

Bexley Training Group trading as Skills for Growth

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

5–8 July 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
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Traineeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders, trustees and managers do not focus sufficiently well on prioritising improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Too many learners on study programmes and traineeships do not attend regularly, are often late and are unprepared for their training sessions.
- Significant changes to staffing have resulted in slow progress to planned improvements to ensure that learners are on relevant programmes, make good progress and achieve well.
- The teaching, learning and assessment of English and mathematics is underdeveloped and learners' achievement of qualifications is poor. Apprentices often retake functional skills tests several times before passing.
- Targets set by tutors and assessors do not sufficiently involve employers and do not focus on the development of learners' skills and personal development.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders, trustees and managers have a strong vision to support disadvantaged young people in Bexleyheath, Woolwich and Stratford.
- Learners develop good skills. The majority of learners on traineeships make good progress and move onto apprenticeships while almost all apprentices remain in employment on completion of their training.
- Learners receive good support and guidance from staff when recruited and throughout their programmes.
- Staff work closely with local employers to offer programmes that meet employers' needs and ensure that meaningful work experience and work placements are available for learners.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Bexley Training Group, trading as Skills for Growth Limited, is a registered charity and independent learning provider based in Bexleyheath, South-East London. Following a merger with Landmark Training in 2011, Skills for Growth's provision expanded to include Stratford and Woolwich. The organisation offers training for learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships in business administration, childcare and hairdressing. Subcontracted apprenticeships in creative and digital media, and music, are being discontinued.
- Approximately 71% of learners are on apprenticeships, 21% on traineeships and 8% on study programmes at level 1 or below. Over 40% of learners come from disadvantaged areas and backgrounds, including those who were eligible for free school meals, have additional learning needs or speak English as an additional language.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders and managers focus more closely on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to provide learners with interesting and relevant training linked to their learning aims.
- Make sure that tutors and assessors establish and apply consistently high expectations for learners to achieve when in the training centres in relation to:
 - attendance and punctuality
 - appearance and behaviour
 - standards of work, especially spoken and written English
- Plan the teaching of functional skills so that it is relevant for learners' roles and employment prospects and more learners develop the necessary skills for their future careers and achieve qualifications in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Review tutors' and assessors' communications with employers to ensure that learners' skills for work are understood and better developed by all involved.
- Ensure that actions arising from self-assessment relate clearly to key areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment, and that trustees and senior leaders monitor frequently the progress made towards achieving these actions, intervening swiftly when the rate of progress slows.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have yet to secure sufficient improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that all learners experience consistently good teaching. Leaders and managers have focused their work on improving the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications. They have yet to focus sufficiently on ensuring that tutors help all learners make good progress with their learning, particularly with improving their abilities in English and mathematics.
- Senior leaders and managers have worked successfully with a wide range of local employers and referral agencies to ensure that they offer an effective range of training and qualifications. As a result, programmes reflect the skills employers require and learners, who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), find attractive and motivating. Managers have structured the curriculum well to enable learners to move on to higher levels of learning or more challenging programmes.
- Senior leaders' own assessment of the provision is broadly accurate and identifies most of the main strengths and areas for improvement in the previous academic year. However, their actions for improvement, arising from their judgements, do not put sufficient emphasis on the areas that will impact most on improving the experience of all learners. For example, they have not included sufficiently specific actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and, as such, the pace of improvement has been too slow.
- Managers' observations of teaching, learning and assessment are not yet sufficiently evaluative and do not identify consistently the progress learners make during learning sessions. Consequently, the actions observers set for tutors are not always appropriate or sufficiently specific to bring about the necessary improvements quickly enough. Managers' observations of apprentices' reviews and assessments identify more accurately what assessors do well and what they need to do to improve.
- Managers are improving their use of data around important areas of learners' progress and performance. They meet frequently to monitor the progress of individuals and groups of learners, setting targets for improvement when required. As a result, the proportion of apprentices who are on target to achieve their qualifications within the planned timescale is improving considerably, halting a trend of decline. However, the proportion of learners who achieve functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics has yet to improve.
- Senior leaders have used performance management procedures effectively to help tutors improve their practice or remove them from employment. As a result, staff turnover has been high and this has negatively affected the quality of learners' experience in the short term. Despite managers' best efforts and rigorous recruitment procedures, they have yet to establish a stable, experienced and effective teaching team. They have been more successful in recruiting skilled assessors for apprenticeship programmes, and, as a result, the proportion of apprentices who are making good progress towards achieving their qualification is improving quickly.
- **The governance of the provider requires improvement**
 - The board of trustees uses its varied range of skills and experience well to guide the strategic direction of the charity. It works effectively to ensure that sound financial performance supports the pursuit of its charitable aims well.
 - Senior leaders keep board members well informed about the financial and educational performance of the charity, its strengths and areas for improvement. However, trustees and senior leaders have not focused sufficiently on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the rate of improvement is slow.
 - The board recognised that it lacked sufficient skills in further education and has recently appointed a new member with appropriate experience who is now working closely with senior leaders to improve quality and outcomes for learners. However, it is too soon to judge the full impact of this appointment.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Managers complete checks on all new staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people, eligible to work in the UK and appropriately qualified. Where checks on suitability are delayed, managers carry out appropriate risk assessments to make sure that learners are kept safe.
 - Staff work very effectively with learners and thoroughly investigate any potential safeguarding concerns. The majority of cases recorded by staff require no external intervention and most learners receive appropriate welfare support from staff to ensure their wellbeing.

