

Slough Borough Council

Local authority

**Inspection dates**

21–24 June 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
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies too much between courses in adult and community learning, and too many courses do not meet the range of learners' needs.
- Tutors do not consistently encourage learners to improve their English and mathematics throughout their programme.
- Learners on internally assessed courses are not set sufficiently challenging targets to make better than expected progress.
- Managers do not have a comprehensive understanding of teachers' performance and therefore plans to improve teaching are not always effective.
- The observation of teaching, learning and assessment does not focus sufficiently on the skills that learners develop and over-emphasises teaching style and paperwork compliance.
- Not all tutors promote learners' understanding of issues that will prepare them for life in modern Britain.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners from disadvantaged groups and those who have recently left care receive good support to achieve their goals, and apprentices receive excellent support to progress into employment
- Strong partnerships ensure that learning programmes meet local, community and labour market needs effectively and managers ensure that classes are well located and accessible for learners
- All learners develop confidence and independent learning skills, and apprentices develop useful employability skills to make a valuable contribution to their workplaces

Full report

Information about the provider

- In 2012, the community learning and skills service of Slough Borough Council merged with, and now incorporates, the provision previously funded by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The areas have contrasting economic and demographic profiles. About a third of Slough's residents are White British and over half are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, over three quarters of residents are White British. In addition, 69% of Slough's population has a qualification at level 2 or above compared with 78% in Windsor and Maidenhead.
- The council receives funding from the Skills Funding Agency for the provision of adult and community learning services. Approximately 80% of the funding is for non-accredited community learning courses, with the remainder for qualifications at level 1 and level 2, the vast majority of which are within provision for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The council also provides apprenticeships for learners aged 16 to 18 in business administration.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by a more thorough approach to analysing the outcomes of observations, using them to identify areas for improvement across the service, and encouraging the sharing of good practice.
- Ensure that all staff have appropriate English and mathematical skills themselves, and are clear about how to develop these skills in their learners.
- Ensure that teachers make good use of initial assessment to set challenging targets for learners, particularly in internally assessed community provision, so that they can make good progress and reach their potential.
- Ensure that tutors understand the importance of increasing learners' knowledge around British values, diversity and radicalisation.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because teaching and assessment are not effective in promoting high-quality learning across the provision. The new management team does not have a good enough understanding of how well teachers perform. The actions managers set are not specific and do not identify how actions for teachers will improve teaching and learning. Managers acknowledge that the observation of teaching and learning requires improvement. Observers put too much emphasis on teaching and classroom paperwork; they do not focus sufficiently on learning and the progress of learners in the classroom.
- The self-assessment process involves staff, partners, subcontractors and managers. The report identifies some key strengths and areas for improvement, but does not focus sufficiently on teaching and learning. Managers use the report to produce a quality improvement plan, which they update regularly. However, they do not monitor it closely enough to drive forward improvements. Data informs the self-assessment well, but managers do not make sufficient use of information available throughout the year to rapidly improve the provision.
- Managers have not developed an effective English and mathematics strategy. Tutors have received training on how to embed these essential skills, but only a few tutors use this training effectively to promote English and mathematics to all learners.
- Tutors do not promote fundamental British values or alert learners to the dangers of extremism and radicalisation in lessons sufficiently, which means that learners' understanding of these issues is limited. Managers do not communicate the importance of promoting these values to subcontractors sufficiently.
- Senior leaders have a clear vision of supporting the development of people and businesses in the community. Managers have high aspirations for the service, which staff and external stakeholders understand well. Managers consult businesses about their training needs and they shape the curriculum accordingly. For example, the Heathrow Academy works closely with the provider to ensure that it can employ local people in roles at all levels in the airport industry.
- Leaders have developed strong partnerships locally to offer community education courses from first steps into education and pre-entry up to degree-level. Managers make good use of available data to make informed decisions about what courses to deliver to meet the particular needs of the two boroughs. For example, senior leaders noticed an increase in children aged up to five of parents for whom English was a second language. They offered a course for parents to improve their English within children's centres. This enabled parents to access GP practitioners and other services and resulted in a decrease in the attendance of children aged up to five at hospital.
- Subcontracting arrangements are good. Managers monitor performance frequently and hold subcontractors to account for learners' progression and achievement of qualifications. Subcontractors benefit from the support and guidance given by managers and they value the partnership group meetings in which they share good practice and learn from others. Managers work with subcontractors to ensure that learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities can access work, volunteering opportunities or additional training which suit their skills and needs.
- Managers work effectively with partners to reduce the numbers of young people who are 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET). Managers offer potential learners interviews at the jobcentre to discuss courses, job clubs and specific training to enable them to apply for local vacancies. This has helped reduce the number of young people who are NEET and ensures that the appropriate organisations know the status of nearly all the young people who are NEET in Slough.
- Senior leaders ensure that young people who have been looked after by the local authority have good access to places on the apprenticeship programme, and managers support these learners well. One such apprentice this year already has a permanent job with the council.
- Managers ensure that learners have access to good, impartial information, advice and guidance when they first access the service. Specialist staff support learners so that they enrol on the correct course at the correct level.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Elected council members provide appropriate oversight and scrutiny of the service's work. They support the service and are aware of how it complements the other services of the council.
 - Leaders recognise the need for elected members to receive timely and accurate data so that they are able to monitor performance better, and challenge and support managers at all levels.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Managers ensure that the safeguarding of learners has a high priority. Staff take swift, appropriate action to keep learners safe when they have any concerns about their welfare. They liaise effectively with other agencies when necessary.
- Senior managers ensure that they adhere to safe recruitment practices. They check that staff have appropriate pre-employment checks before they employ them and update their records regularly.
- Staff have received appropriate training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. However, the council's 'Prevent' duty action plan is not specific to the community learning service and lacks sufficient detail to enable tutors to develop learners' understanding.
- The safeguarding policy has a clear flow-chart on the reporting of incidents and some useful advice to staff on how to take a disclosure from a learner. However, senior managers do not monitor the safeguarding log often enough to check the progress of individual cases. While subcontractors' reporting of safeguarding to the service is adequate, it could be improved by greater frequency.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teachers on adult learning programmes do not consistently provide learners with sufficient challenge and do not focus enough on the skills that they expect learners to develop in lessons to help them make better than expected progress. By contrast, apprentices make good progress, sometimes from very low starting points.
- Most tutors and assessors are appropriately qualified, but a few tutors, particularly those teaching ESOL, do not apply their subject-specific knowledge well enough in their lessons. For example, in beginners' ESOL classes, learners do not spend enough time developing their speaking and listening skills, which in a few instances hampers their progress.
- Learners enjoy their lessons and like their tutors, but the majority are not clear about their progress. Tutors frequently provide encouraging verbal feedback but this does not help learners understand what they have to do to improve.
- On community learning courses, most tutors do not record learners' progress and achievements in sufficient detail or reflect the extent to which they meet personal goals. Not all tutors set learners challenging goals and the evidence that they use to demonstrate learners' achievements is sufficient but limited. Apprentices and learners on family learning courses have a very clear understanding of what they have achieved, as tutors and assessors monitor their progress well.
- Too many tutors of English, mathematics and ESOL courses do not provide learners with a good range of resources which help them develop and reinforce learning. A few tutors rely too much on poorly reproduced, photocopied handouts which lack relevance to adult learners' lives and their employment aspirations. A few tutors use information and communication technology to support learning and provide good-quality visual materials to enhance learning.
- The promotion of English and mathematics in adult learning classes requires improvement. A few tutors miss opportunities to reinforce these skills or remind learners why they are important, and they do not relate these skills sufficiently to everyday life.
- Apprentices develop good business English skills but tutors do not support those that already have at least a C grade in mathematics to develop these skills further.
- Learners and apprentices receive very effective information and guidance before they join a class. Subject-specialist tutors accurately assess new learners' abilities and agree and record the specific skills learners aim to achieve while on their course.
- The majority of tutors have high expectations that learners will practise skills and complete work outside lessons, which helps learners develop their independent learning skills well. Learners benefit from being able to contact their tutors between sessions via email or text messaging if they need additional support to complete their homework.
- Apprentices, who have a range of learning difficulties and challenging personal circumstances, benefit considerably from very good support provided by the coordinators, the young people's service team and their workplace managers.
- Learners and tutors treat each other with respect. Learners from diverse cultures and backgrounds work particularly well together in class. Centres provide a welcoming environment. However, teachers do not promote diversity well during lessons and learners' understanding of radicalisation requires improvement.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

