

West Sussex County Council

Local authority

Inspection dates

24–27 January 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Adult learning programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Inadequate	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have ensured that governance arrangements are strong and that safeguarding is effective; both represent very significant improvements since the previous inspection.
- Skilled, experienced and enthusiastic tutors use their teaching expertise and subject knowledge well to inspire most students.
- The large majority of adult learning students make good progress from their individual starting points and achieve their learning goals.
- Tutors know their students well and plan interesting and purposeful lessons which support and challenge most students to work hard.
- Tutors help students develop their studying and independent learning skills well.
- Since the previous inspection, tutors, supported by managers, have much improved their ability to help students develop mathematical skills; as a result, students, many for the first time, improve these skills and recognise the relevance of mathematics in their daily lives.
- Students know how to stay safe and have a good appreciation of the dangers presented by extremism and radicalisation.
- Tutors promote British values well, in particular tolerance and understanding of people from diverse backgrounds.
- Students who have learning difficulties and disabilities, many who live in residential settings, enjoy their learning and make good progress.
- Tutors on a small minority of courses do not challenge students sufficiently well to make the progress they are capable of making; this is particularly relevant to classes with students of widely varying levels of ability.
- A small minority of tutors do not evaluate lessons well enough and focus too much on whether students have completed tasks rather than checking the skills and knowledge they have developed.
- Students do not receive sufficient independent advice and guidance at the end of their course on their options for employment or further learning.
- Students' attendance and punctuality are improving but are not yet good enough.

Full report

Information about the provider

- West Sussex County Council (WSSC) provides adult learning courses to learners, who they refer to as students, through a subcontract with Aspire Sussex Limited (referred to as 'Aspire' in the county and in this report). Aspire also manages, on behalf of the authority, a very small second-tier subcontract with Albion in the Community. A wide variety of courses are provided at a large number of venues throughout the county. The large majority of these courses aim to meet the needs of families and communities and do not lead to formal qualifications. There are, however, opportunities for students to progress on to a small range of Aspire courses that lead to qualifications.
- Following the previous inspection and re-inspection monitoring visits, managers decided not to enrol any further students under the age of 18.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should:
 - improve teaching so that all students, and particularly those in mixed-ability groups, are sufficiently well challenged so that they are able to progress and achieve to the level of which they are capable
 - ensure that all tutors focus well on checking the skills and knowledge students have acquired during lessons rather than the tasks and activities which students have completed
 - improve attendance and punctuality by continuing the higher expectations and closer monitoring that they have recently introduced.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers took decisive action to remedy the safeguarding and governance weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. They also responded well to the challenge provided by re-inspection monitoring visits, which helped them focus on making significant progress rapidly.
- Managers have sustained the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which remains good. They have provided additional continued professional development to help tutors improve further their teaching and assessment practices to help students learn. Managers have also ensured a good focus on identified areas for improvement. For example, the very large majority of tutors now embed successfully the development of students' mathematical skills.
- Managers have a good understanding of the quality of the provision. This is achieved through an inclusive self-assessment process which captures feedback from staff, students and from partners. A concise, evaluative self-assessment report accurately identifies the strengths of the provision and the areas that require improvement.
- Managers quality assure the provision through a wide range of activity, which represents a very significant improvement since the previous inspection. They maintain a clear focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through effective contract monitoring meetings and audits. They monitor closely the areas identified as requiring improvement at the previous inspection by commissioning external consultants to report independently on the progress being made.
- Managers' observations of teaching, learning and assessment are accurate in identifying how well tutors are supporting students to learn. Most observation feedback focuses well on learning and the progress students make; however, a small minority still focus too much on what the tutor does rather than the impact this has on helping students to learn. Subject specialists mentor their tutors well and support them, where observations have identified areas for improvement. In the very rare cases where a tutor is unable to improve, managers ensure that they do not teach any further classes.
- Subject specialists and more senior managers use data well to monitor and improve the provision. Advanced plans are also in place to introduce a much more suitable management information system to support further improvements in data quality, accessibility and usage.
- Through strong partnerships with local and sector bodies, at a county-wide level, managers have ensured that the curriculum meets the needs of communities well. For example, working in close partnership with Albion in the Community, courses are provided which train many students and help them to find employment as football ground stewards. Subject specialists are also making good progress in improving the provision by developing further their links with the borough councils, particularly those that include the least well-off communities.

