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Thea Croxall  
Principal Commissioning Officer  
Lincolnshire County Council  
County Offices  
Newland  
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Dear Ms Croxall

### **Short inspection of Lincolnshire County Council**

Following the short inspection on 27 and 28 April 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 2013.

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

Leaders and managers, including the council's learning board, provide clear strategic direction that results in provision that meets regional employment and learning needs, as well as the priorities identified in the council's strategic plan for the county.

The quality of education and training for learners on community learning and skills courses, as well as for apprentices and young people on study programmes, is good. Teachers are enthusiastic, well qualified and provide high-quality learning sessions that help learners to achieve and progress. Teaching and learning venues are accessible and of good quality and learners enjoy coming to study in a welcoming and supportive environment. Managers have successfully tackled the most significant areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

Service managers have been particularly effective in implementing a well-structured study programme for young people at risk of exclusion from education, training or employment. The study programme meets all of the mandatory requirements and the range and quality of work-experience placements provide young people with aspiration and ambition to enter the labour market or further their learning. Learners thrive in the service's learning centre for young people in Grantham and the large majority go on to further education, training or employment.

Following a period of considerable change and organisational restructuring, leaders and managers have continued to focus on driving improvements, raising standards and on meeting the diverse needs of Lincolnshire residents, many of whom live in areas of considerable economic and social disadvantage. This has resulted in provision that continues to be good, including apprenticeship provision, which managers introduced after the previous inspection and which meets all of the essential requirements of such provision.

Leaders and managers use carefully selected learning partners to offer a good-quality apprenticeship programme and a wide range of community learning and skills programmes. Learning partners value the support and guidance that service managers provide. Managers' monitoring of partners ensures that they provide consistently good experiences for learners. Learning partners provide service managers with data on learner recruitment and outcomes, but they do not currently provide managers with sufficiently accurate data on the destinations of learners who complete programmes in community learning and skills.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and leaders take swift action to safeguard learners. All staff have received appropriate training and a single central register is maintained and regularly updated. A designated officer is in place. Learners understand what to do if they feel unsafe or threatened.

All staff who come into contact with learners are required to pass an appropriate security clearance to confirm their suitability for work in the sector. Arrangements for monitoring subcontractors' compliance with the council's safeguarding procedures are sound.

The service has begun to implement the government's Prevent duty. All teaching staff, including those working in subcontracted provision, have received training on the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Teachers have a basic awareness of how to keep learners safe from extremist ideologies. A few teachers are confident to promote British values through the curriculum, though, as the self-assessment report acknowledges, most are still in the early stages of developing their skills and confidence in this subject.

### **Inspection findings**

- The service continues to offer a large proportion of its provision through a range of carefully selected and commissioned learning partners. This is a significant factor in ensuring that provision is of consistently good quality. The learning partners help the service to meet the council's strategic priorities by providing opportunities for adults to attend learning venues close to their homes, promoting employability and supporting young people at risk of not being in education, training or employment.
- Robust commissioning and quality assurance have helped service managers to monitor the quality of teaching and learning delivered by learning partners. Service managers meet frequently with staff from each learning provider to scrutinise performance data, outcomes and budgets and to challenge providers to improve where necessary.
- Managers are quick to take remedial actions where they judge standards to have slipped. To help these providers, many of which are small, third-sector organisations that often lack the necessary capacity and expertise, service managers carry out observations of teaching and learning for them and provide training and development to support teaching staff.
- Learners attend a wide variety of community learning and skills programmes that are planned well to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups, helping to reduce isolation and promote community engagement. One learning partner provides learning at home for adults who are unable to leave home owing to ill-health or severe disability. Tutors carry out home visits, equipped with learning resources to help develop learners' communication skills and reduce isolation. One elderly housebound learner is now able to communicate with his grandchildren through instant messaging and voice chat, and with friends by email.

- Learners make good progress. The provision helps learners to overcome their specific barriers to learning and to benefit from formal education, often for the first time since leaving school. Learners on family learning courses become more confident to help their children with schoolwork. One group of learners for whom English was an additional language applied and practised their spoken English, as well as learning about British culture and values. They became more confident to find out about and participate in local community activities with their family.
- Service managers have worked successfully to widen participation for groups often under-represented in learning, such as older learners, ex-offenders and people with a learning difficulty and/or disability. They design learning programmes that bridge specific local skill gaps, such as information technology for older people. One learning partner devised an accessible information technology (IT) programme for a group of older learners that built on their interest in local history and heritage. These learners then developed and applied their newly learned IT skills to further and deepen their understanding of local history and heritage.
- The large majority of learners on study programmes achieve their learning goals and successfully complete their functional skills and employability units. Teachers provide individual learning programmes based on the outcomes of initial assessment that inform each individual learner's programme of study. Learners, most of whom achieved very poor grades at GCSE when they left school, thrive during their time on the study programme. They improve in confidence and develop a genuine interest in gaining vocational skills to help them join the labour market.
- Study programme learners make very good progress from low starting points. Teachers have high expectations and challenge learners to achieve their potential, which inspires and motivates them. Case studies show the positive and supportive feedback received from employers on the progress these learners make in improving employability skills, including in English and mathematics, while on their work placements.
- Managers ensure that all learners on the study programme attend and complete a range of enrichment skills sessions and employability skills units to improve their prospects of work after completion. Learners benefit from a wide variety of work placements and work experience both within the council and with local employers. They develop important social, personal and vocational skills that help them to become significantly more employable. The large majority achieve all of the components of their programme and go on to further education, training or employment.
- Learners on study programmes develop good skills in English and mathematics. Functional skills are an integral part of each learner's study programme, with clear progression pathways to help them improve their English and mathematics. Teachers work tirelessly to help learners understand the importance and relevance to work of mathematical skills and of good spoken and written English. Most learners improve their mathematical and English skills from entry level 1 to level 1, with a few progressing to study GCSEs in these subjects.
- Most learners on the apprenticeship programme make good progress and are on target to complete their business administration and team-leading qualifications within the planned period. The council employs all of the apprentices and helps them to develop good customer service skills, which in turn enables them to work effectively in a team and to use their initiative to direct customer queries to the appropriate council services.

- Assessors are enthusiastic and have significant experience of local authority work, which they use well to develop learners' skills. They make good use of recorded professional discussions to collect evidence of learners' competence and skills, for instance in supporting the coordination of council leisure and corporate events, or leading team briefing meetings effectively. Skilful questioning techniques help assessors to have a clear idea of learners' understanding, enabling them to use probing questions that help learners reflect on their practice and extend their problem-solving skills.
- Apprentices are confident in their mathematical skills and have a good understanding of the application of number in their work setting, for example when allocating discretionary housing benefits. The standard of apprentices' written work is good. Where appropriate, apprentices complete their functional skills qualification at a higher level than that required by the framework.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- learning partners provide service managers with accurate data on the destinations of all learners who complete programmes in community learning and skills
- the service continues to implement its Prevent duty strategy, and that teachers are better equipped and trained to promote British values confidently through the curriculum areas for which they are responsible.

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

Jai Sharda  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the short inspection, inspectors were assisted by the service's principal commissioning officer as nominee. Inspectors met with senior leaders, managers, staff, employers, apprentices and trainees, using face-to-face and telephone interviews. Key documents, including those related to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding, were reviewed. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment sessions and visited training and workplaces to meet learners to discover their experience of training, assess their progress and scrutinise the quality of completed work.