

Worcestershire County Council

Local authority

**Inspection dates**

7–10 June 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
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings**This is a good provider**

- Leaders and managers have improved the quality of provision through a wide range of appropriate and effective actions.
- The range of courses, levels and locations for learners to get involved in learning with the council is well chosen and responds well to the needs of the local community and the local enterprise partnership (LEP).
- Achievement rates have significantly improved for learners on study programme and are high on most courses, including those for adult learners.
- Highly skilled and experienced teachers effectively support learners to achieve their qualifications or learning aims, including in mathematics and English.
- Particularly effective advice, guidance and individual support enable learners of all ages to overcome barriers to learning and make good progress.
- Learners develop good personal and subject skills, including literacy and numeracy, which prepare them well for progression into employment or further learning.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment further to ensure that they are consistently good are not yet fully effective.
- Not all learners can confidently identify the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism that might affect them or their families.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Worcestershire has a large rural population, although approximately half lives in urban centres. Unemployment is lower than the national rate and a higher proportion of the population is economically active than the national rate.
- In 2014, some 54% of 16-year-olds gained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including mathematics and English, compared with the national rate of 57%. The proportion of the population with no qualifications is slightly higher than the national rate of 9%.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the support and training provided for tutors enable them quickly to develop effective teaching strategies in theory or classroom-based lessons, to help learners concentrate on the subject, make consistently strong progress and develop the knowledge and behaviours that will support their further progression.
- Rapidly establish how well learners are aware of the potential risks to them of radicalisation and extremism in all their forms; support tutors to ensure that they raise all learners' awareness and understanding of these important matters through their teaching and, where possible, in individual reviews of learners' progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders set a clear vision for the council's community learning service, focusing on raising the aspirations of local residents and supporting learners to develop and achieve. This helps enhance the life chances of learners, and enables them to make a more positive contribution to the community and the regional economy.
- Leaders and managers have designed the curriculum well to complement that of other providers in the region. It focuses in particular on developing opportunities for some of the most hard-to-reach and disadvantaged members of the community. Managers have also designed the curriculum to address the priorities of the LEP and the local council. For example, managers have succeeded in significantly reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training by devising strategies to identify and make contact with these individuals, and enrol them on suitable programmes. This has enabled these learners to develop their knowledge, improve their literacy and numeracy skills and progress to further training or employment.
- Courses take place in a broad spread of suitably equipped community settings across the county. This helps to overcome the challenges associated with the rurality of the area and limitations of public transport in the region.
- Since the previous inspection, governors and staff have successfully focused their attention on raising the quality of provision. Four initiatives in particular have had a major impact on improving standards. These include: stronger links and closer management between the adult provision and the provision for learners aged 16 to 18; renewed and improved subcontracting arrangements; the introduction of support officers to provide enhanced personal support for learners; and the recent introduction of teaching and learning coaches to help address pockets of weaker practice in teaching and learning. These changes have resulted in more effective and efficient management of the provision, increased opportunities for identifying and sharing good practice, improved attendance and retention, and improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.
- Leaders have used self-assessment and quality improvement processes well to raise the quality of provision. Staff are suitably involved in the review process and improvement priorities. Managers take account of learners' views in reviewing the provision and identifying priorities for improvement.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance, prior to and during their course. The recent introduction of support tutors has been particularly effective in helping staff to identify and address the particular needs of individual learners, thereby maximising their chances of completing their programme. In addition, staff work particularly closely with adult and community groups to help identify courses that may further enhance their developmental and employment potential. They encourage them to enrol on these programmes.
- Staff development is generally good, with a broad programme of short workshops designed to help improve the overall quality of provision. Recent training has focused, for example, on adding value to work experience, improving tutors' confidence in the use of multimedia resources and information and learning technology (ILT) to enhance teaching, and managing challenging behaviour.
- Over the course of the year, not enough observations of teaching, learning and assessment have been completed. As a result, managers are not able to develop a sufficiently comprehensive picture of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the provision to help inform continuous improvement initiatives in this area. In addition, managers have been slow to develop the new coaching role. There are some early indications that the scheme is benefiting the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, but it is too early to judge fully the impact of this improvement initiative.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governance arrangements support managers well. They focus in particular on helping shape the strategic priorities for the provision, providing suitable scrutiny and challenge to managers during self-assessment, and supporting leaders in implementing the quality improvement plan. The governance structure incorporates elected members onto the board, whose portfolio of responsibilities within the council provides valuable complementary links to other areas of the council's work, for example supporting children and young people, and adult social care.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Staff and learners receive suitable induction and briefing on the council's approach to promoting the safety and well-being of all those studying and working on the council's courses. Staff promote safe working practices at all times. As a result, learners and staff feel safe. Managers follow safe recruitment practices for new staff.