- Staff and employers ensure that learners develop safe working practices in the workplace. Learners know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media. Senior leaders' actions to train staff in preventing extremism and radicalisation have been effectively implemented, with learners able to identify the signs and dangers associated with these issues.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Tutors and assessors do not always plan teaching and learning sufficiently well to motivate and inspire all learners. While most learners on traineeships enjoy personalised lessons, which help them to develop their employability and communication skills, too much teaching for study programme learners and apprentices is dull. Tutors do not provide enough well-planned and relevant activities to stimulate learners, and encourage them to attend frequently and make swift progress.
- Teaching of functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT requires improvement. In a majority of English skills classes, tutors use language that learners do not understand, use written resources that contain minor errors, and do not always correct learners' spelling and grammatical mistakes. In a minority of mathematics classes, learners do not get the opportunity to practise their mathematics skills and relate their knowledge to their work roles. Tutors and assessors do not provide enough opportunities for learners to practise their spoken English in vocational classes and reviews.
- Not enough staff use diagnostic assessments of learners' English and mathematics skills at the start of their programmes to identify meaningful and clear learning goals for learners to develop their skills. Staff do not formally assess learners' written and spoken English. Once learners are on programme, staff do not evaluate in sufficient detail the progress learners make or give specific guidance on what learners need to improve.
- Learners benefit from staff's positive relationships with a wide range of employers. Learners on traineeships benefit from good-quality work placements that enable them to gain a practical insight into a career in an area of work that they aspire to, such as business administration, childcare or hairdressing. However, assessors do not always ensure that employers' contributions at reviews of progress are regular or sufficiently detailed to enable trainees and apprentices to understand fully what they need to do to improve their work and make a full contribution in the workplace.
- Apprentices enjoy and benefit from a flexible approach to their learning. Tutors and assessors plan learning, observations, reviews and training sessions to meet the individual needs of apprentices and their employers. Assessors and learners are starting to communicate through using virtual technologies, providing remote learning sessions and assessments, which is helping learners progress and achieve their apprenticeship in a timely manner.
- Learners receive valuable verbal feedback in learning sessions and reviews, which enables them to develop their thinking and consolidate their knowledge. Tutors' feedback on learners' written work is timely. However, it does not always tell learners what they need to do to improve their work or provide challenge for most-able learners. Although assessors often correct apprentices' spelling and grammatical mistakes when they occur in written work, they do not provide learners with strategies so that they can self-correct their work.
- The majority of staff use their relevant industry knowledge and experience well. They use effective questioning techniques to help learners apply their learning to their job role and workplace activities. For example, childcare learners are encouraged to apply their knowledge of child development to the early years foundation stage and plan appropriate assessment activities for use with the children they care for. Study programme learners and trainees benefit from good individual coaching tailored to meet their individual needs and improve their confidence and self-esteem.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

- Tutors do not reinforce the importance of good attendance and punctuality sufficiently well. As a result, too many learners do not develop these important skills. Attendance by learners on study programmes and traineeships is too low and the majority of study programme learners do not complete their programme. Attendance and punctuality by apprentices in their workplace are good and are improving for those learners attending training centres.

- Staff and learners treat each other with respect and learners provide good peer support for each other. The learning and standards of work are appropriate to learners' level of study, although the most able learners find much of the work too easy. Staff provide effective personal support for learners and they are able to access independent counselling if they have personal problems or have experienced difficult life events.
- All learners receive individualised, effective and comprehensive advice and guidance at the start of their programmes. Specialist staff prepare potential learners very well and place them on the most appropriate course that meets their interests and abilities well. Staff support learners on traineeships particularly well and the majority progress onto apprenticeships.
- In the workplace, learners develop good employability skills and gain a good understanding of positive workplace behaviours and attitudes, such as professional dress and the importance of punctuality. Unfortunately, learners do not always apply these same standards when at learning sessions in the training centres.
- The majority of apprentices develop good vocational skills and exhibit a good understanding of why the quality of their work is important to their employer. Employers recognise apprentices' skills development and the large majority of apprentices gain promotion at work and are given more responsibility as a result. For example, childcare apprentices become key workers for specific children they care for.
- Learners gain a good understanding of British values. Through a range of creative practical activities, learners develop a good understanding of diversity and British values, and how these relate to their own lives, their work placements and job roles. For example, learners confidently discussed the European Union referendum and their rights and responsibilities in a democracy.
- Learners feel safe and have a good understanding of how to report incidents, including if they suspect a colleague or client is being radicalised. Childcare apprentices have a very good understanding of keeping children safe and apply their safeguarding knowledge well to their workplace.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Apprentices' achievement of qualifications has been in decline for the last three years and requires improvement. Although an increasing proportion of apprentices are achieving qualifications in administration and hairdressing, too many childcare apprentices fail to achieve all their qualifications.
- Too few learners complete their study programmes and achieve all their learning aims. Study programme and traineeship learners' achievement of English and mathematics qualifications is poor.
- Too many childcare apprentices leave without passing their mathematics and English functional skills tests. Although the vast majority of apprentices pass their speaking and listening, and writing tests at the first attempt, a high proportion of apprentices take their mathematics and ICT functional skills tests several times before passing.
- Study programme learners make slow progress in their learning when attending the training centres. Their progress and development of skills improve when they are on work experience or work placements.
- Apprentices are making good progress following swift action to provide additional support and assessments to those who have not achieved their apprenticeship within the planned time. Learners on traineeships make good progress in developing work-related skills when in work placements. However, the progress by study programme learners is often too slow.
- The progression of learners onto further learning and employment is good. The vast majority of apprentices remain in employment when they leave or complete their programme. Many apprentices take on additional responsibilities at work and a few gain promotion either during their programmes or on completion. The small minority who are capable progress from intermediate to advanced level.
- The majority of learners on traineeships become apprentices while a significant minority join other courses in further education or training. The vast majority of traineeship learners who leave their programme early do so to start their apprenticeship.
- On completion of their study programme, over half the learners join an apprenticeship or start a new programme in further education and training. A smaller proportion start a traineeship.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- There are 27 learners on the study programme, which consists of three parts: employability training, functional skills in English and mathematics from entry to level 2, and two blocks of work experience. Learners attend either Stratford or Woolwich training centres. Most learners were previously not in education, employment or training.
- Attendance and the achievement of functional skills qualifications are low, and managers' strategies to improve these aspects have not yet produced sufficient impact. Learners' progress on functional skills courses is too slow, with many not achieving to their full potential. However, learners do develop highly relevant employability skills and tutors support them well to develop clear plans for their next career steps. The study programme functions well as a stepping stone and progression to further education, training and employment.
- Managers have identified the teaching of functional skills as an area for development but it is too soon to see the impact of their actions on the quality of learning and achievement. The teaching of English and mathematics does not relate to the vocational context of the learners. Tutors do not routinely pick up spelling and grammatical errors and, in some lessons, the language used for activities is too complex for learners to understand. On the other hand, in a few English lessons, learners get good opportunities to produce written work on a regular basis.
- Tutors in employability sessions provide a good focus on job interview and curriculum vitae (CV) writing skills, and expected behaviour at work. Learners participate well during these sessions. Their understanding of the job interview process is good and they find this information useful and relevant when applying for jobs.
- Learners have access to a good choice of work experience placements locally and value the opportunity to be in the workplace. Employers report how well learners develop their skills and a strong work ethic. Learners use their work experience well to inform their next steps.
- Staff have developed a good range of additional activities to develop learners' awareness of job opportunities and the skills needed for employment. They have good partnerships with local businesses as well as links with large employers. Employees volunteer to help with mock interviews and give feedback on learners' CVs. One employer provides effective team-building training. Employees from similar backgrounds to the learners explain how they got into their current jobs. Visits to larger employers widen the young people's horizons significantly. While some learners find these activities very challenging, they look back on them as valuable learning and confidence-building activities.
- Learners feel safe, treat each other with respect and know how to protect themselves when using social media. Learners develop a good understanding of British values through discussions in lessons that challenge their views on topics such as the wearing of clothes displaying religious symbols.

