

Paragon Education and Skills Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

16–19 May 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Apprenticeships Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	
Outcomes for learners	Good	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Almost all apprentices who successfully complete their apprenticeships sustain employment and a significant minority gain additional responsibility or early promotion.
- The majority of apprentices benefit from good teaching and assessment from well-qualified and experienced tutors, who enthuse and motivate apprentices to make good progress.
- Apprentices in most areas develop high levels of skills from well-designed and effectively implemented programmes that ensure that apprentices are able to contribute well employers' businesses.
- Apprentices' behaviour and attendance throughout their programmes are exemplary and they work effectively with managers and colleagues at work, and with their tutors.
- Apprentices benefit from highly effective support from tutors and employers that helps them maintain good progress and ensures that the large majority achieve their apprenticeship within the planned timescale.
- Directors and managers are very ambitious and successful in pursuing high standards throughout the organisation, leading to improvements in staff performance.
- Very strong strategic leadership provides high levels of support and challenge to managers and staff, resulting in significant improvements in apprenticeships since the previous inspection.
- The teaching, learning and assessment of engineering apprentices require improvement to ensure that engineering apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Paragon Education and Skills Limited (Paragon) is an independent learning provider with a head office and training centre in Bournemouth and an additional training centre in Fareham. It offers apprenticeships across England.
- Currently, 4,720 apprentices are undertaking apprenticeship programmes at intermediate, advanced and higher levels in health and social care, early years, hairdressing, business management and administration. It also has a small amount of provision in motor vehicle and engineering. Nearly two thirds of the provision is in health and social care and early years.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in engineering by:
 - effectively planning lessons to meet the individual needs of apprentices
 - ensuring that the reviews of apprentices' progress include all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework
 - ensuring better coordination of training between the workplace and the training centre.
- Ensure apprentices' English skills are developed beyond the minimum level needed for their qualifications and are practised and developed further within the workplace.
- Improve the quality of written feedback to apprentices so that they have a record of, and understand, the key points for improvement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Directors and senior managers are very ambitious and have been successful in pursuing high standards throughout the organisation since the previous inspection. They communicate a clear vision and aspirational values effectively and motivate staff and apprentices to achieve good results. Apprentices, as a result, are keen to achieve and succeed in meeting their goals in the vast majority of cases.
 - Leaders and managers have made significant improvements to apprentices' programmes since the previous inspection. Through skilfully planning actions for improvement, introducing experienced and expert staff, and applying improved training methods, they ensure that the training leads to more apprentices achieving high standards. The exception to this improvement in teaching and learning is within engineering, where weaknesses identified at the previous inspection persist.
 - Directors and senior managers collaborate effectively with employers to plan and manage the curriculum well and to provide apprenticeship programmes that meet local and national employment and training needs. Managers have developed close working relationships with employers to ensure that apprenticeship programmes contribute well to their businesses, as well as benefiting individual employees. Tutors ensure that employers contribute effectively when reviewing their apprentices' progress.
 - Employers value highly the training that Paragon's staff have provided to ensure that they are well prepared for the introduction of the new, standards-based apprenticeships and the new levy funding arrangements.
 - Managers work closely with staff by setting priorities and clear actions. Managers now use improved data and reports to make informed decisions about the quality of provision. Managers ensure that staff monitor individual apprentices' progress more thoroughly and take prompt and effective actions to support apprentices. As a result, the large majority of apprentices are now successfully completing their apprenticeship within agreed timescales.
 - Leaders and managers apply very good quality assurance arrangements, supported by thorough procedures that they monitor well. Managers have improved teaching and learning considerably. They provide clear guidance and training for tutors to ensure that their visits to apprentices place a greater emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning within the workplace. Leaders and managers identify and prioritise areas for further improvement well and quality reviews are self-critical and accurate. However, the current self-assessment report and related quality improvement plan do not identify the weaknesses within engineering.
-
- Arrangements for performance management of staff are rigorous. Quality improvement

coaches regularly observe teaching, learning and assessment and provide developmental feedback that helps tutors improve the learning experience for apprentices. Staff participate well in training and development activities to support improvement. Robust performance management has resulted in underperforming staff leaving and high staff turnover, although this has reduced recently. This had a short-term impact, for example in beauty therapy where staff shortages contributed to apprentices making slow progress. Leaders' effective actions have now secured tutors who have ensured that apprentices are now on target to complete within agreed timescales.

