

Choices 4 All

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

8–11 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
Provision for learners with high needs	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Trustees' and managers' actions to improve the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been ineffective, and standards have declined. Much teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate, too few learners achieve their qualifications and most make slow progress in their learning.
- Until recently, trustees and managers have not focused sufficiently on the quality of education or the learning requirements of learners with high needs.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are not effective. Trustees and managers have not fulfilled their duty under the 'Prevent' legislation; managers have not ensured that safe recruiting practices are adhered to, and their oversight of work experience arrangements is weak.
- Managers have not ensured that teachers are suitably qualified and experienced to work with learners who have high needs. Too few teachers have qualified teacher status or subject specialist experience.
- Managers have not met the requirements of learners' individual placement agreements by ensuring that the ratio of teachers and learning support staff to learners is appropriate.
- Teachers' monitoring and reviewing of learners' individual progress are inadequate. Individual learning plans do not focus on developing good communication skills or improving learners' skills to live independently.
- Teachers do not know the starting points of learners and, consequently, cannot set meaningful targets or know whether learners are making good progress.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners enjoy their time at Choices 4 All. They improve their communications with their peers and staff.
- Learners attend well and are punctual.
- The revised curriculum now provides for a broader range of practical opportunities to enable learners to develop their skills for employment, independent living and communications skills.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Choices 4 All (Choices) is an independent training provider with charitable status based in Harrow, West London, which provides education and training for young people with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners aged 19 to 25 years can join the programme at any time during the year.
- The focus of education and training is on independent living skills, employment skills and training for life.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that learners are safe at Choices and when on external work experience. Ensure that trustees and senior managers fulfil their statutory duty under the government's Prevent legislation.
- As a matter of urgency, ensure that all teachers and staff are trained in the specialist needs of learners with high needs, and understand fully the individual requirements of current learners.
- Recruit members to the board of trustees with sufficient knowledge and expertise of further education and of learners with high needs.
- Ensure that the requirements of learners' individual placement agreements are met by improving the ratio of learning support staff and teachers to learners.
- Ensure that the monitoring and recording of learners' progress is based upon skills development, and what learners can do and have learned, rather than recording the tasks that they have completed.
- Carry out a thorough assessment of current learners' starting points that will:
 - enable staff to set targets for the long-term goals and aspirations of learners
 - accurately capture learners' progress over time.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Since the previous inspection in August 2014, when the provision was judged to be good, standards in all key areas have declined and are now inadequate. The membership of the board of trustees is relatively new. The board have recently appointed a new interim chief executive officer and an interim manager responsible for curriculum and training. However, it is too soon to judge any improvement to the quality of provision.
- The board and senior managers have high aspirations for learners but acknowledge that, currently, standards are poor. Much more effort is required to communicate and instil this ethos of ambition in teaching staff who have low expectations for learners' educational outcomes.
- Management actions to date to secure and sustain improvements to teaching, learning and assessment are inadequate. Too few teachers are suitably qualified and experienced to work with learners who have high educational needs. Few teachers have, or are working towards, qualified teacher status, or have specialist subject experience. Too few benefit from meaningful and worthwhile ongoing professional development. Most teachers have a limited knowledge of how to respond appropriately and well to learners' medical needs.
- The ratio of learning support staff and teachers to learners is too low and does not match the requirements set out in learners' individual placement agreements. Managers do not ensure that learners receive the appropriate and proportionate help in class that they need. Consequently, staff do not prepare learners sufficiently to become more independent in their everyday lives.
- Managers' monitoring and supervision of staff are weak and do not cover all aspects of learning. Since the previous inspection, few observations of teaching, learning and assessment have taken place. Teachers do not have individual targets to improve their teaching practice. External visits and trips that learners make as a part of their studies are not observed, which is a requirement for learners with high needs, and managers have only recently ensured that visits and trips are adequately risk assessed.
- Managers have not taken successful action to rectify the weaknesses found at the previous inspection and have insufficiently robust arrangements to monitor and review the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers still do not track learners' progress in developing their skills effectively or use individual learning plans well to set and review learners' targets.
- Managers have not given sufficient priority to the development of learners' English and mathematics skills. The proportion of learners who complete their qualification successfully remains too low. Managers now plan to include the teaching of English and mathematics skills in all subject lessons. However, it is too soon to judge how successful this will be in enabling more learners to make good progress in developing skills in English and mathematics.
- Management arrangements for planning learners' next steps on completing their course are weak. Managers and staff do not use learners' individual placement agreements effectively to plan learning or to explore and develop learners' own ideas of how they might live independently.
- Managers' use of data to monitor learners' progress in their skills development and qualifications is weak. Managers are unable to identify the individual progress of learners or identify those learners who are making slower than expected progress in their studies.
- The new interim manager for curriculum and training has set about planning a more meaningful curriculum with a greater focus on learners developing independent living and communication skills. Recent improvements include a broader range of practical activities in realistic settings. For example, learners visit the local library, work on a community allotment and develop their cookery skills in a commercial kitchen.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Trustees, in conjunction with the new interim chief executive, have improved their scrutiny of the performance of staff and learners. They know what needs to be improved and they monitor this carefully at their monthly meetings. However, it is too soon to measure any impact on improving the quality of current learning.
 - The new board of trustees brings a range of relevant financial, marketing and business experience to Choices. However, the board still does not have appropriate expertise of further education, or a sufficient understanding of the educational requirements of learners with high needs.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective**
 - Managers have not ensured that safe recruitment practices are adhered to. For example, staff from

external agencies have unsupervised access to learners before managers check whether they have appropriate security clearance to do so. New staff do not have a comprehensive introduction to working at Choices that includes thorough safeguarding training.

