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31 March 2016

Ms Heather Blevins
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Dear Ms Blevins

Short inspection of Warwickshire County Council adult and community learning service

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 visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in May 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection in May 2011, Warwickshire's adult and community learning service has undergone considerable upheaval. Having at one point been on the verge of moving to a commissioned service, with the inevitable impact this had on staff morale, the council instead established the attractive and well-equipped new learning centre in Leamington, demonstrating the commitment of council members to maintaining the service. The accompanying major restructuring in 2014, which included the decision to jointly fund a shared post of head of service with Coventry adult education service (AES), has brought greater efficiencies and stability, and growing expertise among tutors. The introduction of curriculum and programme managers has resulted in a significant sharpening of managers' focus on improving provision for learners, with the full support of council members.

The seven recently appointed programme managers have focused their attention very sharply on improving the curriculum and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Programme managers know their areas very well. They take direct responsibility for their areas and feel strongly empowered to take actions to bring about improvement. They observe the work of all of their staff formally over an annual cycle, and informally in their teams. They use the outcomes of these observations well.

Through these considerable organisational changes, you and your teams have successfully maintained the strengths identified at the previous inspection and

further strengthened those areas that required consolidation. Learners continue to gain confidence, make good progress in developing new skills and are able to find courses at times and locations that meet their needs. You continue to attract new learners from groups that you have identified as under-represented and you continue to develop the curriculum to ensure that it meets local, regional and national priorities.

You have made considerable progress in dealing with the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection: reducing differences in levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy between groups of learners; assessing learners' starting points, progress and achievement in courses not leading to an external qualification; establishing an effective system to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; supporting tutors to help learners develop their understanding of equality and diversity; and using data to support managers to direct their improvement work where it is most needed. The self-assessment report is highly evaluative and accurate, and leads to good action planning to bring about improvement; however, you recognise that despite the progress made, there are some aspects where further work is needed to consolidate the improvements or to extend them to all parts of the provision. Quality improvement plans for each programme area and at service level set clear and challenging targets; the plans produced by programme managers closely reflect the strategic direction and targets of the service.

Managers have been proactive in improving the way that tutors assess learners' starting points, progress and achievement on all courses. You have arranged staff development through a university partner to help tutors develop appropriate ways of assessing learners, particularly on courses that do not lead to a qualification. You and your managers identified improvements that you needed to make in the format of learners' individual learning plans to support better use of learning goals and targets and better assessment of progress. Here, as in other aspects of your work, managers are aware of where initial assessment and target-setting practice is good, for example in family learning, and are disseminating that good practice effectively by providing examples of exemplar materials and giving tutors individual support as required. Your managers are now looking at ways to improve the quality assurance of assessment decisions that tutors make on these courses.

You have established a very clear process for observing the quality of teaching across the service, with comprehensive guidance for both observers and tutors, and an effective peer review process with partner local authorities including reciprocal lesson observations. Programme managers and curriculum managers have been trained in observation, working in collaboration with managers working in Coventry AES, and conduct most of the lesson observations in their curriculum areas.

Inspectors agreed strongly with the findings of programme managers in the lessons jointly observed. Managers now have much more accountability for their curriculum areas and more direct responsibility for the work of their tutors, which enables them to provide prompt support where needed. Curriculum and programme managers have set clear targets in their curriculum areas for further improvement at course

level, which are then reflected in curriculum-area and service-wide quality improvement plans. Targets set for tutors are closely focused on improving learning by making lessons more enjoyable, motivating and creative, and by refining the assessment processes. Some current improvement projects tackle highly specific issues, such as the physical layout of desks in one tutor's room, while wider development areas include improving assessment in class, increasing and sharing creative ideas for questioning to check learning, and the use of information technology to enliven lessons and support learning.

Tutors are required to incorporate aspects of equality and diversity in their schemes of work in order to help learners improve their understanding of these important topics. Alongside this, tutors are encouraged to use the opportunities that arise spontaneously in lessons to prompt discussion. Lesson observations include a good focus on how well tutors are integrating these themes in their lessons.

Safeguarding is effective.

Learners experience a safe and positive learning environment. They respect each other and are keen to learn more about each other's cultures. Learners are mutually supportive towards their peers within learning sessions and work well together. They know how to keep themselves safe when using online services.

Managers have been trained in safer recruitment practices and follow a strict process to ensure that staff are appropriately checked before appointment and detailed records are kept.

All staff have undergone 'Prevent' training as part of wider safeguarding update training, most of which has been in a series of face-to-face events with some online training where necessary for those who missed these sessions. Tutors are aware of the process for raising any safeguarding concerns about learners. For example, in one lesson, the good rapport between the tutor and two vulnerable learners led to the reporting of two safeguarding issues that were effectively dealt with. Senior safeguarding officers appropriately refer serious cases to the relevant external agency.

One of the senior safeguarding officers produced an outline lesson plan to support tutors in introducing 'Prevent' as a discussion topic, prioritising learners in information and communication technology (ICT), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and literacy and numeracy lessons. The lesson plan is designed to be proportionate to the nature of the learners, for example, so that it is accessible for learners with learning difficulties or disability. One teacher in a country crafts lesson introduced safeguarding to learners during induction and followed this up in a lesson by distributing a leaflet and information cards about 'Prevent' and wider safeguarding matters including online safe practices.

