve the quality of teaching in English, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and mathematics, but it was too early to judge whether this had improved learners' achievement of qualifications, which was not good enough at the time of the previous inspection.

Current learners are more likely to stay on their courses; for example, retention rates in English and mathematics have much improved in both subjects. Subject leaders are carefully monitoring withdrawal rates and analysing reasons why learners withdraw, in order to identify root causes and any trends within classes or with specific teachers. Support for learners who have a learning difficulty or disability is well established; staff conduct specialist assessments to identify the need for learning support assistance, including one-to-one support from volunteers.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue the detailed analysis of withdrawals, learning support, success and progression data to ensure the reasons for withdrawal and success or progression are known and understood, and remedial actions taken.
- Continue to work on embedding English, mathematics and ESOL skills development into vocational and leisure learning courses to ensure life and employability skills are maximised.

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