- Managers have not ensured that there is an effective personal relationship policy that would enable staff, learners and parents or carers to have a good enough understanding of learners' rights relating to their personal and intimate relationships.
- Trustees and senior managers have not fulfilled their statutory duty under the government's 'Prevent' legislation. Teachers and staff do not have an adequate understanding of how to protect learners from the possible risks of becoming radicalised.
- The management oversight of external work experience arrangements is weak. Managers have not ensured that adequate risk assessment and safeguarding arrangements are in place, that workplace supervisors are familiar with, and able to manage, learners' medical requirements, or that all learners are supported and supervised sufficiently closely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Teachers do not take sufficient account of learners' starting points when planning lessons, and do not allow for the different needs of learners in the group. Too much teaching, learning and assessment is task-based and not about learning. Frequently, tasks set are too easy for a few learners but far too hard for others. As a result, while a minority of learners finish activities very quickly and then become bored or listless, most need significant help from the teacher. Often, less-able learners are told to leave their work and move on to the next class activity.
- In the majority of lessons, it is not possible to identify what learners have learned or understood. Teachers do not check learners' understanding of the key learning concepts before moving on and their questioning skills are weak. For example, teachers often ask learners 'Does that make sense?' without allowing sufficient time for reflection. Consequently, learners make little progress.
- Teachers' verbal feedback in lessons is not specific enough to help learners understand what they need to do to improve further. Teachers do not encourage learners to be reflective of their learning or of the skills they are developing. For example, teachers tell learners how they have performed, rather than using questioning to find out how well learners think they have done and how they think they might improve.
- Additional in-class help for learning is weak. Too few classes have sufficient support assistants to check learning effectively. Teachers do not discuss with learning support assistants what learning is planned and how they might contribute to the learning. Too often learning support assistants focus on helping learners to complete tasks rather than assisting them to learn, for example through the use of helpful prompts or constructive questioning.
- Teachers' monitoring and recording of learners' progress are inadequate. Individual learning plans do not record the key elements learners develop and improve, for example increasing their independence or improving their communications skills. Teachers do not focus on learners' skills development, whether their communication skills are improving or what they can now do and/or have learned.
- Tutorial arrangements are insufficient. While personal tutors meet regularly with learners to review their development, they do not have sufficient information about the progress learners are making in their individual subjects or other activities, such as work experience, to know how well a learner is succeeding in all aspects of their learning.
- Teachers' assessment of learners' starting points on joining Choices is weak; as a result, they are not able to measure the progress of individual learners over time. Teachers do not know enough about the individual aspirations of learners for their future, to know what long-term targets would be most suitable.
- Written feedback to learners is now of better quality than at the previous inspection. Samples of recently marked work in English and mathematics lessons show that these subject teachers now provide helpful and constructive comments to learners about how they might improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are inadequate

- The opportunities for learners to benefit from meaningful work experience are inadequate. Too few learners have the opportunity to participate in work experience during their time at Choices, and most learners who do take part spend less than a day with an employer. Safeguarding arrangements for

external work placements are weak. External checks on employers and work supervisors are insufficient. Risk assessments of the journey to work and the activities carried out are inadequate.

- Learners do not have sufficient opportunity to learn and develop their skills for employment. While many learners have internal placements, such as working on reception, tending plants around the office and carrying out aspects of general housekeeping in the building, these activities are not structured sufficiently well or focused sharply enough on communication and skills development.
- Tutors now use tutorials more effectively to give learners a better understanding of the rich cultural diversity of life in modern Britain. Tutors have begun to use current news clips and newspapers as the basis for discussions about fundamental British values. However, the content and ideas are often too complex for most learners, and tutors are not sufficiently skilled to manage discussions appropriately.
- Most learners develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using social media and use the internet well to research visits and trips, such as planning a visit to learn more about art at the National Gallery.
- Staff encourage learners to eat healthily and work safely. For example, learners use kitchen equipment safely to prepare nourishing and well-balanced meals. Learners benefit from dance and drama activities to help promote an active lifestyle.
- Learners enjoy their time at the centre and the opportunities provided to socialise with their peers. They become more confident in voicing their opinions and are able to approach staff and explain their concerns if something is bothering them.
- Learners enjoy their lessons and behave well in class and around the centre. They attend well and are punctual.

Outcomes for learners are inadequate

- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of learners who complete all elements of their programme and achieve their qualification successfully has declined further and is now too low. Too few learners acquire the qualifications, skills and knowledge they need to progress into employment, develop good communications skills or to live independently.
- Teachers do not ensure that learners' work is of a high enough standard. Learners' work too frequently shows insufficient progress since the start of their course. In most subjects, learners do not develop their skills quickly enough.
- Both the progress and achievement rates of learners vary too much. For example, male learners do not achieve as well as female learners.
- Managers have not maintained information about the destinations of most learners on completion of their programme. They do not know where learners go after leaving, or how well training prepares learners for independent living and, where appropriate, employment.
- The proportion of learners who complete an English or mathematics qualification successfully remains low. However, current learners are making better progress as a result of recently recruited teachers who have a better focus on developing learners' skills and knowledge in English and mathematics.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	30
Interim CEO	Miranda Seymour-Smith
Website address	www.choices4all.co.uk

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+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
	30							
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14–16	0							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Julie Steele, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joyce Deere

Her Majesty's Inspector

The above team was assisted by the interim head of curriculum and training, as nominee. 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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