The governance of the provider

- The governance arrangements are much improved and are now strong. WSCC adult and community learning leaders manage closely the performance of Aspire through careful monitoring of a good range of performance indicators. At frequent contract monitoring

meetings, and during attendance at Aspire board meetings, they challenge performance and provide support appropriately.

- WSCC managers carry out frequent quality assurance checks and use appropriately qualified, external consultants to advise them on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Managers have taken successful action to address all the areas for improvements in safeguarding identified at the previous inspection.
- Working closely together, WSCC and Aspire managers have reduced the number of learning venues since the previous inspection and taken steps to ensure all those that remain in use provide safe learning environments. Managers carry out appropriate checks on tutors during their recruitment. Managers and staff are appropriately trained in all aspects of safeguarding and their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. Learners understand the dangers of extremism and radicalisation and know how to stay safe online.
- Aspire managers maintain detailed records of any complaints or safeguarding concerns, including all action taken. Where required, managers liaise with the WSCC adult safeguarding team and keep adult and community learning managers well informed about the actions taken.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- There are approximately 4,000 adult learning students on a range of part-time courses organised and delivered from one of six main sites across the county and in over 75 community-based venues including schools and family centres. Approximately 14% of students are on accredited courses and the remaining 86% follow non-externally accredited family learning and community learning programmes.
- Skilled, experienced and enthusiastic tutors use their teaching expertise and subject knowledge well to inspire students. Students benefit from increased social interactions, enjoy developing new skills and taking on new challenges. For example, in an exercise class for the over 50s, students improved their fitness and overall well-being.
- Tutors know their students well and plan interesting and purposeful lessons which support and challenge them to work hard. In functional mathematics classes, for example, students work on personalised online programmes which ensures that all make good progress in developing missing mathematical skills.
- In the large majority of lessons, students make good progress. For example, students who had very limited musical experience at the beginning of the course have made such good progress in playing the saxophone that they now perform regularly at local community events. However, on a small minority of courses, tutors do not set sufficiently challenging work to enable all students to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Staff have high expectations of their students, who understand they should continue their studies outside of lessons if they are to make good progress. Students become more independent and confident in their ability to learn. Tutors routinely set homework in lessons and the majority of students complete it on a regular basis.
- Tutors support students well. They ensure that materials are adapted to enable all

students to participate fully in lessons, which also helps them to become more independent. In one class, the tutor ensures that all worksheets are available in Braille, which enables the visually impaired student to participate fully. In another, the tutor adapts material for one student by providing worksheets on coloured paper to enable them to read and write more easily. Volunteer tutors and carers support students well although, at times, they are not always sufficiently well directed by the tutor.

- Tutors use a wide range of resources to enhance and extend students' learning. In a Spanish lesson, for example, the tutor used interactive technologies very effectively to reinforce learning in the lesson. These resources are also available on the internet so students can practise new vocabulary and improve their pronunciation at home.
- Tutors promote British values well, particularly those of tolerance and understanding of people of different backgrounds. Students from a wide range of backgrounds, abilities and cultures work very well together and demonstrate mutual respect for each other. For example, in a class for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities taking place on Burns' Night, students increased their understanding of Scottish culture and traditional foods.
- Students find the comments made by their tutors on their work very useful in helping them understand what they need to do in order to improve. During classes, they find tutor explanations very helpful. However, in a small minority of classes, tutors do not evaluate lessons well enough and focus too much on whether students have completed tasks rather than checking if skills and knowledge are developed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students develop good skills and knowledge, and improve their confidence and self-esteem. Many students improve their employment prospects through gaining a good range of vocational skills and qualifications that better prepares them for productive participation in modern Britain.
- Students enjoy their learning and are more independent and self-assured as a result of their studies. They take pride in their work and value the opportunities the small class sizes and individual tutor attention afford them.
- Tutors help students develop their study skills well through encouraging independent research, wider reading and skills practice. Students' attitudes to learning are highly positive. They follow tutors' instructions closely in lessons and complete tasks well. As a result, lessons progress without interruption and most students work hard, producing high-quality work.
- Managers and tutors have improved overall attendance and most students attend regularly; this helps them to make good progress. However, a minority arrive late for a small number of lessons, which disrupts the learning for those who make every effort to arrive on time. In several subject areas, notably English and mathematics, further improvement is needed as not all students are ready to sit examinations due to their erratic attendance.
- Students feel safe and know how to stay safe. Their tutors reinforce good and safe working practices during classes and take students' welfare seriously.
- Tutors help students to develop their English skills well within classes. Tutors use speaking and listening activities to improve students' verbal communication and reinforce good grammar and spelling to enhance written work.