- Leaders' strategic approach to developing apprentices' English and mathematical skills is good. This has resulted in a very high number of apprentices passing qualifications in these subjects at the first attempt. However, apprentices' English skills are not developed sufficiently beyond the minimum level needed for their qualifications.
- Leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity and diversity effectively. Staff participate in training and development, which ensures that they develop apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity. Apprentices and staff work safely and well together, showing mutual respect. Tutors promote apprentices' understanding of fundamental British values well and apprentices' behaviour demonstrates that they understand and demonstrate these values.

The governance of the provider

- Governance and oversight of the apprenticeship provision are good. Strong strategic leadership by the board of directors has introduced many well-qualified and effective managers since the last inspection. Highly suitable directors, with appropriate expertise and experience, provide high levels of support and challenge to managers and staff. This has led to significant improvements in most areas since the previous inspection.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff and apprentices display high standards of health and safety. Staff promote safe working practices well. Consequently, apprentices' understanding and application of health and safety are good.
- Leaders have put in place a comprehensive safeguarding policy for apprentices that they review and monitor to ensure that it operates effectively. They carry out appropriate staff checks and provide regular training and updates. Staff training to comply with the 'Prevent' duty has been effective, resulting in apprentices having a good awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and knowledge of how to report concerns.
- A dedicated and qualified member of staff is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the safeguarding policy and communicating with the relevant external agencies. Appropriate procedures are in place and working effectively. Staff and apprentices have a good awareness and understanding of safeguarding and apprentices know how to keep themselves safe online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Apprenticeships are well planned and managed and fully meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. The majority of apprentices make good progress, develop skills and achieve qualifications that prepare them very well for working in their chosen sector. Well-qualified tutors, workplace supervisors and coaches use their experience well to enrich learning and keep learners well motivated.
- Most tutors and workplace supervisors have high expectations of their apprentices and inspire them to be successful in their learning. Most tutors use a wide range of activities to interest and engage apprentices. They plan learning effectively in consultation with employers so that the training is well coordinated with apprentices' development at work. Tutors reinforce learning well, with continual references to industry practices and standards. In a particularly inspiring lesson in business management, the tutor used flash cards and card games to help apprentices discuss and explore the roles of leaders and managers within their own company.
- Within the teaching of engineering, which makes up a very small percentage of the provision, tutors' planning of lessons requires improvement. In these, apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable. Tutors in these sessions do not provide apprentices with sufficient challenge or information relating to the most up-to-date information and practices.
- Tutors provide good and effective support. They support apprentices with additional identified needs well from the start of their programme, resulting in these apprentices making good progress and achieving as well as their peers. Tutors know their apprentices well and adapt learning and assessment materials thoughtfully. For example, apprentices for whom English is an additional language use translation software on their mobile devices to help them understand complex vocational language and terms.
- Tutors make good use of online learning resources and assignments to support the development of apprentices' background knowledge. For example, in a particularly effective automotive lesson, the teacher deviated from his plan to allow apprentices to research safety warning symbols using their mobile devices. This created much lively discussion and debate about the symbols, acronyms and fault codes that appear on drivers' dashboard displays.
- Tutors ensure that assessment for the vast majority of apprentices is frequent and reliable. Apprentices use a wide range of evidence in their portfolios to demonstrate that they have successfully met the requirements of their qualification. Tutors review apprentices' progress carefully and most set well-focused targets for the next stages in their learning and skills development. Apprentices prepare well for review meetings by reflecting on their current progress and the feedback from assessment. Tutors are quick to spot when apprentices are falling behind and intervene promptly in most cases to bring apprentices back on track. While verbal feedback is detailed and helpful, tutors do not always ensure that apprentices record and understand the key points for improvement.

- Employers provide good training opportunities in the workplace. Apprentices benefit from working in a range of different departments or in different aspects of their respective

sectors in order to understand many aspects of the business. Employers and apprentices select the units studied in order to develop fully the skills needed by the apprentice to meet the needs of the business and the aspirations of the apprentice.