- Attendance rates during observed sessions were low, which disrupted learning during a few of those sessions. The service's information on attendance to date indicates that it is in line with its target.
- Staff provide good initial advice and guidance for all learners and apprentices as they enrol on their programme. Most learners receive ongoing advice, which prepares them for their next steps, and apprentices receive good guidance and support, which prepares them well for future employment.
- Learners are highly motivated and often come with a clear idea of how their course will enable them to progress at work and in their personal lives. Most learners develop independent learning skills as they complete work in lessons and at home. Apprentices develop good levels of confidence and useful employability skills as a result of the programme, including improved public speaking, organisation, confidence, information technology and handling complaints over the phone. Their managers report that learners make a significant contribution to the teams that they work in.
- A high proportion of apprentices achieve their functional skills. Many apprentices achieve functional skills qualifications beyond the requirements of the framework, which enhances their employability prospects.
- Learners report that they are safe and know how to keep themselves safe.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- The vast majority of learners on the adult learning programme undertake internally assessed community learning courses. Very high proportions of them remain on their courses and successfully achieve their learning goals. Most learners make expected progress as their individual learning goals do not challenge them to exceed expectations.
- A small proportion of learners undertake externally accredited qualifications. Of these, the proportion who successfully completed their qualifications declined over the last year and is slightly below the national rate. The vast majority of these learners study for ESOL qualifications at level 1. Success rates improved substantially in the previous year but remain slightly below the national rate.
- The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their programme has improved in the last year and is above national rates. The proportion who complete within the expected timescale is well above the national rate.
- Apprentices achieve their functional skills qualifications well, often at the first attempt. However, the few classroom-based learners who take functional skills achieve below the national rate in both English and mathematics.
- A number of gaps exist in the performance of different groups. Learners who have disabilities achieve better than other learners and White British learners succeed better than most minority ethnic groups. Black learners and mixed-ethnicity learners achieved less well than other learners in 2014/15. Managers monitor gaps closely and there are no consistent patterns over time. In classroom-based learning and apprenticeships, female learners outperform male learners.
- Managers are aware that the tracking and monitoring of learners' destinations require improvement. They have begun to capture both the skills learners that develop and their destinations through a detailed survey of a sample of leavers. Managers are aware of the need to extend this to include all leavers. The vast majority of apprentices progress into employment.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

require improvement

- The service offers a comprehensive range of part-time provision for over 3,100 adult learners at nine main sites and community centres across the borough. The vast majority of learners take part in community learning programmes. Learners are on courses such as English, mathematics, ESOL, family learning, and courses to prepare people for employment.

- Most tutors teaching on accredited courses do not plan learning sessions in enough detail so that all learners can make their best possible progress. Too often, tutors do not take full account of the thorough initial assessment information which clearly identifies learners' starting points, goals and aspirations; nor do they consistently set lesson objectives that take sufficient account of learners studying at different levels within the same class.
- On community learning courses, a few tutors do not track and record learners' progress and achievement well enough. As a result, too many learners are unsure of their progress and uncertain how to improve in the most effective way. They do not develop their ability to evaluate their own progress sufficiently well.
- Not all tutors help learners to improve their mathematical, English and language skills sufficiently to prepare them for employment and greater involvement in the community. A few tutors do not model the accurate use of formal spoken English and make basic mathematical, grammatical or language errors in their worksheets or explanations.
- The promotion of diversity within the classroom requires improvement. Tutors do not raise learners' awareness and understanding of people's differences sufficiently so that they are well prepared for life and work in modern Britain. The promotion of diversity in family learning and apprenticeship provision is good.
- Learners are highly motivated and value their learning experience, which helps them to progress at work or in their personal lives. They benefit from the inclusive atmosphere and good social interactions that widen their horizons, build their confidence and increase their enjoyment of learning.
- Managers plan and provide learning programmes to meet local community and labour market needs very effectively. Classes are well located across the area so that they provide easy access to targeted communities. The clear focus on involving disadvantaged groups who may previously have had little experience of education and limited involvement in the wider community is effective.

Apprenticeships

are good

- At the time of the inspection, there were 24 intermediate apprentices and four advanced apprentices following programmes in business administration.
- The large majority of apprentices achieve their qualification within their agreed timescale and progress into permanent employment. Most current apprentices make good progress.
- Apprentices develop good business administration skills that employers value highly and make a significant contribution in the workplace. Apprentices quickly develop skills in such tasks as handling telephone calls with clients, including dealing with complaints. They work well in teams and apply their information technology skills well. For example, one apprentice, dealing with clients who only spoke Spanish, used a translation app on their mobile phone to answer queries.
- Staff have high expectations of all learners, including those with low starting points. Apprentices benefit from a good range of training courses that prepares them well for working in a business environment and that enhances their main qualification. Apprentices produce work of a high standard which their managers value highly.
- Assessment and feedback on assessed work ensure that apprentices know how well they are doing and what they need to do to complete their qualification. However, coordinators, managers and assessors do not consistently record targets in apprentices' individual learning plans. The council's policy of allowing apprentices to apply for permanent positions once they have completed 70% of their framework provides them with considerable motivation to complete. However, the infrequency of visits by a few assessors limits the speed of progress a few apprentices make.
- Apprentices who have a range of learning difficulties and challenging personal circumstances benefit from very good support provided by the apprenticeship coordinators, youth service support team, and their workplace managers. Young people previously looked after by the local authority receive particularly good support to ensure that they are successful.
- A range of courses in business writing, spelling, grammar and presentation skills helps apprentices develop their English skills and to communicate with confidence. In addition, assessed work accurately identifies errors in written English. However, trainers do not provide support for apprentices who already have at least a grade C in mathematics to further develop their mathematical skills.
- Apprentices from a range of diverse backgrounds work well together and treat each other with respect. They receive training on topics such as equality in the workplace, safeguarding and raising awareness of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,945
Principal/ CEO	Philip Wright
Website address	www.slough.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+
	0	464	0	35	0	0	0	0
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	33	14	1	4	0	0		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
	0							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<div><div></div><div>East Berkshire College</div><div></div><div>WEA (Family Learning)</div><div></div><div>WEA (Employability & Community)</div><div></div><div>WEA (Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Areas)</div><div></div><div>Autism Berkshire</div><div></div><div>Adult Dyslexia Centre</div><div></div><div>Destiny Support</div><div></div><div>DASH (Domestic Abuse Stops Here)</div><div></div><div>RBWM - Grow</div><div></div><div>Slough Probation</div></div>							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

William Baidoe-Ansah, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tracey Zimmerman	Her Majesty's Inspector
Heather Clary	Ofsted Inspector
Margaret Garai	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the skills and employment manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection reports. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls 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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