

Aspire-i Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

26–29 January 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Directors and senior managers responded energetically and successfully to the areas of improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- The management of subcontracted provision is now good.
- Directors and senior managers use their good understanding of the region's economic priorities to ensure that provision meets regional and local needs.
- Managers and learners are well aware of the risks posed by extremism and know how, and to whom, they should report any concerns.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are consistently good across the provision.
- Learners benefit from very effective careers information, advice and guidance.
- Staff provide comprehensive learning support to help learners overcome their significant personal difficulties and remain on the programme.
- Learners develop good employability skills through supportive work placements that match their career aims well.
- Learners make good progress from their very low starting points, in developing vocational skills and knowledge.
- Learners' retention and success rates have increased considerably and are mainly high.

This is not yet an outstanding provider

- Targets for tutors do not provide them with a clear direction as to how to improve their classroom practice.
- Staff provide learners with insufficient feedback on what they can do to improve the quality of their work.
- Learners' understanding of equality, diversity and British values are underdeveloped.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality are not consistently good.
- Achievement on a few English and mathematics courses requires improvement.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Aspire-i Limited (Aspire-i) is a social enterprise 'not for profit' organisation that provides Aspire2Work study programmes for learners aged 16 to 18 across West Yorkshire. Most provision is in the city of Bradford. Aspire-i directly delivers programmes for one third of its learners and subcontracts the remaining provision to eight partner organisations. Fifteen learners on the study programme have high needs.
- The proportion of school leavers in Bradford achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, fell significantly in 2014 to well below the national rate. School attendance rates in Bradford are below average and unauthorised absence rates are well above average. Unemployment for those aged 18 to 24 is high and Bradford is ranked as sixth in the top 10 UK cities for youth unemployment. The population of Bradford is ethnically diverse and the district has a large and well-established community of people of Pakistani origin.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Set tutors sharper targets at annual appraisals to give them more specific and challenging direction as to how they can become outstanding teachers.
- Fully implement the new marking strategy so that all learners receive clear and constructive feedback on their written work.
- Reinforce the promotion of equality, diversity and British values with learners, so they can understand more fully the relevance of these issues to their everyday lives.
- Improve learners' attendance and punctuality further by ensuring that all staff apply the behaviour and attendance policies consistently.
- Increase achievements in English and mathematics by developing these subjects in vocational sessions more consistently.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Directors and senior managers responded energetically and successfully to tackle the areas of improvement identified at the previous inspection. A director-led quality improvement board has overseen the rapid actions that have resulted in significant increases to learners' success rates and improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in the large subcontracted provision.
- Directors and managers skilfully led the acquisition and subsequent merger of staff from another company to increase capacity and expertise within the organisation. These staffing changes have enabled managers to address some key areas of underperformance from the last inspection, such as the quality and use of data by managers to track learners' progress and monitor the performance of subcontractors.
- The management of subcontracted provision is now good. Aspire-i has reduced the number of subcontractors since the last inspection; contracts with the poorest performing providers have been terminated. All subcontractors now undergo a thorough commissioning process and are subject to regular reviews, which have a primary focus on the quality of provision and learners' progress. Where the quality and outcomes of a subcontractor's provision have started to slip, they are supported to improve against clear timelines. Regular subcontractor forums result in the sharing of good practice across the provider network.
- Directors and senior managers set ambitious, but realistic, improvement targets for important aspects of the provision, which they communicate effectively to staff, subcontractors, and learners. Managers evaluate the work of individual members of staff against these targets at annual appraisals, and staff have a good understanding of the organisation's priorities. Although staff appraisal discussions include improvement actions identified through lesson observations, they are not personalised sufficiently to provide all tutors with sharp enough direction as to how to improve their classroom practice, nor do they challenge tutors enough to become outstanding.
- Directors and senior managers have a good understanding of the region's economic priorities through their effective engagement with the local enterprise partnership (LEP). Subcontractors are commissioned on the basis of how well their provision meets LEP priorities. When subcontractors have been decommissioned, managers have transferred the provision in-house to retain their ability to offer priority subjects, such as construction and motor vehicle maintenance. Managers have developed an effective partnership with a network of local employers to increase learners' access to work experience and placements, which has increased their employability skills.
- Managers complete the self-assessment process more quickly than previously, so that it now provides timely and accurate information on the main strengths and areas of improvement. Quality improvement plans are given a high priority by senior leaders within the organisation, with the result that the completion of actions is monitored systematically.
- Managers have used observations of staff effectively since the previous inspection to address some of the weaker areas of teaching practice, such as lesson planning and target setting for learners, particularly in the subcontracted provision. However, too many actions in observation reports are not precise enough to enable all tutors to transform the quality of their teaching, learning and assessment so that they are outstanding.
- Managers, staff and learners are aware of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism, and know how, and to whom, they should report any concerns. Managers have undertaken risk assessments and put in place a comprehensive 'Prevent' duty action plan. Aspire-i has good partnerships with the local authority and police 'Prevent' coordinators, who provide training for staff. As a result, staff feel confident about making referrals into the 'Channel' programme.
- Staff have designed some highly imaginative teaching and learning resources to promote British values with their learners, which they share with other providers in the area. Despite this, learners struggle to relate explicitly the general values of trust and mutual respect, which they exhibit in classrooms, to the more specific British values.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governance is good. Directors scrutinise the actions of managers and hold them to account for their actions very effectively.
 - Directors are involved in quality assurance arrangements, including the observations of staff. They challenge managers to demonstrate how their actions have an impact on the progress of learners.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Directors insist that safeguarding is embedded as part of the culture of the organisation, given the vulnerable nature of many learners, and have led on a comprehensive review of safeguarding procedures and roles following the acquisition of the new organisation.