- Not all learners demonstrate a sufficient insight and understanding of fundamental British values and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Managers have identified this as an area for further improvement and are in the process of implementing well-conceived strategies to address this.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The vast majority of staff are skilled and experienced. Since the previous inspection, they have benefited from good development opportunities to improve their professional practice, which has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, learners now benefit from effective opportunities to develop their skills in English and mathematics and from significant improvements in the quality of both verbal and written feedback, which enables them to improve the standards of their work.
- Tutors support learners well in identifying their individual starting points and short- and longer term goals. The vast majority of tutors then ensure that learners achieve and at times exceed these initial goals and make the good or better progress of which they are capable. Most learners enjoy their learning and engage well with the good range of learning activities.
- Lessons are interesting. Tutors adopt techniques which effectively meet learners' individual needs and provide appropriate levels of challenge. Tutors have good subject knowledge and promote good vocational standards. Where appropriate, they skilfully relate learning to working in different vocational contexts. For example, they help adult learners on childcare courses to develop their knowledge and understanding well and apply their classroom-based learning to working with children across different childcare settings.
- Staff quickly identify learners' individual support needs. Tutors and specialist staff work closely with learners in meeting these needs throughout their programmes. Learners speak highly of the individual help and support that they receive. They identify how this is helping them to overcome often initially significant barriers to their learning and achieve their potential, often for the first time in their lives.
- Assessment practice is good. Initial assessment is appropriate and learners have good opportunities to review their progress and development. Tutors regularly check learning in lessons and are thorough in their recording of learners' progress. They provide helpful and constructive feedback to learners, both verbally and in writing, so that learners are clear on what they have achieved and what they can do to improve further.
- Learners have good opportunities to develop further their skills in English and mathematics, both on specialist courses and across their learning programmes. Tutors highlight key technical language and regularly check learners' understanding of this during lessons. On study programmes, all learners take qualifications in English and mathematics appropriate to their starting points. On adult programmes, good examples include the effective use of computers to assist correct spelling and work on the pricing of materials to develop learners' skills in mathematics.
- The promotion and development of learners' understanding of equality and diversity are good across the provision. Staff effectively work with learners to extend and deepen their understanding of key issues and to prepare them for living and working in a diverse society. For example, a group of learners aged 16 to 18 significantly increased their knowledge and understanding of key issues relating to female genital mutilation, which was completely new to most of these learners. Adult learners demonstrate sensitivity and good levels of mutual respect when working with their peers from a range of different cultures and beliefs.
- A very small minority of classroom-based learning does not meet sufficiently well the individual needs and ability levels of learners. The pace of learning is too slow and learners do not benefit from the use of a sufficiently wide range of learning resources to enhance their learning and progress; a few younger learners become disruptive as a result.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- The development of learners' personal and social skills is good and learners significantly improve their self-confidence. For example, learners develop the confidence to undertake voluntary work in their local communities. Learners returning to study hairdressing increase their confidence in using new techniques, and younger learners become more confident working in teams and speaking and presenting in small groups. Tailored courses for men with caring responsibilities for boys successfully incorporate physical activities alongside their development of good interpersonal relationships.

