

**Inspection dates**

**22–25 September 2015**

**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	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too few learners have completed their qualifications because many learners have left their courses early.
- Too few learners continue their studies to further education or employment.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in engineering is not of a sufficiently high standard to enable learners to make good progress.
- Feedback to learners does not always focus on what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.
- Trainers do not provide sufficient opportunities for a small minority of learners to develop personal and social skills in engineering.
- Improvements to the leadership of Paragon Education and Skills have yet to lead to sufficient improvements in the quality of provision.
- Managers have not sufficiently matched courses to the needs of employers locally.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Strong governance by the board is leading to a change in the culture and a greater learner focus in the provision.
- Good teaching, learning and assessment in early years and business administration.
- Current learners make good progress towards achieving their qualifications.
- Particularly good care and support for learners in business administration and early years enables learners to develop good personal, social and employability skills.
- Well qualified and experienced trainers enthuse and motivate learners to make good progress.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Paragon Education and Skills is an independent learning provider based in Bournemouth, with additional training centres in Dudley, Fareham and Manchester. It offers provision across the whole of England. Most of the provision is apprenticeships in health, public service and care, engineering and business administration. A small proportion of the provision is adult classroom-based learning, with a very small number of learners on study programmes.
- Paragon Education and Skills has around 4200 learners, of whom 640 are aged between 16 to 19. There have been significant changes to the provider since the previous inspection. Paragon has reduced the amount of subcontracted provision to just one subcontractor. The use of this subcontractor will also be discontinued. Classroom-based activities for adult learners have been much reduced and are being phased out. The senior management team is almost entirely new to post within the last year.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners are placed on the right courses and monitor their progress to ensure that they complete their qualification.
- Track the progress of learners who have completed their qualifications to assess and enhance the opportunities for them to continue their studies in further education or employment.
- Provide training for learners on engineering courses to develop personal and social skills and evaluate the impact of this training.
- Improve the quality of theory learning and coaching sessions in engineering and health and social care by providing learning activities that are both stimulating and challenging for all learners.
- Improve the focus and accuracy of feedback on learners' work to provide thorough guidance on how learners can improve their knowledge and skills.
- Set and measure targets for implementing the new policies and procedures to ensure they are effective in raising the quality of the provision.
- Establish a strategy, which ensures that Paragon Education and Skills works with stakeholders, including employers and local enterprise partnerships, to train people in the skills needed by employers and local economies.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders have tackled serious management challenges that became evident following the previous inspection. Their tenacity and success in gaining support from staff, shareholders and the funding body has enabled them to make radical and comprehensive changes at all levels of the organisation. As a result, a new management team is leading a reinvigorated organisation in which staff fully understand the high standards that are expected of them and senior staff are intensely focused on improving their learners' experience.
- Senior managers have consulted extensively with staff to establish new values for the reformed company, and are developing a well-considered strategy to provide high-quality training. As yet, this top-level strategy lacks clear, strategic targets and performance measures. While there are very early signs of improvements in provision for learners who have enrolled since the beginning of 2015, it is too early to fully evaluate their impact. Managers have not sufficiently aligned the provision to meet the skills needs of employers in the communities they serve.
- Senior leaders have focused well on improving teaching, learning and assessment through professional development and support for trainers, and through implementing measures to monitor staff performance closely. Managers' evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is leading to good professional development for staff. This has improved their skills to deliver training, including in English and mathematics. However, many staff who observe trainers do not evaluate sufficiently the impact trainers have on learners' progress over time.
- Managers are now in place in all key roles and have developed sensible policies and procedures to underpin improvements. They mostly receive good management information and use it well to monitor the implementation of new policies. However, most initiatives are very new and managers have yet to see their changes lead to consistently high quality teaching, learning and assessment or sustained improvements in learners' progress and outcomes.
- The collection and reporting of some data is still underdeveloped. Managers have yet to ensure that information is collected about learners' progression into further training, employment and better jobs. As a result, they are unable to fully evaluate the impact of the apprenticeships on learners' progression in their careers. They are also unable to demonstrate to prospective apprentices the work and job roles that they may expect to move into following the apprenticeship. Data about the recruitment and performance of vulnerable learners such as care leavers and those who have been in receipt of free school meals are not monitored to ensure these learners are supported and make good progress.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - Non-executive board members challenge senior managers well and have successfully led an overhaul of the senior management. They have led a change in culture that has been welcomed by staff who feel that Paragon Education and Skills is now more strongly focused on helping learners succeed.
  - Board members receive regular reports on learners' performance and progress and have led improvements in the reporting and use of data on learners' progress well.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding**
  - The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Recruitment checks are managed well and, when necessary, risk assessments on job roles and staff are carried out rigorously. Staff are trained in their safeguarding responsibilities appropriately and the safeguarding policy is reviewed frequently by senior staff and board members.
  - Senior leaders monitor safeguarding incidents closely and take swift and effective action to support learners disclosing a safeguarding matter. Policies and procedures are well understood by staff and learners receive high-quality support from a well-qualified, experienced and effective welfare team. Learners work safely, and staff in engineering set high standards for students working safely; learners apply these well in the workplace.
  - Leaders responded well to the government's requirements for providers to raise learners' awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Staff have completed a useful self-assessment of their own knowledge and perceptions of radicalisation and extremism which has led to targeted staff development.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement across much of the provision. Much teaching in health and social care, and in engineering is dull; it does not challenge learners or expose them to the most up-to-date information. Teaching is particularly effective in early years and business administration.
- In engineering and health and social care, trainers and assessors do not always provide sufficient challenge for the most-able learners. Early years learners are provided with stimulating learning sessions and interesting assessment activities that develop good practice in childcare. Trainers and assessors make good use of their vocational expertise to plan an imaginative range of activities that motivates and engages learners. Engineering learners are coached well in developing skills in using lathes, drills and saws in well-managed workshops. However, engineering theory is taught less well and features activities that learners find repetitive and mundane
- Employers provide good training opportunities in the workplace. Learners benefit from working in different departments or in different aspects of their industries. Employers often select the units studied by their apprentices in order to develop fully the skills needed by their business.
- Assessment requires improvement. Assessment visits in the workplace are frequent and planned to minimise disruption to businesses or care settings. Assessors review the progress of health and social care learners effectively but do not always provide good feedback. Feedback is generally very brief and lacks sufficient detail and depth necessary for learners to appreciate what is needed to improve their feedback on assessed work. Assessors do not involve all employers sufficiently in progress reviews and so skills development, behaviours and attitudes in the workplace are seldom included in improvement targets. Learners prepare well for their progress reviews by reflecting on their current progress. The tracking and monitoring of engineering learners' progress has improved markedly because assessment in engineering is started much earlier. In business and early years, written feedback to learners is helpful in motivating learners to perform at their best and reach challenging goals. However, in health and social care and engineering, it does not always give them a clear understanding of their progress and what they need to do to improve their work further.
- Support for learners is good. Trainers effectively help learners develop self-confidence and improve their work skills. Early years assessors inspire learners to achieve particularly challenging learning goals. Apprentices develop their abilities to study independently by using an extensive range of additional online resources that provide good support to develop vocational knowledge and skills. Learners with additional identified needs are supported well from the start of their programme and make good progress.
- Staff promote equality and diversity appropriately in most aspects of teaching and learning. Staff in health and social care use scenarios to create vibrant discussion on how learners' approaches and attitudes to care shape their industry. However, in engineering, not all staff are confident yet in confronting the negative stereotyping, behaviours and attitudes of a minority of learners. In health and social care, a small minority of learners are not yet well prepared for working within diverse communities.
- The development of English, information and communications technology (ICT) and mathematics skills requires improvement. In business programmes, English, ICT and mathematics are highly relevant and developed and supported well. Very effective coaching in this area encourages the development of problem-solving skills very well. In health and social care, tutors do not emphasise the importance of mathematics and English, particularly within the context of the workplace, and most learners do not understand why they have to study them.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** are good

