

# Mardell Associates Limited trading as Smart Training

Independent Learning Provider

**Inspection dates**

18–21 October 2016

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Adult learning programmes	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Apprenticeships	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Traineeships	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Outcomes for learners	<b>Requires improvement</b>		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not yet managed to halt the decline in achievement rates and too many apprentices take longer than expected to complete their childcare and management qualifications.
- Attendance and punctuality by learners at study days for apprenticeships, adult courses and traineeships are poor.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics skills is not good enough and too few adult learners and trainees achieve qualifications in these subjects.
- Reviews of learners' progress are not effective at ensuring that learners, employers and staff have a clear overview of the progress that learners make.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Learners enjoy their training and develop valuable and relevant childcare skills which lead to employment and improved career prospects.
- Training on study days is well structured and carefully planned, allowing learners to develop English and mathematics skills within a childcare context.
- Smart Training works in close partnership with the childcare sector, local communities and employers to offer a good range of qualifications and training pathways for learners.
- Staff are enthusiastic, motivated and knowledgeable and are well supported by leaders and managers, who provide good staff development activities.

## **Full report**

### **Information about the provider**

- Smart Training is a family-owned business based in Hampton Wick. Smart Training has been established for over 20 years, initially working as a specialist childcare provider. Over the last few years Smart Training has expanded to offer traineeships and part-time adult learning programmes as well as apprenticeships in children and young people's workforce, supporting teaching and learning in schools, business administration, team leading and management.
- Regional offices are located in East London, Watford and Leeds and study day training sessions take place in over 20 locations nationally. Study days for apprenticeships take place on a Saturday to minimise disruptions to employers.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve further?**

- Leaders and managers should set clear targets for improvement so that staff and learners take greater ownership of study day attendance, progress and timely achievement of all qualifications.
- Staff should increase attendance at study days by reinforcing the importance of these training sessions and making sure that learners realise what is expected of them from the start of their programme.
- Reduce the number of learners who take longer than expected to complete their programmes by improving the reviews of progress so that learners, employers and staff have a clear overview of the progress being made, not just the activities completed.
- Staff should involve employers more in planning the development of learners' skills and encouraging learners to attend relevant study days and revision sessions.
- Tutors should use results from assessments more effectively to plan training and coaching sessions to increase the pass rates on functional skills tests.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not been successful in preventing the steady decline in learners' achievements. Managers have recently introduced significant changes to improve the monitoring of learners' activity but it is too early to see the impact of these changes and managers have not improved learners' low attendance at training sessions.
- Managers, tutors and learners do not have a clear view of how well learners are progressing overall. Consequently, staff do not intervene early enough to support learners effectively who are making slow progress. Smart Training gathers large amounts of data indicating low attendance at study days, and the insufficient time spent preparing for tests, but this does not indicate the progress that learners have made on their programme.
- Targets for improvement are not clear. Managers are closely monitoring how well tasks identified in the self-assessment report are completed. However, many of these tasks are not expressed in terms of specific, measurable targets and thus it is not clear how well Smart Training is improving the weaknesses identified in that report.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that learners develop their English and mathematics skills fast enough, despite the significant focus that they have recently placed in this area. Their strategies for improvement have yet to result in significant increases in the low pass rates for these subjects.
- Managers monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment regularly and develop good action plans to resolve any concerns identified. Staff benefit from significant continual professional development and the sharing of good practice. Themes obtained from the observation process inform the topics for staff development. In a small minority of cases, the observation report places insufficient emphasis on judgements about learning and is mainly descriptive.
- Senior managers make good use of partnerships with local employers, to support the development of skills in childcare and management. Employers value highly the support provided by Smart Training and the effective communication that they receive regarding any issues that their learners may have. However, employers are not sufficiently involved in reviewing apprentices' progress and setting new learning targets.
- The curriculum offered by Smart Training meets the needs of the childcare sector well. The range of courses, from level 1 to level 5, and the broad variety of routes into training for apprentices, adult learners and trainees supports the development of skills within childcare providers well.
- Smart Training promotes equality and diversity well and helps learners prepare for work in a diverse Britain. Equality is a core value of the company. Managers choose training venues carefully to ensure that they are suitable and accessible. Learners develop their understanding of equality and diversity well through the curriculum and study days.

### The governance of the provider

- The board of directors know their company well and although they recognise the priorities for improvement they have not yet been successful in increasing learners' achievements.

- The board of directors undertake an important role in shaping the direction of Smart Training. The chair of the board and the managing director have a clear vision for the company.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers conduct thorough recruitment checks to ensure the suitability of all staff. Safeguarding is a priority of the early years curriculum and learners' understanding of this is developed well.
- Managers carefully monitor the health and safety requirements and practices in apprentices' and learners' workplaces.
- The leaders and managers ensure that all staff are trained to meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. They ensure that British values and an awareness of the dangers of radicalisation feature in the training sessions but learners' poor attendance at training is limiting their understanding of the dangers of extremism.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- The core elements of teaching and learning are provided through study days. The majority of apprentices do not attend regularly enough to gain the theoretical knowledge they need to complete the associated homework and unit completion tasks successfully in the timeframes planned. Adult learners and trainees also miss out on valuable teaching and learning opportunities due to poor attendance.
- Learners' development of English, mathematics and information communications technology (ICT) skills is too slow. Not enough tutors and assessors use the assessment of learners' English and mathematics skills at the start of their programmes to identify meaningful and clear learning goals for learners to help them develop their skills quickly and pass their exams. There is an over-reliance on learners completing and submitting practice papers and not all activities included in lessons are of the appropriate level or content to meet learners' abilities.
- Target-setting for apprentices is not sufficiently individualised or informed from an accurate assessment of learners' starting points and progress. Targets tend to focus too much on the completion of units between study days or exam completion. Apprentices cannot identify their current progress towards their qualifications and are over-reliant on instructions from their tutor or progress manager. Learners who are struggling with a particular element of their learning are provided with focused short-term action plans to support them getting back on track.
- Learners benefit from the provider's positive relationships with a wide range of employers, schools and community partners. The majority of trainees enjoy relevant work placements, which help them prepare well for progression onto apprenticeships or employment. Employers support their apprentices to gain valuable practical skills and recognise that their apprentices are gaining in confidence. However, the majority of employers are not sufficiently involved in planning the development of learners' skills and reviewing their progress.
- Tutors have valuable recent industry experience that they use well to conduct purposeful

study sessions that motivate and interest the apprentices who attend. In lessons and following workplace observations tutors use highly effective questioning to stimulate learners to develop their thinking skills and apply their learning to their job role and workplace activities. For example, childcare apprentices are encouraged to apply the ABC theory of behaviour management to the behaviour strategies they would use for the children they care for.

- Learners have access to a good range of online resources to widen their learning and practice their English and mathematics skills. The majority of apprentices use these resources well. However, a small minority of learners do not have the necessary ICT skills to access these resources successfully and benefit from useful information available.
- Tutors and assessors provide good-quality immediate oral feedback during lessons and following work place observations. This feedback is supportive and encouraging, and points out clearly what learners need to do to improve. Written feedback from tutors is positive and praises achievements but often fails to identify how learners can improve further, such as developing strategies for self-correcting spelling and grammar errors.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

### **Requires improvement**

- Attendance by learners at study days for traineeships, adult learners and apprentices is too low. Tutors do not reinforce the importance of good attendance and punctuality sufficiently well and do not set high expectations. As a result, too many learners do not develop these important skills and miss out on valuable learning activities at the study days.
- Initial advice and guidance for learners is thorough and tutors carefully explain the different qualifications and funding options available. Tutors note valuable background information during the application process and initial assessments. However, this information is not always used effectively by the tutors and assessors to provide individualised support.
- Guidance and support for learners throughout their programmes are good. Trainees receive particularly effective information and advice on progression opportunities. Apprentices are supported very well, through a range of flexible study options, when their personal circumstances change mid-programme.
- All learners develop good relevant skills associated to current or future employment in the childcare sector. An increasing number of trainees are gaining employment or apprenticeships. Adults frequently take on voluntary positions to enhance their classroom skills development and prospects of employment. Apprentices often undertake additional responsibilities at work.
- Learners enjoy their training and grow in confidence and ability. They show high levels of respect of each other in classroom sessions, where they regularly discuss a wide range of topics relating to diversity, equality and what it is like to live and work in Britain.
- Tutors and progress managers provide good welfare support to learners who face personal difficulties during their training programmes. Additional meetings and contact ensures that learners remain in training where possible.
- Safeguarding of children is a high priority on all programmes and well understood by learners. Learners also understand the importance of how to keep themselves and their

personal information safe. However, learners are less aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

