Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service

Local authority

Inspection dates	17–20 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	**Requires improvement**

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Learners on courses without formal qualifications do not have clear, detailed and ambitious learning targets, and so cannot judge accurately their progress and achievements.
- Many tutors do not set work at a high enough level to challenge individual learners. As a result, not all learners work at the level of which they are capable.
- Tutors on courses that do not lead to formal qualifications do not apply success measures and standards consistently to enable an accurate measurement of learners' achievements.
- Managers do not have an accurate view of the quality of lessons as a basis for improvement. Consequently they have not eradicated weaknesses and the quality of the provision has declined.

- Council leaders and senior managers do not set ambitious targets for the service's performance, and they make insufficient use of the information about learners' performance to hold managers to account for making improvements.
- Managers cannot monitor effectively the impact of the provision on Wirral residents because they are unaware of how many learners progress to further education, training, community involvement or into jobs.
- Managers have not developed effective plans to recruit learners from the service's priority groups, so that the most vulnerable in the community can benefit from the provision.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners enjoy their courses and are proud of the skills that they gain.
- Tutors successfully combine the development of learners' vocational and English and mathematics skills in many craft courses.

- Learners on arts and horticulture courses benefit from work-related activities.
- Managers act quickly to tackle any poor performance issues of organisations that offer courses on behalf of the service.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service (the service) is part of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's Families and Wellbeing Directorate. The contracts and commissioning manager, who reports to the head of targeted services, manages the provision with the support of five senior staff. The service employs around 85 part-time tutors.

- The service offers courses in English, mathematics, employability, arts, languages and first steps in using computers. It provides courses in a range of practical subjects such as horticulture and cooking. The overwhelming majority of courses do not lead to formal qualifications and 40% are subcontracted to other providers. The service offers the provision in around 100 venues including libraries, children's centres and schools.

- Wirral is characterised by the more prosperous residents living in the west of the borough with the most deprived communities in the east. Overall, a higher proportion of Wirral's residents are without qualifications, and the proportion in employment is lower, than the national figure.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure learners have clear, detailed and ambitious learning targets. Make certain that tutors use clear success measures to assess and record learners' progress and achievements against these targets regularly and accurately, so that learners know the progress they are making and have an accurate understanding of their achievements.

- Ensure that tutors tailor their teaching so that learners develop, progress and learn at the level and pace of which they are capable.

- Devise and implement an effective strategy for recruiting significantly more learners who are disadvantaged, including individuals who are least likely to participate in their communities or gain employment.

- Ensure that the council's elected members and senior managers set ambitious performance targets for the service, especially in relation to learners' performance, their destinations after they complete, and the quality of the provision, so that they can support and challenge managers to make swift and secure improvements.

- Develop robust arrangements to collect information about learners' destinations and use this information well to develop the service's provision so that it helps the residents and local community improve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management   requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have not improved the quality of the provision fast enough. As a result of unclear assessment policies, learners have not benefited from an accurate understanding of their achievements. Consequently, the quality of the provision has declined.

- Managers have not developed and implemented robust policies to ensure that tutors have a consistent approach to assessing and recording learners' progress and achievements on non-accredited courses. As a result, significant inconsistencies exist in the quality of assessments and too many are an unreliable record of learners' achievements.

- Managers monitoring the quality of lessons have not identified accurately the main weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. In both their full and short lesson observations, managers have not taken sufficient account of the impact of teaching practices on learners' development. The quality and effectiveness of teaching varies significantly. Despite a wide range of training, tutors have not improved their practice sufficiently.

- Managers cannot evaluate the impact of the provision on the community in Wirral well enough to inform the future development of the service because they do not have sufficient knowledge about learners' future destinations and how they use their new skills after completing their courses. Managers have started to collect information about how learners use the skills they gain from courses: for example, learners who contributed significantly to the Wirral Arts Festival through producing high-quality displays.

- Managers have not ensured that the proportion of disadvantaged residents benefiting from the provision is high enough. Through a detailed review of each subject, they are aware of the groups of learners who start on courses but they have been slow to ensure that the service enrols more individuals at high risk of long-term unemployment, or from full productive involvement in the Wirral community.

- Managers review tutors' performance well. They link effectively tutors' training needs and the development of the provision. For example, as a result of training, most tutors teach English and mathematics well in different subjects. However, the pace of improvement in teaching is not quick enough and has not yet led to consistently good outcomes for learners.