Apprenticeships

require improvement

- Skills for Growth has 243 apprentices, the majority being 16–18-year-olds at intermediate level. Apprentices are mainly on programmes in business administration, childcare and hairdressing. A small number are on apprenticeships in customer service, creative and digital media, music, and ICT. Training fully meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- Managers' and staff's communication with employers requires improvement. Staff do not always fully explore and understand the employers' business needs and apprentices' proposed job role before suggesting training plans. This occasionally results in apprentices not matching employers' expectations and need for specific skills and values.
- Tutors and assessors do not always use information on apprentices' starting points well enough to plan effectively and ensure learners' rapid progress in training sessions. Target setting for apprentices is insufficient and focuses too much on the completion of units and answering short questions. Too few targets relate to the development of apprentices' personal skills to ensure that they become self-assured and independent employees.
- Apprentices do not develop English, mathematics and ICT skills quickly or well enough to pass functional skills tests at the first attempt. Although assessors and tutors incorporate the appropriate use of language and numeracy well in most training sessions, they do not set specific targets for apprentices on what they need to develop and improve further.

- The majority of apprentices make a positive contribution to employers' businesses. They develop good work and technical skills both at work and at the training centre. Within a few months, hairdressing apprentices are able to support stylists by completing tints, washing and blow-drying customers' hair.
- Tutors and assessors provide helpful, clear verbal feedback to apprentices on their progress so they know what they need to do next and how to improve the standard of work. Apprentices are fully aware of the expected dates for completing their apprenticeship and work collaboratively with assessors and work supervisors to gain evidence of achievement.
- Work values, British values and personal safety are included and promoted well throughout the apprenticeships. Apprentices gain good work-related skills such as teamwork and collaboration, costing and timing services, communication skills and time keeping. Attendance and punctuality are good at work and improving at training sessions.
- Apprentices' behaviour at work and in the training centres is good and the majority take an active interest in learning about and acquiring professional standards. They know how to keep themselves safe and adopt safe working practices. They are very clear about what personal protective equipment they need to wear and how to use equipment safely.
- Apprentices benefit from gaining a range of additional training both at work and through Skills for Growth. For example, hairdressing apprentices have good access to manufacturers' training on new products and childcare apprentices have additional paediatric first aid training.

Traineeships

are good

- Skills for Growth has 71 trainees who attend training in either Woolwich or Stratford training centres. Trainees gain work placements mainly in childcare, hairdressing, customer service and business administration. The majority of trainees were previously NEET.
- Staff effectively identify trainees' starting points, and assess their skills and abilities so they can organise work placements that meet learners' needs and future career goals. In the first four weeks, staff set high expectations and prepare trainees well for the workplace, making sure that they understand expected dress codes and behaviours.
- The programmes are sufficiently personalised and tailored in length and content to address the needs of young people wishing to complete a work preparation programme. The majority of trainees are successful in gaining employment as an apprentice.
- Trainees receive effective support to develop their employability and functional skills, such as using experiences gained while on work placement to produce a personalised CV. Trainees demonstrate effective spoken and written English. Experienced mathematics tutors ensure that trainees understand how to use fractions and percentages to estimate prices on sale goods.
- Trainees make good progress in developing work-related skills, especially when on work placements. For example, several trainees learned how to plan activities for children and identify health and safety risks while working in a nursery. Trainees gain confidence and use their initiative to perform tasks more independently.
- Tutors' reviews help trainees evaluate their own performance and understand what skills they need to practice while on work placements. Tutors closely monitor trainees on placements through phone calls to employers and regular visits to the workplace. Trainees receive well-structured verbal feedback on the development of work-related skills. Employers are positive about trainees' attitudes and the worthwhile contributions they make to the workplace. However, employers are not always aware of any objectives tutors have set trainees to develop or improve specific skills.
- Trainees' attendance and punctuality are erratic. Tutors' expectations are not high enough to ensure that trainees' good attendance while on work placements is maintained when attending sessions in the training centre.
- Too few learners on traineeships achieve any qualifications in mathematics and English. Many learners make slow progress in developing and improving these skills in lessons.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	825
CEO	Ashley McCaul
Website address	www.skillsforgrowth.org.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+
	98							
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	150	34	25	34				
	16-19		19+		Total			
	71				71			
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
	■ Big Creative Training Limited							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Joy Montgomery, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Pemble	Her Majesty's Inspector
Patricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Bourne	Ofsted Inspector
Philida Schellekens	Ofsted Inspector
Kanwaljit Dhillon	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the chief executive officer 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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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