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Ms Lynsi Hayward-Smith
Cambridgeshire County Council
Shire Hall
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Dear Ms Hayward-Smith

Short inspection of Cambridgeshire County Council Adult and Skills Service

Following the short inspection on 26 and 27 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 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

The vast majority of provision has good success rates and the proportion of learners achieving their intended outcomes and goals has improved. Teaching, learning and assessment continue to be good. Learners benefit from well-qualified and dedicated tutors, the vast majority of whom plan and deliver good lessons. Managers recognise that goal and target setting can be improved, with too few tutors providing sufficiently meaningful or sharply focused targets on learning plans that enable learners to see the progress they make. Quality assurance reviews of teaching, learning and assessment work well in the main but, in a few instances, observers fail to focus enough on the impact on learners or make sufficient judgements on the progress learners are making.

The recent alignment of the adult community learning, learning services and national careers service has been well received by staff and partners and is enabling the council to focus its activity more effectively on its target groups. Service managers have productive relationships with the wide variety of community learning providers. They facilitate well four county-wide community learning and skills partnership (CLAS) groups, which engage a rich range of local providers. These networking arrangements aid referrals across organisations and have a positive impact on enrolments. A minority of providers, principally community colleges, have not devised appropriate strategies to attract disadvantaged learners. Self-assessment of the service is too descriptive and fails to capture sufficiently all the key areas for development.

A relatively recent emphasis on promoting programmes which allow learners to gain work skills and secure employment is working well. Teaching is very effective in enabling such learners to develop language and mathematical skills. 'Work Clubs', provided in conjunction with allied agencies, support learners well and help them develop job-search and skills to help them find employment. Staff have a good understanding of the barriers to learning and employment faced by Work Club clients and give accurate information, advice and guidance to enable these to be overcome. Measures to record the destinations of learners involved in such activities require improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Service managers and tutors are well aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Procedures are kept under review and a designated officer works quickly to deal with any safeguarding referrals. Disclosure and Barring Service checks for directly employed staff are current. The expectations upon individual providers with regard to safeguarding processes are clear and form part of the monitoring process. Managers are able to draw upon specialist advice from adult social care officers. Staff, including those at the service's providers, have received training on the Prevent duty. Stemming from this, constructive curriculum work is taking place to sharpen tutors' skills in raising learners' awareness and understanding of shared values, attitudes and respect.

Inspection findings

- The vast majority of provision has good success rates and the proportion of learners achieving their intended outcomes and goals has improved. Success rates by different level of qualification remain high.
- Learners benefit from support from their tutors, and make good progress in lessons. Classes are sociable and enjoyable and the vast majority of learners make good progress and develop their skills well. For example, learners studying Spanish and Japanese languages benefit from experienced tutors and almost all learners speak with confidence in these languages. In a minority of lessons, however, tutors do not give sufficient consideration to basic teaching methodology and a 'club'-type atmosphere exists rather than a focus on assessment, learning and progression.
- Tutors have high expectations of their students and challenge them to produce good-quality work.
- Prospective learners benefit from tutors clearly establishing their starting points. However, managers recognise that goal and target setting can be improved. The results from establishing learners' starting points and personal information are not used by tutors or learners routinely to inform the development of individuals' goals and aspirations. Too few learning plans include personal, short-term targets or objectives.
- The collection of destination data is in the early stage of development and, to date, concentrates on wider impacts such as health benefits, progression on to volunteering or further learning. Measures linked to sustained employment are weaker. Managers have contracted with an external organisation in order to

be better informed of the destinations of learners following completion of their course.

- Senior leaders and managers have a clear and ambitious vision for improving the quality of learning and have initiated increasingly rigorous quality processes to ensure continuous improvement. They recognise the need to ensure a much stronger relationship between teaching and learning, progress data and the destinations of learners when evaluating the impact of teaching.
- Managers review the quality of teaching, learning and assessment often through formal observations, peer observations and curriculum audits of providers' schemes of work to give a more comprehensive view of standards across the provision. The self-assessment report in this respect is mostly accurate, although it does not focus sufficiently on learner impact. In the same vein, lesson observers do not routinely inform action plans for tutors, so they can improve their practice or help them address those areas identified for development. Managers recognise correctly the need to refine further the quality assurance process in order to ensure that they prioritise the impact on learners.
- The relatively recent emphasis on promoting work-related programmes which enable learners to develop their competence in English and mathematics, gain work skills and secure employment is working well. Many learners enter the service with little self-confidence and poor qualifications, but tutors quickly build up a picture of levels of support required.
- Tutors operating within these programmes use a good range of teaching and learning strategies which engage learners well. Resources are stimulating and matched well to learners' goals and experiences. They use questioning well to check and extend learning and make sessions interesting and relevant. In a few instances, tutors and volunteers intervened or made suggestions too quickly, thereby not allowing learners to work independently to complete their task.
- Work Club tutors support learners effectively to search for jobs and develop wider skills for employment, such as to build personal profiles and write application letters. Strong links with Jobcentre Plus and local employers add value to the Work Club. The strategy to multi-skill staff within the clubs to enable them to deliver accurate information advice and guidance as well as learning provides a seamless experience for the learners and helps support their progression.
- Insufficient emphasis is placed on using learners' starting points to set targets against which progress can be measured and success celebrated. Learners' progression following Work Club attendance is not yet collected fully, with a tendency to rely on case studies as evidence of progress.
- Service managers have productive relationships with providers and combine a monitoring and developmental role well. A revised tendering arrangement is aiming to engage those voluntary, community and charitable organisations well-placed to provide learning opportunities for the service's target groups, such as speakers of other languages or learners who are economically vulnerable. Work of this nature viewed by inspectors was highly effective.
- The proportion of learners enrolled from disadvantaged wards has increased, meeting one of the council's strategic objectives of encouraging adults most distanced from learning to participate.

- A significant minority of providers, principally community colleges, have not developed their awareness and practice in attracting and accommodating the needs of disadvantaged learners. Instances of good practice do exist from which others can learn, for instance postcode analysis of learners and scrutiny of recruitment and retention data for those learners entitled to concessions.
- As part of their broader role, service managers facilitate well the four CLAS partnerships which succeed in engaging a wide range of local providers, including district councils. These groups help providers determine the type of learning programmes needed locally, create networks and enable referrals between agencies. The head of service brings expertise and contributes well to county-wide strategic post-16 and skills planning groups.
- Managers are involved in innovative curriculum projects, such as digital approaches to English and mathematics, with a view to broadening the reach and scope of adult learning.
- Self-assessment is too descriptive. Comparative data is not used well enough to convey the reach of the service and its impact.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the lesson observation process is strengthened to ensure that observers can define priorities for improvement precisely, and the impact teaching, learning and assessment that is having on learners' progress
- arising from lesson observations, tutors are set precise, measurable targets and actions to improve their teaching practice and enable a larger proportion of learners to make the progress expected of them
- the recording of learner progression, particularly in work-related programmes, is improved
- all providers have well-considered strategies in place to meet the local authority's aspirations to attract disadvantaged 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

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by your quality manager, who acted as nominee. We held meetings with you and your management team as well as with council strategic managers and a cross-section of providers. We carried out visits to providers and partner organisations to observe the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, spoke with learners and reviewed their work. We also reviewed service documentation, including your self-assessment report.