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22 March 2017

Mr Nicholas Child
Operations Manager
Learn Devon
The Kennaway Centre, 10–12 Victoria Street
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Dear Mr Child

Short inspection of Devon County Council Adult and Community Learning (Learn Devon)

Following the short inspection on 28 February and 1 March 2017, 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 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

You, council leaders and your staff have ensured that Learn Devon has a clear focus on improving the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Devon. Inspectors found that teachers deliver courses that improve people's literacy and mathematical skills, improve their chances of progressing into employment and contribute to improvements in health and well-being.

Leaders have a clear strategic plan which contains ambitious targets for improving the lives of learners and are making good progress on implementing this plan.

Managers have carefully reviewed the curriculum to focus it clearly on Learn Devon's strategic priorities. They have ended their 16 to 19 study programmes and are reducing leisure courses to enable funding to be made available for courses for the target groups of learners. Managers evaluate new initiatives well and take bold steps to find ways of using education and training to improve people's lives. For example, a project to evaluate the impact of education on people's mental health has demonstrated positive outcomes for the participants.

Managers have reduced the number of subcontractors who deliver courses on behalf of Learn Devon by removing those that did not ensure enough learners achieved their qualification. All courses that are delivered by subcontractors contribute to Learn Devon's strategic aims.

Staff work well with other departments in the council and other agencies that are working with disadvantaged groups, such as the probation service, children's centres and charities for the homeless. These links ensure that many people in the target groups for Learn Devon know about and attend courses.

Safeguarding is effective.

Managers carry out appropriate checks on the suitability of staff when they are appointed. Staff are trained effectively, and with the appropriate regularity, on their responsibilities for safeguarding learners. Senior managers who are responsible for safeguarding use their good links with external agencies to support learners when safeguarding concerns are raised. Managers work particularly well with other agencies when supporting vulnerable learners, such as those who do not have permanent housing.

Learners told inspectors that they feel safe and that staff support them well when they have concerns about their safety.

Leaders have implemented their responsibilities for protecting learners from radicalisation and extremism well. Teachers ensure that learners discuss and debate matters of democracy, tolerance and mutual respect in their lessons and are increasingly making discussions about how learners can keep themselves safe from radicalisation and extremism relevant to the risks that exist in Devon.

Inspection findings

- Learners in 2016/17 are making good progress and the proportion who achieve their qualifications is higher than at the same point in 2015/16. Learners on community learning programmes make good progress in learning new skills and knowledge. Teachers discuss with learners their aspirations, prior knowledge and skills in order to agree what each should achieve by the end of their course. Teachers skilfully plan their lessons to ensure that a very high proportion of learners successfully achieve their targets. Many learners overcome significant barriers to learning and develop skills that increase their chances of gaining employment as a result of their course and the support from their teacher.
- Leaders and managers have effectively identified the courses on which too few learners were achieving their qualification and stopped recruiting learners to these courses. For example, courses for young people who were not attending school and courses for learners with specific medical issues who were unable to attend any lessons have been discontinued.
- Senior leaders are making very good progress towards an ambitious target of recruiting 75% of their learners from priority groups. They have reviewed the processes that underpin their work, including employment contracts, course fees, staff development and course locations, to ensure that every aspect of the organisation supports their strategic aims. For example, managers have introduced a bursary for disadvantaged people who would benefit from one of the arts courses that would normally be too expensive for the learners.

- The work of subcontractors is closely monitored and the courses subcontractors provide are closely aligned to the aims of Learn Devon. For example, one subcontractor provides training for learners with hearing impairments and for young learners who have gained few qualifications at school who want to become hairdressers. Learners gain experience in hair salons and many progress on to apprenticeships and employment.
- Teachers use information about learners' prior achievement and personal barriers to learning well to plan courses that ensure learners develop new skills and knowledge. Many learners told inspectors about the confidence they have gained as a result of their course. For example, learners have developed the confidence to travel by bus to Exeter as a result of learning how to read a bus timetable and the confidence to search for jobs as a result of learning how to complete an application form online. Managers carefully monitor the quality of the support that teachers provide to learners through frequent meetings with teachers and feedback from learners.
- Managers provide good opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, to take part in professional development and to contribute to improvements in the service. For example, two teachers with different skills in assessing learners have watched each other teach and shared their practice in order to learn from each other.
- Managers do not evaluate sufficiently the teaching skills that their teachers use in lessons. They carry out too little analysis of the quality of teaching in their evaluation of provision and many appraisals do not evaluate, review and set improvement targets for teachers to develop further the skills needed to improve their learners' progress.
- Information, advice and guidance are effective and timely and ensure that learners are on a course that helps them develop new skills and knowledge. Staff are highly effective at responding to requests for courses that comply with Learn Devon's strategic aims. For example, training is provided for people who are applying for work in a new shop in order to improve their chances of being offered a job.
- Staff work closely with other agencies and council departments to identify learners whose lives would be improved by attending a course. For example, they have collaborated with community groups that work with older people to provide courses to improve health and reduce isolation.
- Short, introductory courses are used well to provide a first step into further education. For example, a short course for parents on enjoying local nature walks with their children was used well to help some parents progress on to courses to improve their English and mathematics.
- Learn Devon has increased considerably the number of learners on English and mathematics courses. Teachers in these subjects use a wide range of techniques and resources so that learners develop good skills in English and mathematics. Learners learn how to write clearly and improve their punctuation and spelling. They develop better comprehension and understand the meaning of terms used to describe the different purposes of writing. Teachers are skilled at developing learners' creativity with language, and several learners reported improvements to their well-being as a result.

- Most learners on English and mathematics courses make good progress and develop a range of skills that improve their lives. Learners who are studying or planning to get a new job reported how the English courses have developed their writing skills. Several employed learners, who had previously been unable to complete forms or record their work, explained how they can now fill in the forms their employers require.
- A higher proportion of learners are now achieving functional skills qualifications in mathematics and English than in previous years, but still too many do not. Senior managers have provided good support for teachers who are teaching new courses in GCSE mathematics and English, including training and time to collaborate on planning. Teachers assess learners' progress on completing assignments and tests on these courses well but senior managers do not monitor closely enough whether learners are achieving the grades of which they are capable.
- Some managers and teachers are not promoting English and mathematics in their courses well enough because the communication and implementation of Learn Devon's strategic priority for English and mathematics are not coordinated across the organisation sufficiently. Managers have recently developed a draft curriculum plan for English and mathematics and guidance for tutors on embedding English and mathematics in subject areas. However, it is too early to see the impact on learners' English and mathematics skills. Managers have not reviewed the quality of English and mathematics sufficiently when evaluating the quality of provision or identified in their improvement plan how the subjects can be improved further.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers monitor closely the progress learners on GCSE courses are making and ensure that actions taken by teachers to support them to achieve their potential are effective
- managers evaluate and develop their teachers' teaching skills in order to improve further their learners' progress
- managers strengthen the implementation of the strategic priority for English and mathematics by systematically evaluating the quality of the teaching, learning, assessment and learners' progress in these subjects; setting and monitoring clear improvement targets; and supporting teachers to improve learners' English and mathematics in all subjects.

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

Steven Tucker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by you as nominee. We met you and your senior leaders, teachers and other members of staff. We visited lessons to collect information about learners' progress and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. We spoke to learners during lessons and in a meeting that you arranged. We reviewed key documents, including those in which Learn Devon's leaders evaluate the quality of provision and standards achieved, the provider's evidence of safeguarding and reports on learners' satisfaction with their courses.