Managers recognise that developing learners' understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism is an area for further development.

Inspection findings

- You and your managers have worked successfully to improve success rates in literacy and numeracy courses, but recognise that further improvement is needed in specific courses. Tutors now make more thorough and effective use of established diagnostic tools to identify learners' starting points and support needs. They use the results of these assessments effectively to 'stream' levels in literacy and numeracy classes. You have increased the number of courses running in the evening, which has been successful in attracting more male learners who are in employment, with the result that the balance of men and women on courses is much more equitable.

- Curriculum and programme managers have increased the sharing of good practice between tutors, leading to more creative approaches in their teaching and assessment. The result of this wide range of actions is that the much-improved overall success rates in literacy and numeracy are now high and well above national rates; success rates on ESOL courses are consistently high. Your data show that this improvement trend is continuing in the current year. Fewer learners have left their courses prematurely than at the equivalent point last year and the proportion still in learning is very high.

- You have closed the overall differences in achievement between different groups of learners. Learners with learning difficulties or disability are performing at least as well as all other groups and sometimes better.

- Tutors understand the links between completing an individual learning plan and the development and monitoring of learning in a way that supports learners; they no longer see this process as an administrative exercise. They use a wide range of formal and informal methods of assessment that has been tailored to meet the needs of particular groups. For example, a curriculum development group created a simple assessment tool for pre-entry level learners to identify their English and mathematics abilities, which more effectively met the needs of learners with learning difficulties or disability. The form is simple to understand, contains clear targets and dates for completion, and uses a 'traffic light' system so that learners can readily assess their progress.

- In an English class, the teacher was using a very good form to assess progress. The document, called 'the big picture lesson plan', records learners' prior understanding of the topic of the lesson and learners then record their learning under different headings in a simple spider diagram format. In sugar craft, the teacher has a detailed conversation with learners prior to the start of the course and identifies their learning aims. This is used to create a highly personalised learning plan. Learners keep a detailed record of their progress and achievement through taking photographs of their work.

- Managers are aware that there is more to do in sharing good practice, particularly in developing targets that are measurable, and in using different ways to measure learners' progress, especially through the use of technology.

- As a result of the much stronger focus on quality within each curriculum and programme area, teaching, learning and assessment are becoming more

consistently good. Tutors are helped to improve by taking part in shared working with the programme manager, watching the programme manager or other tutors who are stronger in the area identified, and receiving individual mentoring and support. They are encouraged to bring to the regular curriculum meetings examples of good practice identified during observations, such as in the promotion of equality and diversity.

- In an English lesson, the tutor showed an excellent use of targeted questioning that had been an area for improvement in previous observations. As a result of feedback and support, this was an area of strength in the lesson jointly observed.

- Tutors are particularly adept at integrating equality and diversity discussion into ESOL lessons and in English speaking and listening activities. Tutors use the daily prompts displayed by one internet search engine as a start-up activity, such as Peruvian independence day, Hedy Lamar's birthday and her scientific achievements during the Second World War, and a 'Room 101' exercise based on the well-known television series.

- Many faith and ethnic heritage groups are represented in the service. Learners work together very well and use their experience and background as a way of developing understanding and tolerance. In one English lesson, the teacher had prepared an 'odd one out' starter activity based on different flowers that were emblems of the different countries of the UK. He then asked the learners if they could name the emblems of their own countries, including Pakistan and Brazil, successfully drawing on the diverse cultural heritage of the learners. In an ESOL lesson, entry level learners explored International Women's Day and what it meant within the different cultures represented by the learners in the class. This prompted learners to ask questions of peers about attitudes to women, and different customs relating to marriage.

- Tutors use comprehensive group profiles that identify individual learners' needs well to plan learning. They know their learners very well and are able to plan suitably challenging activities for them that meet their needs and ensure good progress. They plan extension activities, simplify some tasks, produce alternative formats, and provide support as required in ways that the learners feel comfortable with, and as a result they make good progress.

- As a result of the close working relationship with Coventry AES, managers now have very good access to key performance information. They evaluate their data very carefully and in great detail to identify any concerns and to direct improvements. For example, managers identified that one tutor's female students were making less progress and achieving less well than the male students. They intervened and supported the tutor successfully, so that male and female current learners are now progressing at least as well as expected.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- programme managers encourage and support tutors to raise their learners' awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism in ways that are appropriate to learners' interests and abilities, and programme managers identify when this is done well and promote its sharing and adoption

- programme managers analyse the reasons for the decline in achievement rates in a small number of courses and quickly act to restore the previous high rates

- tutors share the good practice that currently exists in assessing learners' starting points, setting learning goals and measurable, time-specific targets, and monitoring their progress using relevant techniques such as photographing their work, particularly on courses not leading to a qualification.

Yours sincerely

Nick Gadfield
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by you as head of service. We held meetings with staff and managers. We observed teaching, learning and assessment jointly with your programme managers and looked at learners' work and the facilities available to them. We spoke to learners wherever we found them and incorporated their views in our findings. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding.