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29 March 2016

Ms Ellen Ryan  
Head of Learning, Skills and Employment  
London Borough of Islington  
Islington Town Hall  
Upper Street  
London  
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Dear Ms Ryan

### **Short inspection of London Borough of Islington Adult and Community Learning Service**

Following the short inspection on 2 and 3 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 February 2011.

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

You and your senior leaders have successfully maintained the good quality of provision seen at the previous inspection. In many areas, such as in mathematics, further improvements have been made and almost all learners achieve their learning aims and/or qualifications. However, the previously outstanding provision in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) has not been maintained at its former high standard.

Of the three key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, your senior leaders and managers have tackled two well. They have made clear improvements to the monitoring of learners' progression at the end of their courses, and to the identification of the performance of different groups of learners. However, attendance and punctuality, particularly for ESOL learners, remain a challenge.

You have aligned the work of the adult and community learning service very closely to the borough's priorities. The commitment at the highest level of the council that has gone into addressing poverty, supporting people with more complex needs and positively placing employment at the heart of the council's priorities, pervades from the highest strategic level through the whole service and to tutors in the community

and local residents. The council's departments collaborate particularly well to ensure that employability is the focus of their work. A restructure last year, which created one service to focus on learning, skills and employment, has been very effective. Learners understand clearly the role the service plays in supporting them into work.

Governance arrangements are good. The self-assessment moderation panel, which comprises senior officials within the council and senior leaders from the local college, provides effective external oversight of provision and service developments. It ensures impartial scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders, managers and staff of the service.

The service's internal focus on quality improvement has been particularly effective because senior leaders, managers and teachers know the provision well, are appropriately critical and strive to improve the service to learners.

Senior leaders and managers have strengthened further the outstanding work with partners to reinforce learning and provide venues in accessible local settings. Partners also provide additional staffing to support learning, for example through mentors and work coaches, and bilingual support staff in family learning provision. The partnership work with Jobcentre Plus has had a positive impact on behaviours through the delivery of vocational courses and ESOL to long-term unemployed people. The partnership has used this flexible approach well, particularly with people who have more complex needs, to build confidence and self-esteem. Senior leaders in the service have recognised the need to improve learners' attendance on ESOL and English courses. Volunteers are used well within mathematics and English lessons to provide in-class support.

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have increased significantly the range of employability and vocational courses, and have recruited designated staff to provide impartial information, advice and guidance alongside that provided by teachers in class. The vocational programmes are an excellent step in helping to get people onto the pathway to work through a 'try-and-see' approach. This coupled with employer engagement has led to the opportunity for local unemployed people to gain good flexible jobs and help to overcome barriers to employment. Leaders have established progression routes for learners, so they can move on from non-accredited to accredited learning, and into work experience, volunteering, paid employment or further learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Annually updated policies and procedures have recently been amended to include the local authority's duty to safeguard learners from extremism and radicalisation. Safe recruitment practices apply, with the completion of appropriate checks on all relevant staff, including subcontractors and volunteers, renewable every three years. Safeguarding incidents are few and records clear and proportionate.

Learners receive information about safeguarding during their induction and via the learners' handbook, with helpful pictorial prompts included in study skills booklets and on posters. These resources also promote shared values of democracy and freedom of speech. A wide range of training for staff includes safeguarding in the context of equality-related themes such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and gangs. As a result, teachers and managers understand their responsibilities to safeguard learners particularly well. They know their learners well and are vigilant; they support learners as appropriate and refer concerns to the designated safeguarding officer.

Staff promote online safety and the use of information and communication technology well to learners; they use helpful posters which are clearly displayed in centres and discussed in lessons. Staff also remind learners about the health and safety risks they need to be aware of when working on computers. As a result, learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when working online.

The service works closely with safeguarding officers in all departments of the council and externally, such as community safety officers and the police. Learners feel safe in centres, with their peers and their teachers.

## **Inspection findings**

- Staff now monitor learners' progression well, having improved this aspect of their monitoring. For example, in 2011/12, only 283 learners were tracked to identify their progression to positive destinations; by contrast, in 2014/15 the service sampled 1,000 learners and was able to track 707 of them. Of the learners who were unemployed before starting the service's courses, over a quarter progressed to positive destinations, including work.
- As a result of highly effective partnerships, learners can continue their learning with other training providers. For example, learners on ESOL courses can move on to accredited, higher-level language learning, as a result of the protocol for sharing data with City and Islington College. Learners can progress from non-accredited courses with the service and go to the college for the next level course. The college accepts the teacher's assessment of the learner and learners are routinely given an interview.
- Leaders have put in place an effective strategy to provide individual information, advice and guidance (IAG) to learners. Learners benefit considerably from individual IAG sessions. Sessions are well advertised and easily accessible to learners, with many appointments taking place in the centres where learners study. Well-trained IAG staff meet learners' needs well; some have specialisms such as expertise in working with disabled learners and those with learning difficulties. Another adviser is an ESOL specialist.

