

Wokingham Borough Council

Inspection dates	5–8 July 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
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Senior council officers and leaders of the service have worked very successfully to deal with key areas for improvement from the previous inspection.
- Managers make sure that the service offers courses in response to thorough analyses of local and regional skills needs.
- Learners in communities under-represented in education, or in areas of economic hardship, benefit from well-targeted provision that provides them with confidence, self-reliance and useful employability skills.
- Leaders have significantly improved the management of subcontractors and strengthened tendering and quality assurance processes.
- A high proportion of learners successfully complete their courses. Retention, attendance and achievement rates are now good for accredited and non-accredited courses.
- Learners receive good feedback from teachers, which encourages and motivates them to take part enthusiastically in lessons.
- Teachers know their learners very well and are responsive to their needs, supporting them to overcome often multiple barriers to learning.

It is not yet an outstanding provider because

- A small minority of teachers make insufficient use of initial assessment information to direct and plan teaching and learning that meet individual needs.
- A minority of targets on individual learning plans lack focus on the development of learners' longer-term personal, social and employability skills. Individual targets set for short courses are sometimes too complex.
- Observation of teaching and learning reports lack evaluative judgements on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on learners' progress. Report forms are overly complex and encourage observers to focus too much on activity and process.
- A small minority of learners lack confidence to discuss British values and are not fully aware of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The adult and community learning service of Wokingham Borough Council is part of the children's service division of the council. The service is small, and largely subcontracted among four partner organisations. Service managers reduced the number of subcontractors in response to weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Managers target courses to meet the needs of residents in the most deprived areas of the borough, and classes take place in a range of community settings and neighbourhood learning centres. Classes include a small range of English and mathematics courses at level 1 or below, as well as confidence building, employability, parental support, information and communication technology and more traditional craft and leisure courses.
- The adult population of Wokingham is approximately 116,455. The borough has low unemployment and the educational achievement of adults is higher than that of the South East or nationally. Adults living in Wokingham borough are generally well educated with an above-average percentage of the population attaining qualifications at level 4 or above, although approximately 3% of the adult population have no qualifications. Around 16% of the borough's population is from a minority ethnic group.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that self-assessment reporting is more evaluative and focuses more directly on learners' progress, and teaching and learning quality. Managers should enhance the quality improvement activities that underpin self-assessment by:
 - Implementing plans to simplify and improve teaching and learning observation reporting so that teachers are better informed about how to improve their practice.
 - Exploring ways to improve further the identification and sharing of good practice across the provision, so that all teachers and sub-contractors can make effective use of existing best practice
 - Drawing further on existing support from borough school improvement colleagues to enrich and develop managers' understanding of and confidence in the analysis of teaching and learning quality.
- Managers should improve the usefulness of individual learning plans so that these meet the needs of learners and teachers in workshops, short courses and on longer accredited courses.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior officers and managers have made very good progress in dealing successfully with areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. During the past 18 months, leaders undertook a comprehensive review of provision to ensure that the range of classes is more suited to the needs of those residents in deprived communities, individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, carers, care leavers or those who need help to develop personal or employability skills.
- Leaders make sure that the strategic direction of adult education fully supports the borough to achieve its key strategic objectives. Since the previous inspection, managers carried out successful work to identify key user groups through good liaison with the council's community development team, children's centres, Family First and Jobcentre Plus. The target groups identified now reflect key national and local priorities, including 'New Challenges, New Opportunities', the borough's health and well-being strategy, Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's strategic economic plan and the council's children and young people's plan. Managers maintain good internal partnerships with borough schools, social care services, children's centres and the council community development team.
- Managers have made significant progress in improving data collection and usage to accurately identify and effectively reach targeted groups. Learners' engagement with provision, their retention, achievement and destinations are very effectively tracked and analysed to discover trends or potential problems with provision. Subcontractors and partner organisations benefit from good support from managers and staff in their analysis of data.
- Leaders and managers have revised and improved arrangements for the commissioning of subcontractors, and introduced a considerably stronger and more transparent tendering process for the coming year. This tendering and commissioning process focuses clearly on a good range of performance targets relating to learners' achievement, engagement, satisfaction and eligibility. Across the past 18 months, managers have acted decisively to cut contracts with the few partners who had a poor performance record. Communication between service managers, staff and subcontractors is good, so that subcontractors, partners and staff share a common understanding of the key objectives for the service.
- Service leaders support teachers well to develop learners' English and mathematics skills. A good range of staff development sessions have focused clearly on ways to introduce activities into lessons that will raise learners' confidence and skills in mathematics and English.
- Leaders and managers have put in place improved quality improvement and assurance arrangements. As a result, managers and partners now understand more clearly the strengths and weaknesses of teaching learning and assessment, and are able to monitor learners' progress much more effectively than at the previous inspection. However, the process for observation of teaching and learning, while producing a broadly accurate picture of standards, focuses too much on teachers' activities with insufficient focus on learners' progress. Managers recognise this weakness and have plans to streamline observation procedures.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - As local authority community provision, the service has no governors. Senior officers of the council, including the current interim assistant director of learning and achievement, provide good oversight of the service, and provide good direction and support for the head of service and other staff. Elected members provide further oversight through their scrutiny of service outcomes and effectiveness.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Managers have improved safeguarding measures since the previous inspection. Learners are safe at learning centres, and feel safe. Managers provide a good range of internet safety and related classes so that learners generally understand how to keep themselves safe and free from exploitation online.
 - Partners and subcontractors have a named safeguarding lead trained to adult safeguarding standards at level 3. Service managers frequently check providers' safeguarding policies and procedures, and carefully review arrangements in performance monitoring meetings and during quality assurance visits.
 - All managers and staff have received 'Prevent' awareness training. While the vast majority of learners understand the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism, a very small minority require further support to develop their confidence and understanding in this area.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The service delivers predominately non-accredited provision including creative arts, horticulture, literacy, parenting, numeracy and employability courses. A small number of accredited courses lead to qualifications in English and mathematics at level 1 and below. The range of courses reflects the education and training needs of the service's target learners. Learners access learning through a good range of venues in local communities, many of which also give learners access to other services such as libraries and crèches.
- The majority of learners enjoy their learning and develop a good range of personal, vocational and employability skills and knowledge. Class sizes are small and learners receive good individual coaching and support from teachers who target learning specifically to meet their identified needs.
- Most teachers are appropriately qualified and have good vocationally relevant experience, which they use well to engage learners, tailor learning to meet learners' needs and expectations, and help them expand their knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers provide particularly good feedback to learners during classes. This feedback helps learners to make progress during lessons, encourages them to strive for their next learning goals and helps them to correct mistakes and improve their skills.
- In most lessons, teachers plan learning activities well to meet learners' individual needs and aspirations. Learners work well individually and in small groups. However, in a very small minority of lessons, teachers do not set sufficiently difficult work for the most able learners. As a result, these learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- The majority of teachers assess learners' prior knowledge and skills accurately at the start of courses and use this information well to ensure that learners make progress according to their abilities. In a minority of courses, in particular introductory courses for teaching assistants, teachers do not evaluate carefully enough learners' progress in relation to their starting points, and do not set them learning goals and targets on their individual learning plans that are sufficiently challenging. By contrast, in some short courses and workshop sessions, individual learning plans and the targets on these are too complex and demanding for such short learning sessions. Managers are aware of this weakness and will be putting in place revised learning plans and encouraging staff to develop more appropriate targets during the coming year.
- Learners develop a wide range of skills. Learners on courses in English for speakers of other languages use their new language skills at work, in their personal lives or in their communities, improving their independence. Learners on English courses develop their literacy and communication skills well and those on ICT courses improve their confidence and ability to use the internet safely.
- The majority of teachers use high-quality resources, including well-prepared presentations and detailed handouts to help learners to learn. In a small minority of courses, teachers do not have suitable resources and this has a detrimental impact on learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Learners come from a very diverse range of backgrounds, and teachers and centre staff are skilful at ensuring that all learners integrate well with each other in training sessions. Teachers use effective strategies to bring diverse learner groups together during lessons and to help learners understand each other's needs and interests.
- Learners demonstrate highly positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy their learning and develop good and effective personal and employability skills because of their learning. These include significant increases in confidence, a benefit which is valued highly by learners and, where applicable, their carers or key workers.
- Learners' develop a good range of personal and social skills, and these allow many learners to raise their aspirations and progress to further learning in colleges and, for a few, at universities. Teachers help many learners to develop improved parenting skills, and learners are able to identify ways that they become better able to support their children in school or at nursery.
- Through participating in learning, learners develop their self-confidence and experience increased self-esteem, in both their personal lives and by developing their career plans. Many learners make very considerable progress, for example by progressing from entry-level literacy courses to become teaching assistants.
- Learners have a high level of respect for their peers and teachers. Most learners are enthusiastic, motivated to learn and keen to develop their skills. Attendance and punctuality are good on most courses.