- Staff at all levels have a broadly sound understanding of the strengths and most weaknesses of the provision, although they have underestimated the impact of weaknesses on learners. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and detailed and points to a good range of evidence. The service's development plan is clear, although managers have not yet implemented successfully all the identified issues, such as improving the recording of learners' progress.

- Currently, the service's direction and its provision are under review in order to better reflect the council's new strategy, 'Wirral Council Plan: A 2020 Vision'. Leaders, senior managers and staff at all levels are ambitious and determined to make swift improvements, although it is too early to judge the full impact of actions on the quality of the provision.

- Staff at all levels promote fair treatment and respect for individuals well. They have received appropriate training to promote democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Tutors are aware of their responsibilities to enhance learners' understanding of the values required to live in modern Britain. However, they are not yet fully confident about how to teach this in their lessons.

- **The governance of the provider**
  - Members of the board of governors, constituted from a number of partner organisations and an elected council member, know the service well and are ambitious for its development. They increasingly use their diverse skills and experience to monitor the quality of the provision: for example, recently they have observed some lessons.
  - Governors have not set robust and ambitious targets for the performance of the service. They have not challenged senior managers sufficiently about the quality of the provision and learners' performance. As a result, they have not been sufficiently effective in ensuring that managers systematically tackle all areas for improvement.

- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements and recruitment checks are rigorous. Staff are suitably trained and clear about protecting learners, including vulnerable adults. Designated staff have effective links with a good range of relevant external specialist organisations: for example, to support homeless learners.

- Managers have a detailed record of safeguarding policies and procedures in subcontractors. They keep good records of any safeguarding concerns and the responses they make to them.
- Managers and tutors have received appropriate training to ensure that they understand their responsibility in preventing extremism and radicalisation. However, tutors' approach to raising learners' awareness of the dangers of extreme views varies in its effectiveness.
- Governors and senior leaders have a good understanding of their duties in relation to safeguarding learners from risks, including the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment   requires improvement

- Tutors' assessments in non-accredited courses lack rigour. Most tutors do not have explicit assessment criteria on which to base assessment decisions. Learners who remain in learning to the end of their course are usually deemed to have passed the course whether or not they have satisfied the course objectives. Internal moderation of the achievement of targets is not rigorous enough.
- Tutors' target setting for learners and recording of their progress varies considerably in quality across subjects. Only a small minority is effective. Most learners do not have targets that are based on their personal developmental needs. Targets are not sufficiently detailed and clear. Therefore learners do not know exactly what they need to do to achieve. Many learners do not have targets that are sufficiently demanding, with the result that they do not achieve to their full potential.
- Tutors do not identify errors in learners' written work and help them to improve their spelling well enough. As a result, learners do not improve the accuracy of their writing sufficiently. Tutors' feedback to learners includes appropriate praise and encouragement but it does not help learners to progress towards achieving challenging targets and their personal goals.
- Tutors often prepare and use a range of imaginative, practical activities that engage and motivate learners successfully and help learners to apply their understanding to everyday tasks. For example, in an English for speakers of other languages lesson, learners sorted cards containing different phrases to describe the routine for someone getting up in the morning. Handouts and booklets are usually of good quality but occasionally tutors use them excessively, resulting in learners losing interest and focus.
- Tutors have good subject knowledge and experience in coaching adult learners. Tutors in practical subjects, such as horticulture, dressmaking and flower arranging, have very relevant industrial experience that they share readily with learners. They use their knowledge and experience very effectively when they are planning lessons and delivering learning.
- In a minority of lessons, tutors successfully plan and ensure that individual learners work at levels which extend their knowledge and skills well. For example, learners benefit from very good personalised workbooks and task sheets in information and communication technology lessons. In English and mathematics lessons, tutors use the information about learners' starting points well to plan their understanding of vocabulary and grammar.
- In many craft courses, tutors skilfully integrate English and mathematics to extend learners' knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, in a mosaics lesson, learners with learning difficulties or learning disability identified, and then wrote down, the names of simple shapes such as circles, squares, triangles and rectangles. Learners in a flower-arranging lesson became familiar with specialist terminology and with techniques for costing their floral displays.
- Tutors skilfully foster a purposeful, relaxed and adult learning environment in their lessons. As a result, learners are enthusiastic and keen to learn. They enjoy meeting other learners, making new friends and learning from each other's experiences and mistakes. However, learners do not get sufficient opportunities to develop the valuable skills of working independently and in groups.
- Learners benefit from very good support, both during and outside lessons. Tutors, especially craft tutors, are very passionate about their subjects and provide additional individual coaching if needed. For example, they supportively encourage learners to use tablet computers for the first time. Learners with complex personal issues and barriers to learning, such as mental health and domestic violence, improve their confidence to stay on courses as a result of good tutor support.
- Staff offer learners good information, advice and guidance about the suitability of courses before they enrol. A wide range of informative course guides are available to help them make the correct choice and to consider progression opportunities. However, learners do not receive enough guidance towards the end of their courses about possible community involvement opportunities, employment prospects and follow-on courses, so that they can make informed decisions about their next steps.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare   requires improvement