- The teaching of mathematics is excellent, led by an enthusiastic and highly knowledgeable curriculum leader who takes the lead on sharing good practice, not only within the well-established and highly effective mathematics team but also across other curriculum areas. Learners in mathematics lessons make particularly good progress. Staff focus very well on the learners and the learning process to plan provision; for example, the new mixed model of online, drop-in and webinar provision enables learners to learn flexibly, when they want. A range of different mathematics qualifications on offer, which have no specified examination periods, enable learners to take examinations at any point during the academic year. Staff provide very good support and feedback on learning; this motivates the learners and enables them to achieve rapidly. Learners speak with excitement and enthusiasm about their learning and the progress that they are making. Many good practice aspects of mathematics teaching and learning are already being implemented in English. Managers have plans to employ similar good practice in other subject areas.
- The introduction of an action planning unit, completed by learners over three sessions, aims to create a thorough and comprehensive individual learning plan (ILP). Once completed, it gives teachers and learners a clear view of whether or not the course on which they are placed is right for them, or whether a higher-level course, a non-accredited course or drop-in sessions would be more suitable. This good practice with ILPs has been shared across the service, and the English department have now implemented this approach.
- The revised system for marking learners' work is good; it enables teachers to monitor the quality of learners' marked work more easily. Learners now have a much clearer understanding about what they did well and what they have to do to improve further. Teachers provide more detail. For example, if a learner's work is good, the teacher no longer writes simply 'good'; the teacher states why this is the case. Learners have a good understanding of why it is important for them to do homework and practise skills outside of lessons. Teachers in mathematics and English have already completed training in the revised marking system; the training for ESOL teachers is due to take place very soon.
- Senior leaders and managers work with key employers in the borough, such as large care providers and prestigious hotel chains. Employer representatives visit lessons and talk to learners, interview them and invite them to engage in further learning at work. Approximately two to three people out of every cohort of learners will apply and get work from these contacts. The service has a very good and productive relationship with Jobcentre Plus, particularly for learners claiming employment support allowance. This specific provision enables learners to gain employability skills without losing their benefits, for example by working as volunteers or in part-time paid jobs. The service's collaboration with partners creates a holistic

approach which enables these vulnerable learners to overcome barriers to achieving employment.

- A good range of strategies promote good attendance and punctuality. Teachers use the action planning unit at the start of mathematics and English courses to ensure that the level of study and the lesson times are suitable for learners. Support workers provide effective monitoring and follow-up of poor attendance and punctuality, by texting learners on their mobile telephones. As a result, learners on English courses have improved their attendance and punctuality. In 2015/16 in-year attendance has increased by seven percentage points compared to last year; punctuality also improved by five percentage points. However, the same process has had little impact on attendance on ESOL courses, with an improvement of one percentage point occurring over the same period.
- Staff reinforce frequently learners' understanding of the importance of good attendance and punctuality to enable them to make good progress. Teachers ensure that learners are fully aware of the times of classes and the importance of punctuality before they enrol on a course, guiding them to make realistic decisions about whether they can make the commitment required. Teachers identify difficulties affecting attendance and learning, for example poor health and shift work. Teachers in most classes use this information well to plan relevant and appropriate tasks to help learners progress. In a small minority of classes, the recording of learners who are late to class is not accurate. Currently, insufficient alternative approaches exist to give learners the opportunity of catching up on missed lessons and to record accurately the work done in these different ways.
- Staff conduct detailed, thorough and wide-ranging initial assessments of learners' skills. Most teachers use the results of these assessments well in their planning and teaching. Teachers have considerable expertise in supporting ESOL learners who may be dyslexic. When required, learners benefit from the support of vetted and trained volunteers. The service has increased the number of volunteers to support learners with additional learning needs. Managers have plans in place for staff training to develop teachers' ability to support learners with additional learning needs, and two teachers are due to go on dyslexia training.
- Teachers provide insufficient challenge to more-able learners in mixed-ability groups. Too many learners in ESOL lessons speak in their first language rather than in English. On occasion, learners in ESOL classes are not able to make good progress as the teacher does not provide sufficiently clear explanations of the language points being taught.
- Good support exists for vulnerable adult learners who have a wide range of problems which make learning difficult, such as mental ill health, to participate in learning and develop skills for work. In the classroom, mentors and teachers support these learners well, often offering one-to-one tuition

and guidance. Staff make good use of community facilities and voluntary sector groups to provide accessible local learning venues and work experience. Learners with mental ill health complete food hygiene qualifications and are then able to undertake work experience in, for example, the venue's kitchen.

- Plans to develop a virtual learning environment (VLE) for learners are well underway. This VLE will enable learners to use learning resources at times other than during their regular lessons, and is designed to support those learners who have multiple responsibilities or difficulties which affect their attendance at lessons. For example, it will help those caring for young children or dependent adults, those with other family commitments and those who are unwell and require regular attendance at hospital.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers and teachers improve ESOL provision by:
  - accurately recording learners' attendance and punctuality
  - challenging more-able learners more effectively in mixed-ability groups
  - ensuring learners in ESOL lessons speak English as much as possible
  - providing sufficiently clear explanations of the language points being taught to enable learners to progress rapidly.
- senior leaders and managers develop alternative ways to learn, such as those proposed as part of the development of the VLE, so that learners can catch up on missed lessons; and develop a system to record learners' participation and progress in these other ways of learning.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rosy Belton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors carried out the inspection, assisted by the deputy manager adult and community learning, as nominee. We visited the three main learning centres to observe teaching and learning and to look at learners' work. We met with partners, learners, senior leaders, managers and teachers, and visited community-based learning venues. We

reviewed key documents, including the service's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, data related to the performance of learners currently on programmes and those related to safeguarding. We considered the views of learners by reviewing the results of Ofsted's online questionnaires.