- Learners feel safe and any safeguarding incidents are reported and acted on quickly, with good support put in place for learners with on-going safeguarding concerns.
- Safeguarding concerns of staff are quickly addressed. For example, managers responded promptly to a staff request to put panic buttons and security cameras into construction workshops.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have been unremitting in their attempts to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have succeeded in enhancing the quality of learners' experiences which has resulted in improved progress and increased qualification success rates.
- Programmes are appropriately planned and managed to meet the principles of study programmes and are tailored carefully to meet individual learners' needs. A good range of vocational options is offered to learners so they can follow their preferred occupational route. The options include, for example, business and administration, childcare, construction, sport, hairdressing, and motor vehicle maintenance.
- Good development of GCSE English and mathematics provision enables learners who have not previously obtained these qualifications with A* to C grades to choose them as a follow-on from, or alternative to, functional English and mathematics. Learners for whom English is an additional language attend specialist English sessions.
- Teaching, learning and assessment delivered by the provider and the subcontractors are good overall. At the previous inspection, the quality of provision across the subcontractor network was too variable. Most of the variability in quality has been eliminated. Learners are interested, motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. Most are stretched and challenged well and make good progress in sessions.
- Resources for learning are good and help to prepare learners for work. For example, motor vehicle maintenance learners have access to industry standard software that is used to access technical information and specifications for vehicles. Tutors use a variety of activities and resources during sessions which provide variety and maintain learners' interest.
- In the few sessions that are less effective, tutors do not use questioning techniques sufficiently well and learning activities are not matched carefully enough to each individual's needs. Insufficient use is made of the results of initial and diagnostic assessment in English and mathematics to target individual learners' specific weaknesses. Although most tutors are aware of the techniques for including English and mathematics learning in vocational sessions, they do not do so consistently in all subjects.
- Staff give learners good oral feedback in class about the quality of their work, notably about what they have completed successfully and where improvements are needed. In a functional mathematics session, learners' written calculations were checked immediately and they received excellent feedback from the tutor about which answers were correct and incorrect. The quality of written feedback is, however, variable. While tutors usually praise the good aspects, they provide insufficient advice to learners about what they can do to bring their work up to a higher standard. They do not routinely identify spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in learners' written work, which results in errors being repeated unnecessarily and detrimentally. Too often, work which is not of a high enough standard is marked incorrectly to be 'excellent' or 'brilliant'.
- Learners receive very good personal and pastoral support which enables them to overcome some of their problems which inhibit learning, and stay on their programmes. In many lessons, support staff provide individual support to identified learners, including those with high needs, which enables them to make rapid progress. Aspire-i communicates well with parents and carers of learners and where appropriate, involves them closely in decisions and plans for learners.
- Tutors review learners' progress comprehensively each month. In addition to identifying their progress against qualification and enrichment aims, learners have good opportunities to evaluate their progress towards their personal learning goals. Tutors and learners agree targets that are specific and measurable, such as in sport where a target was to run 1.5 miles in 10 minutes. The recording of progress reviews is not always sufficiently detailed in a small minority of subject areas such as construction.
- Learners feel safe and know well to whom they would report any problems that affected their safety and the safety of others. Their knowledge of British values and equality and diversity is underdeveloped, and on occasions they are confused between the various topics covered under these themes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

- Learners enjoy their study programmes and make good progress in improving their confidence and personal skills such as team working and problem solving. They develop good employability skills and a positive

attitude towards learning and their future career plans.