- In too many lessons, a high proportion of learners do not attend regularly. This has a negative impact on learners' progress and on the development of their knowledge and understanding, and the skills valued by employers.
- Learners do not receive sufficient information to enable them to develop realistic short-, medium- and long-term employment and community-involvement plans. Tutors do not place enough importance on relating their subjects to the world of work. They do not ensure that learning activities are integrated in vocational and community contexts to enable learners to see how their learning relates to community involvement, future employment and career plans.
- Learners feel safe and many recall receiving information about the values of living in modern Britain. However, very few learners can explain what these values are and why they are important. Learners' awareness of extremism, radicalisation, terrorism and online safety is insufficiently developed by tutors.
- Learners work well in lessons and become more self-confident and self-assured. There is strong mutual respect between learners and tutors. Learners' personal and social skills improve and they become increasingly more able to communicate effectively, work collaboratively and develop good working relationships with other learners.
- Learners derive considerable health benefits from attending courses. They thrive from being with other learners, having opportunities to concentrate on their own learning and being in a better position to support their families. Those with mental health problems find learning extremely therapeutic and beneficial to their well-being.

Outcomes for learners   require improvement

- Data on learners' successful completion of non-accredited courses is not reliable, as tutors use unreliable and imprecise assessment methods.
- The information about learners' progression into jobs, further education or increased involvement in their communities is not robust enough for the service to evaluate its impact on learners' prospects.
- Most learners make at least the progress expected of them relative to their starting points. However, the most-able learners do not achieve to their full potential. Learners are proud of their achievements and how these are applied to improving their quality of life. For example, mature learners in an English lesson have learned to read and now they are able to enjoy reading books for pleasure. Learners in an Italian lesson can understand menus, and order and receive food when they are on holiday in Italy. Many learners develop good practical skills and many produce work of a high standard, for example in sewing lessons.
- Learners in art and horticulture benefit from work-related learning. Learners on art courses are now putting on an exhibition of their work in a popular local public venue while learners on gardening courses have created a successful gardening business, selling plants to the public, and are growing their own fruit and vegetables. Learners with learning disability and those with learning difficulties make appropriate progress towards independence, for example through lessons on preparing food.
- Learners with significant personal barriers to participation in education improve their skills to contribute to their communities: for example working as volunteers in hospitals. Homeless learners enjoy the structure of daily attendance and gain a sense of belonging.
- Many learners improve their use of English, mathematics and information and communication technology, and so are better prepared to find employment. Learners on vocational courses improve their skills in English and mathematics. Many learners on family learning courses gain skills to teach their children fundamental concepts in English and mathematics: for example, they use board games to make learning fun.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,500
Head of Service	Mrs. Janice Monty
Website address	www.wirral.gov.uk/lifelonglearning

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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	247	N/A	16	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	16-19	19+	Total
Number of traineeships	N/A	N/A	N/A

Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A

Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	▪ Wirral Connect ▪ Wirral Community Action ▪ Wirral Environmental Network ▪ Wirral Girls Grammar School ▪ Pildrim Street Arts centre, Birkenhead ▪ Homestart Wirral ▪ Advocacy Wirral ▪ Ferries Family Project ▪ North Birkenhead Development Trust

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Shahram Safavi, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Brenda Clayton	Ofsted Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
David Longworth	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the curriculum manager for information technology, 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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To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk