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Mrs Elaine McCausland
Head of Service Liverpool Adult Learning Service
Employment and Skills – Regeneration
Liverpool City Council
Park Road Adult Learning Centre
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Liverpool
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Dear Mrs McCausland

Short inspection of Liverpool Adult Learning Service

Following the short inspection on 1–2 December 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in April 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and senior managers have focused very effectively on improving the quality of the provision that the service offers. As a result, your learners continue to receive a good quality of education. They make good progress and most achieve their personal goals or gain qualifications.

The changes that you have made to the provision to reflect the priorities of disadvantaged communities in Liverpool are exemplary. You have shaped the provision very successfully to ensure that learners are better prepared to benefit from the economic and social developments in Liverpool, for example by offering 'first step' courses as a route into employment or self-employment.

Leaders and senior managers are very ambitious for the provision. You are striving hard to be an outstanding provider. Your self-assessment of the quality of the provision is robust and accurate. This has allowed you to implement a comprehensive plan to improve teaching, learning and assessment further. You, your managers and tutors have good capacity for driving further improvements. As you have recognised, on courses that do not have formal qualifications, too many tutors do not set learners clear learning targets. Consequently, learners do not know their own progress well enough. Too many learners do not produce work of the standard of which they are capable, because tutors do not set high expectations for these learners.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements continue to be comprehensive and effective. You have successfully reviewed your safeguarding policies, and updated them when required, to reduce even further any safety risks to learners. For example, you have reviewed your policy about checking tutors' backgrounds in relation to safeguarding issues. As a result, you are now in the process of checking all tutors. Until recently, you only made this check for tutors who taught vulnerable learners, offered family learning lessons or provided lessons in schools.

All tutors have received relevant training on keeping learners safe and their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. They are very skilful in discussing these issues with learners. As a result, learners have a good understanding of the risks of involvement with radical ideologies. They can explain confidently about the dangers of extremism. They know how to report any concerns and are certain that you and your staff take their worries seriously. Learners have a good awareness of staying safe while online.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and senior managers have ensured that the service's response to the changing needs and priorities of disadvantaged communities in Liverpool is outstanding. You have continued to develop the provision to improve learners' prospects significantly – for example, by offering a substantial number of courses for developing skills in English and mathematics, and for finding jobs. You and your managers have developed courses that help learners to gain the skills that employers seek. For instance, the course 'Beginners' Arabic for work and tourism' is an effective response to an identified skills shortage in Liverpool. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses enable learners who have arrived recently in the country to become more familiar with British culture. As a result, they understand their communities better and become more active in society, for example by setting up their own businesses. The provision for learners suffering from poor mental health helps to reduce their sense of isolation.
- You and your staff have developed good arrangements to monitor learners' progression into jobs, accredited courses and courses without formal qualifications. Managers undertake regular and frequent surveys of learners who have completed their courses to gather information about their next steps. A good proportion of learners respond to these surveys. Managers also survey specific groups of learners – for example, learners on vocational courses to assess the effectiveness of the provision. Senior managers use this information exceptionally well to make changes to the provision, for example by developing more courses in collaboration with employers to enhance learners' prospects of gaining jobs. However, you have not yet set clear and challenging targets for learners' progression into jobs and further courses. Consequently, you cannot evaluate the full impact of the provision.

- You have developed further the quality assurance arrangements for the service, including self-assessment, to ensure that weaknesses are identified and improvements made quickly. You monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment effectively through observations and 'learning walks', and identify areas for improvements. For example, you have recognised that target setting for all learners is not good enough and have taken action to improve this process. You are implementing the improvement action plan effectively to further enhance the quality of teaching and learning. You recognise that pockets of weakness require faster and further improvements.
- The large majority of tutors have a good knowledge of learners' starting points. They regularly review and record individual learners' achievements and skills. On a number of courses, for example on 'Using a sewing machine basics for beginners', learners are very clear about their learning targets, and are exceptionally proud of the skills that they develop and the outstanding quality of their work. However, a minority of tutors do not set clear learning targets for their learners. Consequently, these learners are not sure about their achievements and do not produce high enough standards of work. On these courses, too many learners do not take pride in what they have written, because their tutors do not have high enough expectations of them. These tutors do not encourage their learners to keep their work tidy and well organised. Consequently, learners find it difficult to review what they have learned or make improvements to their work.
- Learners progress well on accredited courses, which represent about a quarter of the provision, and courses without formal qualifications, which comprise the remaining three quarters. In 2015/16, most learners on accredited courses achieved their qualifications. A high proportion of learners who studied on English and mathematics level 1 courses were successful. A high proportion of learners on courses that do not lead to formal qualifications achieved their personal goals and the aims of their courses, although not all achieved to the standard of which they were capable.
- After completing their courses, a good proportion of learners start other courses, including accredited courses. This indicates that they have overcome any barriers to participation and engagement. In 2015/16, around 40% of learners did not have any qualifications when they took their first course. Around a third of these progressed to entry level courses and achieved success on them. Around a third of learners starting from level 1 qualifications progressed to level 2 courses, which they completed. Many learners improved their confidence and attitudes to work, gained paid employment, worked as volunteers in local businesses or became self-employed.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders and senior managers set clear and demanding targets for the progression of learners into jobs or further education and training, so that the impact of the provision within communities in Liverpool can be evaluated and enhanced even further
- senior managers continue to implement the existing improvement action plan robustly and relentlessly, so that the quality of the provision improves further
- tutors set sufficiently detailed targets for learners to enable them to make even better progress, and to recognise more fully the skills that they develop
- tutors encourage learners to keep their work well organised, so that they can easily review it and effectively apply what they have learned, enabling them to produce high standards of work.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shahram Safavi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by the head of service, as nominee. We met staff at all levels and learners. We observed training and lessons with you and members of your staff and looked at learners' work. We interviewed your learners. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, and by seeking their views during on-site inspection activity.