## Outcomes for learners

## Requires improvement

- Managers took decisive action last year to review learners who achieved their childcare qualifications and had little intention of taking their functional skills test. This resulted in a higher than usual number of non-completers and achievement rates declined for a third consecutive year to well below the national averages for the sector.
- Too many apprentices are making slow progress and fail to achieve within the timescales expected.
- Last year, too many adult learners left early without achieving their qualifications. In 2014/15, the majority of adult learners benefited from additional qualifications. However, many of these were not funded in 2015/16 and achievement rates for the alternatives introduced are not yet good.
- Many traineeships learners make reasonable progress in developing and improving their English and mathematics skills during study days, and pass rates on functional skills tests are starting to improve. However, achievement of qualifications remains very low.
- An increasing number of traineeship learners are progressing into a positive destination. Last year a quarter of trainees left to start an apprenticeship and two-fifths gained employment or returned to full-time education. In the current year, the majority of trainees have progressed onto a full-time training course or employment.
- In 2015/16, Smart Training started delivering GCSEs to meet the government requirements for people employed in the early years sector. The first cohort achieved good results, with around half gaining a grade A\* to C in mathematics and English, which is well above the national average.
- Last year, managers reduced the gap in achievement rates that had existed between male and female apprentices for the two previous years.

## Types of provision

### Adult learning programmes

### Requires improvement

- Currently 359 adult learners study part-time vocational programmes in childcare and supporting teaching and learning in schools. The majority of learners also work on improving their English and mathematics skills. Study days are designed to fit around learners who have children at school or nursery.
- Learners who attend frequently enjoy their training and progress well. However, poor attendance and punctuality at study days results in too many learners making slow progress and too few achieving relevant qualifications.
- Teaching and learning activities are varied, group discussions are lively and informative and learners are able to make good links between theory and practice. In a minority of sessions tutors too readily provide the answers to the question they ask rather than giving learners the chance to explore different ideas and suggestions.

- All learners undergo an assessment of their skills at the beginning of their programme but tutors take insufficient account of individuals' areas for development in planning sessions. Tutors do not routinely use additional or alternative activities to develop the most able learners. A minority of learners with low levels of English and ICT skills struggle to access the good range of resources available to them through Smart Training's online training academy.
- Learners are very positive about their programmes and appreciate the support they receive from experienced and knowledgeable tutors. However, tutors do not systematically review learners' individual progress. Tutors often set targets related to completing a task rather than developing skills that align to learners' aspirations and career aims.
- There is good development of English at the beginning of training sessions, with an exercise on researching and understanding technical words that are linked to the topic being taught in the session. In a few sessions, the level of English texts used to improve learners' reading skills were too difficult for learners to understand and the content was inappropriate for the group.
- Tutors make effective use of tasks to help learners develop their mathematics skills that are interesting and relevant to their work with children, for example, rhymes about shapes or researching the professional services available for children in the borough and then putting them on a graph to compare how many of each type of service was available.
- Smart Training's good partnerships with local schools and communities help learners find relevant work placements which allow learners to apply the topics they learn at study days and develop their practical skills. Learners gain in self-confidence and aspire to working in childcare settings at the end of their courses.

## Apprenticeships

## Requires improvement

- Smart Training provides apprenticeship frameworks in children and young people's workforce and management. Of the 1,285 apprentices currently in learning, 17% are on intermediate apprenticeships, 64% on advanced and 19% of apprentices are following higher-level programmes. Study days are held each month on a Saturday in suitable locations across the country.
- Too many apprentices are making slow progress and are not expected to complete their qualifications in the planned timeframes. Poor attendance at the study days results in gaps in apprentices' theoretical knowledge to support their practical workplace training. Too many do not attend revision sessions and do not complete their functional skills and GCSE qualifications. Managers have not intervened quickly enough to get apprentices back on track.
- Reviews of apprentices' progress are not effective and are reliant on telephone conversations and emails. Assessors, progress managers, learners and employers do not have a clear overview of how well apprentices are developing their skills and practical knowledge in the workplace. Staff place too much emphasis on apprentices completing activities rather than whether an apprentice is on track, ahead or behind where they are expected to be.



