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Ms V Webb  
Interim Service Manager  
Adult and Community Learning  
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Dear Ms Webb

### **Short inspection of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council**

Following the short inspection on 9 and 10 March 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in March 2012.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

Senior leaders and managers have taken effective action to address the majority of key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision and use this well to ensure that learners continue to achieve well and maintain good standards.

Through close joint working with partner agencies, such as colleges and the voluntary and community sector, senior leaders and managers develop provision well so that it meets the needs of local residents effectively. Managers have successfully extended the learning opportunities available to local residents so that there are clear progression routes for them to continue their learning. For example, new courses in health and social care, beauty, and information and communication technology (ICT) have been developed well to respond to local labour market needs and to provide progression routes for learners of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). These are now in place – ranging from introductory courses to courses that lead to a qualification.

#### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Managers prioritise the safety of learners effectively. They have put in place clear policies and procedures that set out the expectations of staff should they have

concerns about the safety or welfare of learners. When staff need to act on safeguarding concerns, they do so quickly and effectively. Managers apply safe selection practice when recruiting new staff and undertake all relevant checks on their suitability for employment. Learners feel safe and inspectors observed safe working practice at learning centres and during sessions.

All staff have undertaken training in preventing extremism and radicalisation. A 'Prevent' action plan is in place. Managers and staff instigate programmes that promote British values effectively. For example, over 300 learners learned about the symbolic importance of poppies and their importance in commemorating those from the armed forces lost in the First World War. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disability learned about the suffragette movement and the history of voting and democracy, and performed a play helping other learners to explore these themes.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the previous inspection senior leaders received too little information to enable them to scrutinise the performance of the service. Managers now ensure that senior leaders and managers regularly receive a broader range of information, including that on learners' participation, how well learners complete their courses and the outcomes that they achieve. The lead member for adult and community learning receives regular performance reports and challenges managers to make improvements.
- The new chief officer has quickly grasped key issues and established plans to secure further improvements. New management arrangements are already proving effective, with improved liaison with other council departments, such as the housing department. This has led to new premises for adult learning to take place at an outlying housing estate.
- The extended senior management team regularly use data and performance information well to analyse, review and make improvements in the delivery of learning programmes. This has led to effective new strategies, for example to recruit new learners; to improve learners' attendance; to better track the progress of individual learners; and to take practical steps to improve their readiness for examinations.
- Managers undertake regular observations of learning activities, which are effective in maintaining and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Skilled and experienced managers carry out thorough observations and accurately identify key strengths and areas for improvement in teaching. Feedback to tutors is detailed and helpful and includes action plans which enable tutors to understand clearly what they need to do to improve further. Managers moderate the quality and consistency of most observations. However, in a small minority of cases, observers are too generous in their grading, particularly with regard to what they judge to be outstanding practice, or they do not always identify important action points for tutors to develop their skills.
- Managers monitor the progress and achievement of learners effectively. As a result of a detailed audit in 2015 managers identified the need to secure further improvements in how tutors record learners' progress. Subsequently

managers provided additional training for tutors and support for curriculum managers and course leaders. As a result the vast majority of learners now benefit from having clear personalised learning goals and regular assessments, reviews and recording of their individual progress. Inspectors saw examples of excellent practice; for example in English and in modern foreign language courses, with learners fully involved in setting and reviewing their own progress and achievements. Curriculum managers regularly share this good practice with staff to raise standards. Managers are currently working with the small minority of tutors who have yet to implement fully effective processes for setting, recording and reviewing the progress of learners.

- The priority groups that the service aims to attract are clearly defined in service plans and understood well by senior leaders, managers and staff. Managers plan the curriculum well and work effectively with partner organisations to reach these groups. As a result an increasing number of older learners, those with disability, from minority ethnic groups and from the most deprived areas are participating in adult learning. Targets for recruiting these learners are being exceeded
- There are no discernible achievement gaps between different groups of learners. All learners achieve equally well. Managers and staff develop programmes that successfully attract more vulnerable learners, such as projects for learners with dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Older learners benefit from exercise classes, and painting and reminiscence workshops. Neighbourhood learning centres are located well in areas of highest need and support the engagement of priority groups effectively. Around half of all learners are new to classes each year.
- Since the previous inspection managers have ensured that the availability of courses that lead to qualifications and the number of learners taking qualifications have increased significantly. Learners have good access to recognised qualifications; for example in British sign language, and adult and social care. Nearly all learners successfully achieve their qualifications. They develop improved self-esteem and confidence and improve their prospects of employment.
- The majority of tutors use technology effectively to support teaching and learning. For example, the good use of digital photography enables learners to record and upload their work to the internet so that family and friends can share in their achievements. Managers have invested well in new technology, such as purchasing tablet computers for tutors to use at different venues where there is no access to ICT for teaching. Managers are extending well the breadth of ICT courses available; for example, with the introduction of courses on the use of computer tablets and applications. However, insufficient training opportunities exist for those tutors who lack confidence in using technology in the classroom. Furthermore, not enough tutors promote the use of the virtual learning environment to learners and as a result not enough learners use it to consolidate, catch up on and enhance their learning.

## **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers are consistent in their judgements and in identifying areas for improvement in their observations of teaching, learning and assessment so that all tutors are clear on the improvements needed
- managers provide effective support to the small proportion of tutors who do not set targets, record and review the progress and achievement of learners effectively
- all tutors are confident in using ICT in the classroom and effectively promote the virtual learning environment to learners to enhance their learning.

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

Jon Bowman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by the quality improvement manager for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council as nominee. We met with you, senior leaders, managers, tutors and learners. We carried out lesson observations, took account of the most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. We used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and staff. We scrutinised data and information on the performance of the service; and reviewed schemes of work, lesson plans, key policy documents and records of safeguarding concerns.