- Learners behave maturely and show respect for one another, despite some having a previous history of challenging and disruptive behaviour. Staff are adept at keeping learners focused on their work through a variety of practical and engaging activities. Learners take pride in their work.
- Learners with high support needs are integrated well into all aspects of their study programme. They receive individual in-class support, where required, to help them progress rapidly.
- Links with employers are very effective, and learners benefit from meaningful and relevant work experience with particularly supportive employers. One learner attended a work placement with a local automotive glazing company and impressed his employer so much that he was offered an apprenticeship at the end of his programme. The impact of work experience is reinforced well through learners' completion of a personal reflective log to record tasks undertaken and skills learned.
- Good impartial careers advice and guidance at the start of their studies ensure that learners are supported well to make realistic choices about their career plans and incremental steps towards them. Towards the end of their programme, learners receive further good guidance to help them make well-informed choices about their next steps.
- Learners participate in an extensive range of enrichment classes and activities offered by Aspire-i. Topics include sexual health, healthy eating, drug awareness, interview techniques, confidence building, leadership skills, and equality and diversity. Construction learners gain a Construction Skills Certification Scheme card to enable them to work on a construction site.
- Staff provide learners with clear information to help prepare them to live and work in modern Britain. This ensures that learners understand the risks to their personal safety including bullying, grooming and other forms of abuse, and are generally aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved steadily since the last inspection due to the consistent focus placed on these work-related behaviours by staff, but further improvement is required. In some classroom-based lessons in particular, attendance is still too low. However, most learners arrive at sessions ready to learn and have a clear understanding what is expected of them.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Learners make good progress from their very low starting points when joining the programme. Learners face a variety of problems and personal difficulties which inhibit learning; around a quarter of learners have previously been excluded from school or have displayed poor attendance. They quickly develop confidence, self-discipline, communication skills and study skills, which provide a solid foundation on which to build their vocational and employability skills. For example, one learner who could not speak English when she came to Bradford eight months ago can now speak English fluently.
- The proportion of learners who progressed into further education/training or employment on completing their programme in 2014/15 was high, at around three quarters of leavers. The vast majority of learners who are retained on the programme are successful in progressing positively to their next steps and are supported well by staff to do so.
- At the previous inspection the proportion of learners who left their programme early without completing their qualifications was high. The retention of learners increased considerably in 2014/15 and so far in the current year has continued to improve to a high level.
- Learners' achievement of qualifications increased considerably in 2014/15 from a low level in the previous year, although overall success rates for vocational awards remained below the national rate. However, in some subjects such as building and construction, child development, and well-being and sport, success rates were high.
- Functional skills success rates increased significantly in 2014/15, with around two thirds of learners achieving their intended awards. However, some functional skills success rates, particularly at entry level, require further improvement. The provider's data for the current year indicate further increases in success rates in most subjects.
- For the very small number of learners who took GCSEs in English and mathematics at a local further education college in 2014/15, achievement of grade C or above was low. This year, Aspire-i is delivering GCSE English and mathematics provision in-house.
- No significant differences exist in achievement between groups of learners. Managers monitor achievement rates closely and report data on the participation and achievement of different groups of learners, including by subcontractor, to the improvement task force monthly.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	547
Principal/CEO	Mrs Caroline Harrison
Website address	www.aspire-igen.com

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+	
	136	0	117	0	16	0	0	0	
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	0	0	0	0	0	0			
	16-19		19+		Total				
	0		0		0				
	0								
	Number of learners aged 14–16								
Funding received from At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Education Funding Agency (EFA)								
	■ All About Hair & Beauty								
	■ Biketrain								
	■ Motive8								
	■ Panache Training Academy								
	■ Playscape Training								
	■ QED								
	■ Skills Link Training								
	■ The Works Skatepark Charity								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Pat Hornsby, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Charles Searle	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Dan Grant	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Hartmann	Ofsted Inspector
Patrick McKinley	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the group quality and curriculum manager, 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 learners 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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