- The development of students' mathematical skills has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Tutors give helpful individual support to those with very low ability and confidence and provide access to online learning materials to help with adding and subtracting, multiplication and division. Students now better recognise the importance of mathematics within employment and everyday activities, for example in managing money or calculating discounts.
- Tutors provide students with good information, advice and guidance at the start of and during their courses. Students, many of whom start their studies with low expectations and who have been away from education for a long time, gain the enthusiasm to study further. They develop good personal and social skills which give them the confidence to progress. However, the guidance tutors provide to students at the end of their courses requires improvement. While tutors are very supportive, and provide good advice on further Aspire courses, too few students receive independent advice to increase their understanding of their future learning or employment options.
- Tutors help students gain a very good appreciation of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and this is further enhanced through poster campaigns in corridors and classrooms. Tutors have received training in the 'Prevent' duty, and introduce these topics and British values frequently and very successfully within classes. A particular strength is tutors' ability to embed learning about these values within the subject being studied, and make it relevant to students' level of ability. For example, students with significant learning difficulties win 'Aspire citizen awards' through developing a good awareness of these values within the context of their residential settings.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The large majority of students achieve their learning goals and make good progress relative to their starting points. Almost all students in information technologies, sport and leisure, languages and arts achieve. Many, who have had poor academic achievement at school or significant barriers to learning, make good progress which is beyond their own expectations.
- The proportion of students achieving A* to C in English and mathematics and those achieving their English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) qualification, although on an upward trend, requires further improvement. Managers are fully aware of this and have increased the number of revision sessions and are working hard to improve attendance to enable students to reach their full potential.
- The work undertaken by managers to narrow achievement gaps by gender, ethnic background and circumstances is generally good. They have successfully improved the previous low retention rates for students from black and minority ethnic groups. There is no significant variation in the achievement rates of students by age or gender, or for those who declared a learning difficulty and/or disability.
- Students acquire new knowledge and skills rapidly. Students on modern language programmes develop confident conversational and reading skills. Students on ESOL courses develop their spoken English skills well. They also experience other cultures than just their local communities. In arts and crafts, students are successfully encouraged to develop new techniques to produce work of commercial standard or to take part in public exhibitions. In health and well-being, tutors support and challenge students to develop

their levels of fitness and improve their diet.

- Students who have disabilities and those with learning difficulties have consistently high achievement similar to that of their peers. Support arrangements are good and as a result students with disabilities gain good skills and confidence, which helps them to become more independent in their everyday lives.
- Tutors help students prepare for their return to education, training or employment. Many students start their course as beginners and progress to more advanced levels. The vast majority make good progress and become more accomplished, knowledgeable and skilful.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50208
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	6,530
Principal/CEO	Deborah Myers
Telephone number	033022 29432
Website	www.aspiresussex.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	4	2009	2	463	0	30	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	Nil							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	Nil							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Aspire Sussex Limited							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the senior manager education and skills, 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; 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

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Margaret Garai	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Clary	Ofsted Inspector
Vanessa Cass	Ofsted Inspector

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