- Learners develop a good range of practical and vocational skills. For example, a group of adult learners effectively developed their information technology skills and are becoming 'digital champions' in their local communities. In art classes, adult learners develop the skills and confidence to feel equal to others in the group; young learners demonstrate the development of their own personal artistic style and skills development over time through their work in detailed sketchbooks. The development of learners' skills in English and mathematics is good.
- Learners on study programmes for those aged 16 to 18 benefit from good work-experience opportunities. This enables them to develop good vocational skills such as preparing activities for use in their work with children or developing practical skills in working on motor vehicles. They understand the central importance of good punctuality and attendance. Visits to local employers and the fire and police services also enhance learners' experience of the world of work. A few learners are not being prepared sufficiently well to adopt the standards expected in the workplace.
- The vast majority of learners demonstrate good attitudes to their learning. Attendance on adult learning programmes is very good. For learners aged 16 to 18, attendance is more variable, but staff appropriately follow up any absences with learners, and with parents or carers. Most learners take pride in their work. The standards of their written and practical work are good. A few learners on study programmes do not behave sufficiently well in classroom-based sessions, which impedes learning for them and their peers.
- Information, advice and guidance are highly effective, both on entry to programmes and in enabling learners to make well-informed decisions about their next steps. Tutors provide very effective support for individual learners. Learners on study programmes also benefit from the ongoing work of specialist support officers, who provide impartial advice and guidance as well as effective pastoral support, for example in relation to learners' health and welfare needs. This wide-ranging support enables learners to overcome barriers to their learning and helps them to remain on the study programme.
- Learners feel safe at the training centres and know how to keep themselves safe in the workplace. Attention to health and safety, for example in practical sessions, is good. Younger learners are broadly aware of the risks of extremism and radicalisation, but their understanding of fundamental British values is less well developed; adult learners do not all have a sufficiently well-developed understanding of these matters.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- At the previous inspection in December 2014, too few learners aged 16 to 18 completed their courses, achieved their qualifications or progressed into further education, training or employment. This was in marked contrast to adult learners, who achieved well.
- In 2014/15, following significant actions by leaders and managers, the achievement of learners aged 16 to 18 on most courses rose dramatically; more young learners achieved their qualifications than in similar providers. A small number of learners working towards diplomas in sport and leisure with one of the council's subcontractors were adversely affected when the company ceased trading during the academic year. These learners were unable to complete their diplomas as planned but managers arranged additional support which enabled almost all of them to gain certificate qualifications. Adult learners continued to achieve well, and better than those in similar providers, except for the small numbers on health and social care and retail courses.
- Concerted action by managers resulted in far fewer young people not continuing in education, employment or further training after completing their course, a reduction from 33% in 2013/14 to 4% in 2014/15 with a further 3% registered with Jobcentre Plus as they had reached 18 years of age and were now looking for work.
- The proportion of learners who leave their courses before completing has reduced over the previous two years. Most learners who started in the current year are still in learning. The majority of learners, including most of those on study programmes, progress to further learning or into relevant apprenticeships or employment when they finish.
- Learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers in relation to their starting points. However, male adult learners achieved less well than the larger cohort of female adult learners in 2014/15; this was influenced by an upturn in employment opportunities.
- Most learners enjoy their courses and are proud of the progress they make in developing new skills and becoming more confident about what they know and can do. Learners on preparation for life and work courses record their progress by taking photographs; other learners keep detailed journals or portfolios of what they have learned. Young learners develop valuable skills in self-reflection through evaluating their work and that of their peers. Learners' written work is of a high standard on almost all courses.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The council offers study programmes in six subject areas, including arts, media and publishing; construction; hospitality and catering; and preparation for life and work. Some 120 learners at the time of the inspection were involved in these programmes.
- Managers have implemented the requirements of the study programmes effectively. Learners follow a programme that meets all of the principles and is matched to their individual needs, making good use of initial assessment to ensure that learners are on the right programme at an appropriate level.
- Careers advice and guidance are highly effective. All learners are knowledgeable about the potential progression opportunities open to them. They can talk confidently about their own personal progression route; for example one learner was able to explain her route through to her chosen career which involved completing her current programme successfully, including the achievement of English and mathematical qualifications, and progressing to a higher level programme at a local college.
- The quality of work-experience placements and work-related learning is strong; learners develop good practical, personal and social skills while on placement and many receive offers of future paid employment or apprenticeships. Learners rightly praise the support they receive from both the provider and employers. One learner on a work placement at a care home is being supported by the local housing association and hopes to gain an apprenticeship there. Another learner undertaking an extended work placement at an automotive centre has already been offered an apprenticeship, and his progress and development were highly praised by the company's owners.
- Learners undertake a programme of additional activities that helps them to develop their personal, social and employability skills further. They have been supported in preparing for their own work placements by visiting employers such as the fire service, a local fishery, a construction company and the West Mercia police. In addition, learners made good use of an art gallery visit to develop their own art work. They were able to evaluate the visit and write well about the art work they had seen.
- The development of learners' English and mathematical skills is effective and all learners undertake qualifications appropriate to their starting points and prior achievement. In one lesson, learners were using the mathematical skills learned to plan and execute training circuits in boxing, calculating minutes and seconds and calculating the number of punches thrown using multiplication, division, addition and subtraction.
- More learners complete the study programme as a result of focused work on supporting them through difficult personal and social issues that would have otherwise seen them drop out of education. Although a small number of learners did leave early in 2014/15, of those that did, a third progressed to positive outcomes including voluntary work, apprenticeships and paid employment. Staff work closely with other agencies to re-engage those young learners at risk of becoming 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET).
- The majority of learners are clear about their destinations and a significant number of them have already secured places at colleges to progress to a higher level qualification or been offered apprenticeships. Others have secured paid employment or voluntary work. For those learners who will be staying for another year, staff prepare clear plans to show how they will progress to a higher level programme or to a programme that better suits their career aspirations following effective advice and guidance.
- Tutors plan the large majority of learning well and make good links to learning in previous lessons. Tutors check learning and progress well in lessons and use this and initial assessment information to set individualised targets for learners. Reviews of learners' progress are regular and effective in monitoring their progress over time.
- Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is promoted well in lessons. Most tutors take opportunities to challenge learners' language and comments whenever necessary.
- Learners feel safe. They know whom to go to and where to find help if they need it. They are able to discuss staying safe online and are able to demonstrate an awareness of their own health and safety by undertaking their own risk assessments as part of an employability unit.
- A small amount of classroom-based theory teaching is less effective. Learners are less engaged and become bored, and this detracts from their ability to learn and make progress. The effective strategies employed in practical lessons to engage learners and maintain their concentration are not used as well in all theory lessons.

