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Mr Nick Whitfield
Chief Executive
Achieving for Children
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Civic Centre
44 York Street
Twickenham
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Dear Mr Whitfield

Short inspection of London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Following the short inspection on 13–14 January 2016 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 service was judged to be good in May 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

Your learners continue to receive good-quality education and training. They make good progress on their courses and achieve well. Working closely and effectively together, leaders, managers and partners successfully promote a clear vision and mission for community learning and apprenticeships, placing learners at the heart of their work.

Since the previous inspection, to better meet the needs of your local communities, you have reviewed and remodelled your provision and its management. Central to this is the highly effective work of the Richmond Community Learning Partnership and the associated commissioning board in ensuring that learners' needs are identified and prioritised, and that the best possible use is made of increasingly limited budgets.

You have successfully increased the participation of learners from a more diverse range of communities, which is reflected in your now broader and more ambitious portfolio of community learning courses.

Similarly, your well-established apprenticeship programme, offered through strong partnerships with employers, has grown since the previous inspection. It provides good training and progression for apprentices, many of whom have not previously achieved well at school or college. Apprentices often obtain full-time posts with their employers and progress to higher levels of apprenticeships. Significant numbers of previous apprentices now work with, and manage, new apprentices and help with their training.

Learners work in friendly and harmonious environments and they feel safe and able to get on well with their studies and work. Apprentices receive excellent training support from the service's staff and from their employers, who are particularly knowledgeable about their apprentices' courses and what they need to do to succeed.

In pursuit of becoming an 'outstanding' provider, leaders, managers, staff and partners are clear about the improvement priorities for the service, and they have high expectations for themselves and their learners.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified significant strengths in the service's leadership and management, including their achievement of good outcomes for learners and the good quality of provision and teaching, learning and assessment. However, leaders' and managers' capacity to bring about further improvement was only satisfactory. Areas for further improvement included: continuing to increase the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that more was outstanding; improving the quality and rigour of self-assessment; increasing the rigorous use of data and monitoring systems to better evaluate the quality of provision in family learning; making better use of individual learning plans to monitor and track the progress and progression of learners in family learning; carrying out a detailed annual review of apprenticeship sub-contractor performance; and increasing the number of apprenticeships available.

Your managers, partners and their hard-working staff have made significant improvement in each of these areas.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve. For apprenticeships, your assessors and apprentices' employers work highly effectively together to ensure very good planning and delivery of training, and apprentices make very good progress on their programmes. Employers have become expert in supporting their apprentices, and programmes are modelled to meet individual needs, although more attention sometimes needs to be given to apprentices' prior achievements in planning their programmes.

On community learning courses, including family learning, quality improvement work, stemming from the very good partnerships now in place, has secured a greater consistency of good-quality teaching and learning. Managers and tutors now have a much better understanding of the progress of learners and have worked well to introduce individual learning plans for all learners, although tutors do not always use these to best effect.

Quality improvement arrangements, including self-assessment, are much improved since the previous inspection. An effective quality monitoring scheme, working across the partnerships, ensures that issues of quality are speedily identified and addressed. Self-assessment now makes good use of learners' achievement data to ensure robust and evaluative judgements. Since the previous inspection, you have ceased to sub-contract your apprenticeship provision and you monitor apprentices' performance well.

Safeguarding is effective.

You continue to ensure that the safeguarding of your learners has the highest priority in the work of the service, and the good safeguarding identified at the previous inspection continues. Set within the thorough arrangements of the borough, the service effectively promotes its own safeguarding arrangements to staff, learners, partners and employers. Learners were able to speak with inspectors knowledgeably about the ways in which they were safeguarded. All staff understand why safeguarding is important and are thoroughly trained. Learners feel safe in their studies and at work. The Prevent agenda is well understood by leaders and managers and good staff training has taken place. Key staff responsibilities for the implementation of the Prevent duty are in place and partners are fully involved. The service has started to formally educate and brief learners on the risks of radicalisation and extremism through workshops and as part of course content, but this is in its relatively early stages and needs to be completed speedily.

Inspection findings

- The leadership and management of the service continue to be good. Senior managers and partners ensure that the quality of provision for learners is good. They work effectively to address areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection and by the service's own self-assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Outcomes for learners remain good overall and the successful completion of apprenticeships is very good.
- Together with partners, you and your leadership team have improved the service's capacity to meet the needs of its local communities. The very good work of the Richmond Community Learning Partnership and of the commissioning board ensures a relevant and broader programme of community learning courses, increases participation of learners from diverse communities and makes the best use of scarce resources. Similarly, the very good work with employers has increased the range and relevance of apprenticeship programmes, which are highly valued by apprentices and employers.

- The capacity of leaders and managers to drive forward continued improvement is now good. Self-assessment by managers and staff of the service's strengths and areas for further development has improved since the previous inspection. Good self-assessment, now with sharper and more evaluative judgements, and improved use of learners' achievement data by managers, tutors and assessors enable accurate diagnosis of weaker areas.
- Learners continue to benefit from good teaching, learning and assessment. Managers', tutors' and assessors' work and determination to further improve the quality of lessons and training are reflected in the increasingly good progress of learners and the often high success rates. Apprentices continue to make very good progress and most are expected to achieve within their planned timescales.
- Tutors and assessors now have a better understanding of the extent of their learners' progress in lessons or in training, although a small minority of community learning tutors do not make the best use of individual learning plans to help evaluate the progress their learners are making.
- The successful completion of apprenticeships is high as a result of the importance that managers, assessors and employers attach to their assessments, which are frequent and very effective. If apprentices fall behind their expected rate of progress, then assessors and employers intervene swiftly and effectively.
- Managers, assessors and employers ensure that the progression of apprentices from one level of apprenticeship to another, and to full-time employment, is high. Learners on community-based courses enjoy their learning and value the social interaction their courses bring. Many attend for health and well-being reasons and to reduce their feelings of isolation. They often progress to other, more demanding, courses.

Next steps for the provider

In pursuit of the service's vision to be an 'outstanding' provider, leaders and managers should ensure that:

- their successful drive to further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues apace and that the very good practice in apprenticeship provision, and in some community learning, is consistently evident across all courses
- all community learning tutors, when planning and teaching lessons, fully consider learners' progress towards achieving their agreed individual learning goals
- the planned programme of training to help all learners fully understand the Prevent duty and the risks of radicalisation and extremism is speedily and fully completed.

Yours sincerely

David Martin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors were assisted by the manager, Way to Work and Community Learning, as nominee. We met with your deputy chief executive, your senior managers, tutors, assessors, learners, partners and partner employers. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, including work-based learning assessments, and reviewed learners' written work. We reviewed key policies and documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We also considered the views of learners and employers.