- Learners appreciate the safe, inclusive learning environment provided by the subcontractor partners and by service teachers and managers. Learners feel safe and support each other well in classes and around centres. Learners understand the arrangements in place to protect them. Managers put in place a good number of courses promoting online safety, such as 'Internet safety for parents of teenagers', and courses to support confidence in use of iPads and tablets. Teachers sensitively and effectively support learners' understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe, and how to identify safe and secure websites: for example, when communicating with friends, banking or shopping online.
- Teachers provide comprehensive guidance to learners to help them select the most appropriate programme to suit their personal and career plans. Learners benefit from good levels of guidance throughout their courses to help them plan their next steps.
- Teachers and most learners have had training on the meaning and promotion of British values, and in ways to recognise and avoid the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. However, a very small minority of learners still lack understanding in these matters.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Outcomes for learners have improved since the previous inspection, both for learners on accredited and non-accredited courses. The vast majority of learners achieve the qualifications for which they study, or achieve or exceed their course aims and learning goals.
- Only a small number of courses lead to externally accredited awards, with around 80 learners taking qualifications during the current year, mostly in English and mathematics at entry level or level 1. For these courses, retention and achievement rates are high.
- Many learners go on to take level 2 courses in English or mathematics with other providers. Such learners receive good encouragement and support from their teachers and generally understand well the progression routes available to them.
- Achievement rates for non-accredited courses are high, with the vast majority of learners achieving courses' learning goals or personal goals and targets. Managers have introduced improved enrolment forms that better support learners and teachers to assess starting points and thus support progression in learning. The majority of teachers use individual learning plans well to help learners set personal goals and targets, although these are insufficiently precise and measurable in a minority of cases.
- Managers use data very effectively to identify and analyse the performance of vulnerable and targeted groups of learners. Where trends in performance do cause concern, managers take swift remedial action.
- Teachers and managers collect and make good use of a wide range of information about learners' aspirations, their levels of satisfaction and their concerns. The vast majority of learners express very high levels of satisfaction with their courses and are keen to express their pride in the skills they have developed during learning.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	936
CEO	Mr A Couldrick
Website address	

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)		782						
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bracknell and Wokingham College ■ Crescent ■ Elevate ■ Norwood 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Richard Beynon, lead inspector

Carolyn Brownsea

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the interim assistant director of learning and achievement, 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 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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