

St Helens Adult and Community Learning Service

Local authority

**Inspection dates**

25–28 January 2016

Overall effectiveness**Requires improvement**

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The proportion of learners who achieve their accredited qualifications is low.
- Learners on courses without formal qualifications do not have clear and ambitious individual learning targets and so it is difficult for them to know how well they are doing.
- The quality of provision and learners' achievements have declined following several management restructures and weak planning for the delivery of adult learning services.
- Until recently, council leaders and senior managers have monitored neither the quality of the provision nor the achievement of learners.
- Tutors do not make sufficient checks on learners' knowledge and understanding to enable them to make good progress.
- Tutors do not make good use of information about learners' starting points to plan their teaching. As a result, not all learners work at the level they are capable of.
- Managers do not evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment well enough to identify and eradicate quickly the weaknesses in tutors' teaching.
- Managers are unaware of many learners' destinations and so are unable to monitor the impact of the provision in the local community.

The provider has the following strengths

- The new operational management team has improved the guidance and enrolment processes. Consequently, very few current learners have left.
- In 2014/15, most learners achieved their English and mathematics qualifications.
- Many learners, often with complex barriers to learning, make significant gains in confidence, self-esteem and well-being.
- The standard of most current learners' work is good, and on the creative writing courses it is very high.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Adult and Community Learning Service is St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council's adult learning service. Around 80% of the provision offered consists of non-accredited courses. The majority of accredited courses are pre-entry and level 1 in English and mathematics. Annually, the service offers around 300 courses in 73 venues in schools, community centres and libraries. Since the previous inspection, the service has been based in three different council directorates and is now within the public health and well-being directorate.
- At the previous inspection, the borough was ranked 51st nationally in terms of the overall indicator of deprivation and has increased to 36th position currently. St Helens has a population of 176,000, of whom a quarter have a registered disability, including mental health issues. The unemployment rate in St Helens is in line with the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who achieve their accredited qualification so that their prospects for employment or progression to other courses improve.
- Ensure that council leaders and senior managers plan effectively any future changes to the adult learning service.
- Ensure that the council's elected members with the responsibility for the service's work scrutinise all key aspects of the provision including learners' achievements and destinations, so that they are able to challenge senior managers about the quality of provision and its impact on the community.
- Ensure that tutors delivering courses that do not result in a formal qualification record clear, measurable and challenging targets for learners so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to achieve next.
- Ensure that all tutors use information about learners' skills and abilities at the start of a course to plan their teaching so that learners make good progress and achieve their potential.
- Develop robust arrangements to collect and use progression and destination data to inform future planning of the provision and assess its impact on the community.
- Ensure that the observation of teaching, learning and assessment is thorough, and that the good practice and areas for development inform staff development so that weaknesses are eradicated quickly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Council leaders and senior council managers have not given sufficient priority to planning and monitoring the quality of the adult learning service. Therefore, the quality of provision has declined since the previous inspection.
- During a period of significant instability and through several council restructures, the adult learning service's operational management team introduced a new and effective guidance and enrolment process. In 2014/15, after two years of declining achievements, the proportion of learners who achieved their accredited qualification improved, although it is still too low. Partnerships with other local providers have reduced duplication of provision in the community and have created new routes for progression.
- The arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Observers of lessons focus too much on tutors' activities and not enough on the impact of teaching on learning and the progress of individual learners. As a result, not all tutors develop the appropriate skills to plan teaching that meets the needs of individual learners and to assess their progress.
- Management information on learners' destinations is currently incomplete. Consequently, managers are unable to evaluate the impact of the provision on individual learners and the community. Strategies to improve the accuracy of destination data are now in place and managers have plans to use the information to plan future provision.
- The strategy for the development of learners' skills in English and mathematics is not fully established. For example, the policy on how tutors identify learners' grammatical and spelling errors is not consistently applied as some tutors are concerned that this may demotivate learners.
- Managers do not ensure that weaknesses identified in teaching are tackled effectively because not all tutors apply the training which they receive to improve their teaching. For example, the training which tutors received in setting and recording clear learning targets has not been fully effective.
- Managers use a range of information, including the views of learners and staff, in the self-assessment report which is very thorough. The draft self-assessment report for 2014/15 is comprehensive, analytical and judgemental. However, the quality of the provision is over-graded. The improvement action plan is detailed and a good tool for further improvement.
- Managers have ensured that learners receive effective advice and guidance about their options at the start of their courses. Following a review of courses with low retention rates, managers have made suitable changes to course structure and the length of courses to meet learners' needs, and most now remain on their course. The new enrolment and induction process is more effective in helping learners to make more informed choices about what each course involves. As a result, in-year attendance has improved and is now strong.
- Managers and tutors have ensured that the courses are designed and developed to engage many learners whose circumstances make them socially and economically disadvantaged. A large majority of learners live in communities which are ranked the most deprived areas in Britain. The provider successfully enrolls a high proportion of learners who have not participated in education or training for many years.
- The provision for learners with mental health issues effectively helps them socialise and participate in their communities. Managers are successful in obtaining additional funding to develop further courses for hard-to-reach learners, for example by offering courses at full cost in first aid.
- Managers develop a culture of fair treatment and respect for learners' different views, backgrounds and experiences. Managers, tutors and learners mutually respect each other, and collectively they create an inclusive learning environment in which they feel safe to share experiences and develop. Tutors have received effective training on democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. However, not all tutors promote these ideas well enough.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governance has not been effective and the quality of provision has declined. Critical aspects of learners' achievements have not been monitored.
 - The council, through a newly elected member with responsibility for the service's work, has good knowledge of the provision and high expectations of its managers. The council recognises that despite these recent improvements, governance requires further improvement to ensure that governors have the information the need to challenge managers. For example, key performance indicators do not include key outcomes such as learners' achievements and destinations.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and include appropriate checks on staff. Managers and tutors are vigilant about safeguarding issues. They maintain a detailed record of any safeguarding matters raised and the actions taken. Staff have received good training about how to keep learners safe.
- Staff are well aware of their responsibility to protect learners from extremism and radicalisation. All staff have completed the relevant training courses, and have a good knowledge of extremism risks in St Helens, for example in relation to far-right groups. However, the service has not yet provided learners with sufficient guidance about these risks.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently good. Tutors do not always plan lessons and activities well enough to extend individual learners' skills. Tutors do not consistently set clear learning targets to ensure that learners know how well they are doing and what they need to do next to achieve their potential. Not all tutors check and monitor learners' development of knowledge and skills. They set activities in their lessons for all learners to complete, but do not always check if they have all completed the tasks successfully. Too many tutors rush to start the next activity without ensuring that learners have benefited from the previous task. Consequently, not all learners learn from the activities, and some are confused.
- On non-accredited courses, most tutors have an accurate knowledge of learners' prior knowledge and skills, and what they need to achieve to complete their courses successfully. However, tutors do not always record their learners' progress. Learners' own records of their progress focus on enjoyment of the course rather than skills development as a meaningful summary of what they have achieved.
- On accredited courses, tutors routinely collect and record details of learners' initial assessment tests. However, tutors do not use this information well enough to plan learning activities. As a result, learners of different ability levels work on the same tasks and too many are left struggling and unable to complete the tasks.
- Not all tutors are sufficiently skilful in integrating the development of learners' skills in English and mathematics in their lessons. In learners' marked work, there are inconsistent practices between tutors about the identification and correction of grammar and spelling errors. Some tutors do not identify learners' written errors as they fear it will demotivate unconfident learners. The service has not established a clear protocol for tutors to use.
- Where equality and diversity are part of a course, tutors plan well to ensure that these aspects are covered well in their teaching and assessment. However, on other courses, tutors do not promote learners' understanding and awareness of individual differences well enough.
- Tutors actively encourage learners to develop good skills to learn independently. For example, they frequently set homework for learners outside formal lessons. Learners benefit from good support in lessons: for example, tutors make reasonable adjustments to support those learners with specific needs such as mental health problems, hearing impairments or dyslexia.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

- Learners' attendance in lessons, despite recent improvement, is not good enough. Attendance rates on courses in English, mathematics and Italian are low. Learners who do attend are punctual and arrive in good time for the start of their lessons.
- Not all tutors motivate learners well to develop their skills in using English and mathematics. As a result, too many learners do not improve their literacy and numeracy skills well enough.
- Learners enjoy and value developing their vocational skills. They are keen to learn and can readily identify new skills learnt as a result of their courses. For example, learners on family learning courses acquire a range of methods to teach their children about multiplication and long division.
- Supportive tutors enable learners to overcome some often complex barriers to learning, and grow significantly in confidence, self-esteem and resilience. Managers and tutors recognise the importance of learners' development of personal skills as a first step to their progress, and monitor the development of these skills well. Learners are considerate, attentive and respectful of their peers and tutors. The courses for learners with mental health issues provide them with hope and a purpose.

- Managers and tutors provide learners with a good range of information and guidance about other courses. They work with Jobcentre Plus, the National Careers Service and a local college to help learners progress after completing their courses. However, tutors do not record the advice and guidance which learners receive and so cannot evaluate its effectiveness to inform further improvements.
- Learners know how to keep themselves safe. Specific courses such as first aid enable them to develop good practical knowledge and skills for use in emergencies. Learners develop a good understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet. However, they do not yet have a good enough understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Most learners make the expected progress from their very low starting points. They achieve their learning objectives. However, on non-accredited courses, tutors do not record this information accurately, and consequently the data about their achievements are not reliable. On accredited courses, women achieve better results than men. Managers have identified the reasons for the underperformance of men, and taster courses and more rigorous enrolment processes are reducing the gap.
- In 2014/15, based on the provider's data, managers and tutors increased significantly the proportion of learners who successfully completed their accredited course, although achievement remains too low. A large majority of learners on levels 1 and 2 English and mathematics courses achieved their qualifications.
- The standard of a significant number of learners' work is good. Learners on creative writing courses produce high-quality autobiographies, and photography learners make wall calendars of a professional standard.
- The service is collecting more detailed information on learners' progression and destinations, and initial data indicate that many learners on accredited and non-accredited courses continue to study on other courses or move to employment. However, the data are not yet sufficiently comprehensive.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,814
CEO	Susan Williamson (Head of Service)
Website address	www.sthelens.gov.uk/adultlearning

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+
	N/A	645	N/A	31	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
	■ N/A							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Shahram Safavi, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Priscilla McGuire	Ofsted Inspector
Elaine Price	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the operational and service development manager of the 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 lessons, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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Manchester
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