- Adult learners study on part-time courses across a wide range of subject areas. These include English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); English; mathematics; computing; hair and beauty; fashion design; business administration; painting; Tai Chi; and community projects delivered at venues across the county with a total of 1,321 learners. Most courses are linked to the county council's health priorities and community needs.
- Most learners develop their personal and social skills very well. Attendance and punctuality are very good, with learners contacting tutors if they are unable to attend. They are supported well to ensure that work is not missed. Learners enjoy their studies and build their confidence in a local and familiar environment, enabling them to progress to higher level courses more successfully.
- Managers work closely with a broad range of partners, including charities, Jobcentre Plus, community groups and schools to ensure that programmes effectively meet the needs of adult learners. Managers have high expectations for their learners. They support partners to ensure the quality of courses meets those expectations.
- Experienced tutors design courses that enable learners to work at their own pace and to become more independent learners, preparing them well for their next steps into further learning or employment. In level 2 hairdressing, three learners making very good progress completed their courses early; one learner has progressed into employment and two are progressing to a level 3 course at the local college. Learners are encouraged to research information outside the classroom and share findings with each other through shared social media groups and in class.
- Tutors use questioning very effectively to check learning, prompt learners and ensure that all learners are engaged. The vast majority of learners' work is marked with detailed feedback from tutors and instructions on how to improve further. Tutors provide very good verbal feedback to learners and encourage peer assessment, which builds confidence and prepares learners for future support roles.
- Learners benefit from very helpful information, advice and guidance from tutors and specialist guidance staff to make informed choices about their next steps. This is evident in the good number of learners who progress to new courses. Tutors signpost learners to a range of volunteering options with community groups, self-employment and higher level courses.
- Partners provide additional training to prepare learners for volunteering with a strong emphasis on safeguarding, recognising challenging behaviour and child protection. The Old Needle Works delivers a range of courses for the council, and on site there are a number of new small businesses to motivate and encourage learners to explore self-employment.
- Learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress to meet their individual learning goals. The new 'Growing Healthy' project provides an opportunity to work on an allotment where learners have cleared the site, made raised beds and planted vegetables, herbs and flowers. Produce from the site is given to a homeless shelter for cooking; learners are encouraged to use the skills gained in their own homes. Learners develop good practical skills, recording their progress in diaries, and working for their community and others.
- The vast majority of learners make good progress in developing their English and mathematical skills to build their confidence, help their children, progress to higher level courses or enter employment. Tutors skilfully embed English, mathematics and communication skills into practical activities through measuring and costing materials in sewing projects, timings for beauty treatments, and customer service and research skills in computer classes.
- Learners feel safe and are confident to talk with staff if they have any concerns. The council and its partners have strong links to a wide range of support networks to ensure that any at-risk learners are well supported.
- Learners have a good understanding of how to be safe using computers, passwords and accessing social media sites. Tutors ensure that all learners have a good understanding of health and safety practices in vocational areas and their individual responsibility for themselves and their clients. In the beauty salon, learners check clients' health history and any allergies before starting treatments. However, learners struggle to articulate how they would keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation or extremism.
- The interaction of the learners demonstrates a strong culture of equality and diversity. In an ESOL session, the Queen's two birthdays were used to reinforce numbers such as 90th and 1st and to discuss other dates that learners celebrated, for example name days, national days and moveable dates for Ramadan and Easter.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,826
Principal/CEO	Catherine Driscoll
Website address	www.worcestershire.gov.uk

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+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	79	1,095	0	182	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships								
	16-19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14-16	0							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Archway Academy ■ Droitwich Voluntary Services ■ Mencap ■ South Worcestershire College ■ Inspire Community Training and Development CIC ■ ASHA ■ Vestia Community Trust ■ WEA ■ 4Children Worcestershire ■ Birchensale Middle School ■ Nationwide Community Learning Partnership 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Nick Gadfield, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Nelson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathleen Tyler	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Ofsted Inspector
Judith Lye-Forster	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the family learning manager, 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 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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