- Tutors promote equality and diversity well in most aspects of teaching and learning. Tutors in health and social care use examples of situations that may occur in the workplace to stimulate effective discussion on how apprentices treat their clients with dignity and respect. Apprentices in service sectors develop their knowledge of different client groups well and, as a result, they develop good customer care skills. For example, a barbering apprentice supported a client with dementia effectively while escorting them to and from the chair and the client's car.
- Tutors develop apprentices' skills in English, information technology and mathematics well, resulting in a high proportion passing examinations in these subjects at the first attempt. In business programmes and childcare, tutors develop apprentices' skills in English, information technology and mathematics that are highly relevant for their job roles and provide good support. Very effective coaching encourages the good development of problem-solving skills. For example, childcare apprentices use spreadsheets and formulas to calculate the frequency of nappy changes and sleep patterns. However, the English skills of apprentices are not often developed beyond the minimum level needed for their qualifications and they do not practise and develop them within the workplace. As a result, apprentices' written work contains too many spelling and grammatical errors in the later stages of their programme.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices enjoy their learning and increase in confidence at work through developing relevant occupational skills and knowledge that enable almost all to progress well in their qualifications. Apprentices' behaviour at work and in lessons is exemplary. Tutors and managers closely monitor the very few incidents that cause concern and take effective action to ensure rapid improvements. Apprentices' attendance in engineering and motor vehicle lessons is very good.
- Apprentices produce work of a high standard and develop skills quickly. Apprentices' work fulfils industry and commercial standards and enables them to contribute well to the employers' businesses. For example, early in their programme, apprentices in hair work with clients to develop their skills such as colour correction and barbering. Health and social care apprentices provide high standards of domiciliary care for clients with mental health needs, and apprentices on advanced programmes in this area develop team-leading skills quickly, enabling them to manage teams in care homes well.
- Apprentices gain good employability skills quickly and employers give many learners significant responsibility at work. Apprentices are valued highly by their employers, resulting in the vast majority being retained in secure employment after their apprenticeship.
- Apprentices in hair and beauty benefit from additional professional development provided by product suppliers. This helps them to stay up to date and provide clients with accurate information about different techniques and products available in the market.
- Applicants to apprenticeship programmes benefit from impartial advice and guidance from

independent careers advisers and an internal employer engagement team. Staff place a clear focus on ensuring that an apprenticeship is the right choice for each individual. This ensures that the skills and interests of the applicant match the vacancies available prior to interview with the employer. This closely monitored procedure has contributed to improvements in the number of apprentices retained in employment.

- Apprentices are aware of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and know how to report concerns. For example, prompted by a recent national incident, apprentices in a car hire organisation have carried out additional training on checking the personal identity of clients and how to check for potential fraud. The great majority of apprentices know how to protect themselves online and use technology safely. Apprentices pay good attention to working safely and using appropriate personal protective equipment in workshops. Marine engineering apprentices benefit from specific training for slinging and lifting, which enhances their awareness of health and safety in the workplace.
- Apprentices with personal and welfare concerns benefit from the support of a professional welfare manager who provides individual advice and guidance, monitors progress, and refers to specialist outside agencies promptly when required. Informative leaflets developed for use by tutors help raise apprentices' awareness of wider citizenship topics well, but not all tutors are confident in effectively managing discussions around potentially sensitive topics such as mental health.
- Apprentices work well with managers, colleagues and their tutor, enabling them to progress well at work and in training sessions. Almost all apprentices understand how they can be active members of their community, and tutors promote respect and civil rights effectively. For example, in childcare, an apprentice designed a well-planned activity for children to help them understand the importance of sharing, and of respecting each other.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Apprenticeship qualification outcomes have improved considerably since the previous inspection and are now good. Current learners are making good progress. The in-year achievement rates show considerable improvement and a higher proportion in 2016/17 have achieved than in previous years.
- Apprentices now make much faster progress than in previous years. The vast majority of apprentices now successfully complete their courses within agreed timescales. The number of learners that go past their planned end date is now very low.
- Apprentices become highly skilled business support staff, health care and early years workers, supervisors, mechanics and engineers. They make considerable progress from their starting points and develop their skills quickly. Apprentices produce work of a good standard and their work is highly valued by their employers.
- There are no significant gaps between the performance of different groups of apprentices over time. The few apprentices identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from good support and achieve their apprenticeship within planned timescales. Apprentices who have previously been children looked after do as well as other apprentices.

- Apprentices make good progress in developing their skills in mathematics, English and information technology and do well in examinations in these subjects. However, the English skills of apprentices are not often developed beyond the minimum level needed to pass their examinations. As a result, learners' written work contains too many spelling and grammatical errors.
- The vast majority of apprentices secure sustainable employment at the end of their course, about a third progress from intermediate to advanced programmes and a reasonable number gained promotion as result of the apprenticeship.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53792
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	7,504
Principal/CEO	Mark Botha
Telephone number	0800 7832545
Website	www.paragonskills.co.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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	20	0	14	2	0	19	0	5
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	320	1,701	175	2,135	0	389		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	N/A							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief operating 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.

Inspection team

Roger Pilgrim, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Lyn Bourne	Ofsted Inspector
John Evans	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Lacey	Ofsted Inspector
Gavin Murray	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. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email 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.

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.

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.

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/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at 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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017