- Employers are not sufficiently involved in agreeing apprentices' progress and setting new learning targets. Assessors do not involve employers effectively enough in making sure that apprentices receive a broad range of opportunities to develop new skills in the workplace, such as linking apprentices with other employees to learn new roles and complete different tasks.
- Assessment visits to the workplaces are not always effective. A minority of assessors do not prepare apprentices well enough for formal observations which results in apprentices making slow progress because observation tasks have to be rearranged and repeated.
- Assessors are highly motivated and develop positive relationships with apprentices and employers. They provide apprentices with good feedback on their written work and ensure that apprentices understand what they need to do to improve their work.
- Apprentices seen in the workplace understand their overall aims and demonstrate ambition to achieve their qualification and to progress further, such as studying at a higher level. Their practical work is of a good standard. For example, apprentices working in nurseries pay particularly good attention to safeguarding and promoting children's understanding of sharing and considering the consequences of their behaviour on others around them.
- Apprentices benefit from the vocational skills and knowledge they gain, which helps them to become more effective in the workplace. Employers value the contribution their apprentices make and many of them are keen to support their apprentice and often give them additional responsibilities. For example, one apprentice in a nursery setting took lead responsibility for supporting children's reading.
- Apprentices receive good support to improve their English and mathematical skills and often explore topics in good depth, which extends their learning. Apprentices that attend these sessions improve their self-confidence and enjoy learning. A good range of online learning resources is used well by apprentices to broaden their understanding and to make further progress.
- Assessors promote good professional standards and behaviours in the workplace, which help apprentices quickly become valuable members of their teams. Apprentices gain a good understanding of safe working practices that they put into practice at work.

## Traineeships

## Requires improvement

- There are 100 learners on traineeship programmes, with the majority interested in childcare and the remainder interested in business administration, working with ICT or hairdressing. Learners spend at least six weeks in a relevant work placement and attend weekly study days.
- Too many trainees are absent from their study days, which means that they do not learn and develop all the skills they need for their further studies or employment, although an increasing number of trainees make positive progression following their programmes.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment on traineeship study days is too variable. In some sessions, trainees learn well because the activities are at the right level for them and the skills are relevant to the workplace. However, in other sessions, trainees do not have sufficient opportunity to engage in learning and tutors ask questions to which only the more confident learners respond.



- The teaching of English and mathematics has improved, although these skills are not yet sufficiently related to the workplace and further study. Tutors focus the English and mathematics learning too much on taking tests. Staff collect much information on trainees but do not yet distil it into clear next-step targets. A few trainees are working below the level of which they are capable.
- Trainees get good advice and guidance before they join the traineeship programme. Advisers gather a good range of information on new recruits' prior qualifications and experience as well as attitudes to learning. If trainees need extra support and advice, advisers build this into the programme. They share reports and recommendations on best options for training not only with the training and placement teams, but also with the trainee.
- All trainees have a weekly tutorial, which is very effective. Trainees and their tutor build up trusting relationships and pastoral support for trainees is particularly good. This is especially valuable for young learners and those who are vulnerable young adults. Staff and trainees review work placements together, plan next steps and, with guidance from their tutors, trainees take increasing responsibility for their own development.
- Work placements are effective. A high proportion of the trainees are on placement within two weeks of joining the programme. Trainees have the option of trying placements with different employers and in different sectors, which is helpful for those who do not yet know what type of career they want.
- The placement team keeps in regular touch with employers and collects useful information on learner progress and behaviour at work. The team records this feedback well and passes it on to the tutor team, which in turn uses it well to reflect on performance during their weekly tutorials.
- Staff make every effort to keep vulnerable trainees safe and apply health and safety well in the context of work placements. Trainees understand the concept of safeguarding well and have good awareness of health and safety, and why this is important in the workplace.
- Tutors have a good focus on the practical application of British values, such as tolerance and respect for each other, and colleagues and customers in the workplace. Trainees behave well in lessons.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	50165
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,500
Managing Director	Kate Stock
Telephone number	020 3700 4294
Website	<a href="http://www.smart-training.com">www.smart-training.com</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	–	44	–	215	–	109	–	1
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	89	137	165	655	–	239		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	62		32		97			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	none							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, 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 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.

## Inspection team

Joy Montgomery, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector
Philida Schellekens	Ofsted Inspector
Dan Grant	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Learner View**

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to [www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Employer View**

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to [www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2016