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Ms D Naeem
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Dear Ms Naeem

Short inspection of Southwark Adult Learning Service (SALS)

Following the short inspection on 17 and 18 May 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 March 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have sustained most of the strengths of the provision, such as their work with partners to broaden the curriculum on offer to learners. Managers continue to ensure that a high proportion of learners successfully complete their courses and those taking qualifications achieve them. SALS plays an important role in meeting the local authority's vision of a fairer future for all Southwark residents. During a time of reducing funding, managers have successfully increased the number of learners taking courses and the number of courses available to them.

Links with partners, such as schools and children's centres, are good. These and a good range of subcontracted partners help managers to extend successfully the reach of the service into all areas of the borough. As a result, around three quarters of learners each year are new to learning and taking their first steps back into education. Managers ensure that those learners from the most disadvantaged communities attend, with a very high proportion of learners coming from areas with high levels of deprivation.

Managers, partners and tutors care passionately about their learners and take pride in their achievements. The continued investment in crèche facilities enables learners with children to take qualifications more easily and demonstrates the commitment of senior leaders and managers to removing barriers to learning for their residents.

Safeguarding is effective.

Managers ensure that up-to-date safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. These clearly outline what staff should do if they are concerned about the welfare of learners. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and, as a result, identify learners where they have concerns about their welfare. They act effectively to safeguard learners and liaise with other agencies on behalf of learners when needed. Managers apply safe selection and recruitment practices when recruiting new staff and undertake relevant checks on their suitability for employment. Learners feel safe at learning venues and inspectors observed safe working practices.

All staff have undertaken training in the prevention of extremism and radicalisation. A 'Prevent' strategy is in place. Inspectors saw British values promoted effectively; learners discussed the news and contrasted living in the UK with their own backgrounds and cultures. Managers recognise that tutors are not all sufficiently confident to promote British values and further training is planned to improve their confidence.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders and managers have reviewed the provision to ensure that it fits well with the local authority's vision for local people. They regularly monitor the performance of the service and have a good grasp of the overall effectiveness of the adult learning service. The self-assessment report is accurate; leaders and managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and they are tackling most areas for improvement successfully. However, senior leaders do not always have a detailed understanding of all of the areas for improvement and this inhibits their ability to provide greater challenge to managers.
- Senior leaders have secured significant financial support to ensure that the quality of accommodation at the main learning centre is of a good standard. They have made further investment in much-needed new information and learning technology (ILT) infrastructure. Senior leaders are effectively involved in key strategic decisions such as reviewing the fees policy and in approving contracts to subcontractors.
- The previous inspection identified that managers had more work to do to ensure that learning delivered by subcontractors was of a consistently good quality. Managers now effectively monitor the performance of subcontracted partners. The local authority has ceased working with subcontractors where their performance did not meet the expected standards. Observations of teaching, learning and assessment are now in place at subcontracted partners and observers provide useful feedback to tutors. Managers have good, up-to-date information on the performance of partners and use this well to develop strategies with them to address any decline in performance. Annual reviews help partners reflect on their

performance over the previous year, address any areas for improvement and plan new learning programmes.

- Staff provide good information, advice and guidance to learners before they start their courses to ensure that they are on the right course. As a result, a very high proportion of learners complete their courses. Managers have responded to the decrease in the availability of external information, advice and guidance. They have developed partnerships with the in-house information, advice and guidance team which offers drop-in sessions and appointments for learners. However, these developments are new and it is too soon to judge their effectiveness. The availability of specialist advice and guidance through subcontracted partners is good. The partners offer sound advice and guidance to learners on their next steps when they complete their course so that they can pursue their interests, for example in jewellery making, take further courses or seek employment.
- Data on the destinations of learners after they have completed courses shows good progression, with around half of learners progressing to further learning; a third moving into employment; and a fifth taking up volunteering opportunities. However, managers recognise that the number of learners they hold information on is too low. As a result, they have developed sound plans to increase the proportion of learners whose next steps are known to them.
- Managers ensure that all new tutors are effectively supported, with timely observations of their lessons and well-targeted support following observations. Managers have observed a substantial number of tutors so far this year. During joint lesson observations with inspectors, managers from the service identified most of the key strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment. However, the quality of written reports of observations varies too much and too many lack a sufficient focus on the impact of teaching on learning and what tutors need to do to improve further.
- Managers have identified that the recognising and recording of the progress and achievement of learners on non-accredited courses is an area for improvement. They have secured steady improvements in this area and know that there is more to do to achieve a consistent approach across the service. As a result, on many courses learners have clear targets and meaningful feedback on their progress and achievement. In subcontracted provision where managers sample learning plans they develop effective strategies with partners to improve the quality of target-setting such as linking partners with others to share good practice. However, the quality of recognising and recording non-accredited progress and achievement is not yet consistent across the provision, with some targets for learners insufficiently specific. As a result, not all learners know how they can improve the quality of their work, and planning for the individual needs of learners is not always evident.
- Managers have identified the use of ILT in lessons as an area for improvement and are making reasonable progress in securing improvements. Inspectors saw some good examples of tutors using ILT in lessons. Managers have secured funding to refurbish the ILT equipment

and Wi-Fi is now available in the main building. However, access to ILT is at present too limited for learners to undertake research and develop their skills. The recent delivery of new computers is planned to alleviate learners' frustrations.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they receive more detailed information on the performance of the service so that they can provide greater scrutiny and challenge to managers and maintain improvements in the quality of the provision
- the quality of written reports on the observation of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good so that tutors know what they need to do to improve
- the recording of the progress and achievement of learners on non-accredited courses is consistently good so that they know how to improve and tutors can plan teaching to better reflect the learning needs and aspirations of individual learners.

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

Jon Bowman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by the deputy head of service for SALS as nominee. We met with you, senior leaders, managers, tutors and learners. We carried out lesson observations, took account of the most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. We used group and individual interviews and telephone calls to gather the views of learners and staff. We scrutinised data and information on the performance of the service, and reviewed schemes of work, lesson plans, key policy documents and records of safeguarding concerns.