- Nearly all learners grow in confidence and develop positive attitudes to learning. Their attendance is good and they take responsibility for their own learning. They are self-assured, keen to share their ideas and many contribute well to raising standards in the workplace.
- Current learners are passionate about their achievements and future careers. Learners are clear about career opportunities and effectively plan for future employment and training.
- Learners gain good employment-related skills in areas such as administration, research, and team

working. They are valued by their employers and contribute well to raising standards in the workplace. Learners in nurseries design stimulating activities for the children, and are able to make good suggestions for improving care practice. One learner in business administration has developed particularly good skills in managing debt collection from customers in a firm but tactful manner.

- Early years, engineering and business administration learners take pride in their work. Learners improve their spelling and punctuation and gain greater confidence in the use of mathematics and ICT, especially within business administration. In health and social care, standards of work are of an acceptable standard but some learners are not challenged academically. In engineering, learners do not work hard enough outside training sessions.
- Learners show respect to the people they work with and their behaviour and conduct is professional. They demonstrate good working relationships with their peers and employers. Learners in health and social care understand their responsibilities towards vulnerable adults and know how to challenge any type of abuse.
- Learners feel safe and have a good understanding of how to protect themselves and others. In engineering, there is a very high regard for safe working practices. Staff raise awareness of the Prevent agenda and fundamental British values.
- All learners in early years, engineering and business administration are making good progress, with the majority of learners on track to complete their programme well before the planned timescale. Learners in health and social care make steady progress in relation to their starting points. Many learners are likely to be retained in permanent jobs after their training, and childcare learners are often promoted to senior positions or to deputy manager posts.

## Outcomes for learners

## require improvement

- The large majority of current learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualification. Most of these learners are on track to complete their qualifications within the time allocated.
- Too few learners have completed their qualifications and there has been a significant drop in the number of learners completing their course.
- A small minority of learners are known to have progressed into further education or progressed within their place of work.
- Differences in the performance of different groups are narrowing but managers have not analysed performance differences between all groups.
- Learners achieve their targets well overall and meet some very challenging targets in early years. Learners fulfil some very challenging roles in business administration. However, some learners are not challenged sufficiently to reach their potential.
- Learners' work is of a sufficiently high standard to fulfil professional requirements overall. The standard of learners' work in early years is very high. Learners in business administration move into challenging roles such as personal assistant to a director or managing maintenance programmes for a local council.
- Learners engage well with tutors and clearly enjoy the learning experience. Learners are very committed and enthusiastic about their work and participate fully in training sessions.
- Learners make adequate progress in improving their skills in English and good progress in information technology, although a very small minority of learners improve their skills in mathematics.

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	10925
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Mark Botha
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.paragonskills.co.uk">http://www.paragonskills.co.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	1	2	32	7	0	15	0	0
<b>Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	473	2012	135	1747	0	11		
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>	0							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sarina Russo</li> </ul>							

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Charles Clark, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steven Tucker	Her Majesty's Inspector
Penny Mathers	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Hill	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the operations director, 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 students 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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