

# Essex County Council

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 10033852

**Name of lead inspector:** Matt Vaughan SHMI

**Inspection date(s):** 14 March 2017

**Type of provider:** Local authority

**Address:** Spinks Lane  
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## **Monitoring visit: main findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit following publication of the inspection report on 6 February 2017, which found the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, leadership and management, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and adult learning programmes. The provider's quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners and apprenticeships provision were judged as requiring improvement.

### **Themes**

#### **What actions have been taken to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements for all learners and apprentices are effective?**

Leaders have rectified nearly all the weaknesses identified at the recent inspection. They have revised safeguarding processes and procedures to help ensure that all learners and apprentices are safe. The provider's safeguarding policy has been revised to ensure that accountabilities and actions keep safe all groups of learners and apprentices. Leaders now check that there are appropriate risk assessments in place to monitor the safety of all vulnerable groups of learners and apprentices. All staff working with learners and apprentices have undergone Disclosure and Barring Service safeguarding clearance to ensure that they are safe to work with such groups. A county councillor has now joined the safeguarding monitoring group to represent elected members; this group meets every other month to plan, monitor and review safeguarding arrangements, but it is too early to assess its impact. Leaders have planned a series of further training to upskill staff on safeguarding, including a focus on mental health. Too few tutors ensure that their learners have a good understanding of British values and the dangers of extremism. Leaders are yet to plan further training for tutors to ensure that they rectify this concern.

#### **Priorities for improvement**

- Build on the strong foundations now in place to monitor safeguarding arrangements effectively and ensure that all learners and apprentices are safe.
- Ensure that staff training on British values and the dangers of extremism enables tutors to promote effectively these issues so that learners and apprentices have a good understanding of them.

#### **What actions have been taken to rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?**

Insufficient progress has been made to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Although tutors ensure that good-quality information on learners' starting points is secured, too many tutors do not use this information well enough to plan teaching, learning and assessment that motivate and challenge their learners to make good progress, particularly in their theory work.

A small minority of tutors plan effectively to meet the needs and abilities of their learners and, as a consequence, these learners make good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills development. Tutors enable most learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress because they are very attentive to their needs and ambitions and challenge them to work hard and progress.

Tutors' use of feedback to enable learners to improve their work is often too limited and over-reliant on generalisations such as 'well done'. As a result, too many learners do not know how to improve their work sufficiently, produce high standards of written work and excel. Where tutors provide specific and frequent feedback, learners make better progress in their theoretical and practical work.

Not enough tutors challenge their learners in lessons to make the progress of which they are capable. Too many tutors dominate lessons to the detriment of the learning process; they seldom use questioning techniques to check effectively on learners' understanding and rarely extend the learning to enable the most able to accelerate their progress.

Too much teaching, learning and assessment of accredited qualifications do not promote links to relevant industry, or pathways to higher levels of learning and employment. The majority of learners develop new practical skills, but few are aware of relevant professional occupational standards. Too many tutors of non-accredited courses fail to utilise and promote sufficiently the recording and recognition of progress and achievement (RARPA). Consequently, learners' progress and achievements are not monitored and recorded sufficiently and too many learners are not aware of their progress. Too few tutors use individual learning plans and target-setting rigorously; they do not plan and set challenging targets that motivate learners to excel. Learners' attendance at lessons during the inspection was low.

Not enough tutors promote the value of English and mathematics in the vocational subjects. As a result, too many learners do not improve their English and mathematical skills, or appreciate the importance of these essential subjects within their career aspirations and goals.

### **Priorities for improvement**

Urgently train tutors to:

- plan learning that motivates and challenges learners and apprentices to make good progress
- provide specific feedback that inspires learners and apprentices to improve their work to high standards
- improve their skills in questioning techniques in order to check and extend learners' and apprentices' learning
- promote links to relevant industry or pathways to higher levels of learning

- employ the RARPA process effectively; ensure target-setting is rigorous and that learners' progress is monitored and recorded thoroughly and that all learners are aware fully of their progress
- promote the value of English and mathematics in their vocational subjects
- ensure that all learners attend their lessons regularly.

**What actions have been taken to ensure that the observation of tutors' practice is fit for purpose and secures improvements in teaching, learning and assessment?**

Leaders have revised their policy on the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, although it is too early to assess its impact. This policy states that moderation by the curriculum and quality improvement group (CQIG) of observations, judgements and recordings is limited to one a year; this is insufficient to secure the required improvements in tutors' practice. On joint observation of lessons during the recent inspection, the provider's observers differed from inspectors on the majority of judgements and did not focus accurately on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on the progress made by learners or their outcomes. However, scrutiny of observations conducted by members of the provider's observation team since the inspection demonstrates that the majority of recordings focus more sharply on how tutors' practice impacts on the progress made by learners. A minority of observations are not followed up by specific or sufficient actions to rectify identified weaknesses within an agreed timescale. Managers have further improved their guidance to tutors on what constitutes outstanding teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders have increased the volume of training opportunities that focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment and there is a good level of take-up by staff.

**Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that when conducting observations, all members of the observation team focus accurately on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on the progress made by learners.
- Ensure that observations are followed up by pertinent actions that aim specifically to rectify all identified weaknesses within an agreed timescale.

**What actions have been taken to ensure that leaders' self-assessment is robust, appropriately self-critical and drives effective action planning that secures sustainable improvement?**

Leaders have revised their self-assessment report to incorporate accurately the judgements and findings of the recent inspection; there is now a far greater focus on weaknesses and the characteristics of teaching, learning and assessment. The quality improvement plan has also been revised to incorporate the post-inspection action plan. The CQIG monitors the updates to the plan made by leaders and managers each month and reports appropriately to the senior management team (SMT). The

SMT acts as the accountable body for the self-assessment process and the progress of the quality improvement plan's actions. Leaders acknowledge that a greater depth of data on all aspects of performance is required to ensure that the quality improvement plan is robust and informs fully the self-assessment process. Plans are in place to secure the required level of data on performance. The quality improvement plan is sound and precise, and sets out coherent actions planned against most weaknesses identified in the report. This includes a good focus on improving specific aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. However, a few actions lack any monitoring update on progress made; for example, the action regarding the CQIG's monitoring of the achievement of different groups of learners and apprentices does not provide any information on the achievement of any groups. There is an insufficient focus on attendance. The plan includes robust targets for apprenticeship programmes, but none for the adult learning provision.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that all planning takes into account a detailed level of data on all aspects of performance to inform fully the self-assessment process.
- Make sure that the quality improvement plan includes regular updates of the progress made against each defined action so that leaders and county councillors can assess progress against identified weaknesses.
- Ensure that levels of attendance across the provision are taken fully into account in the quality improvement and self-assessment processes.
- Incorporate performance targets for adult learning provision into the quality improvement process to help monitor improvements and inform the self-assessment of provision.

### **What actions have been taken to ensure that leaders provide county councillors with accurate information on performance so that county councillors challenge them effectively?**

Leaders are candid in explaining the progress made thus far in enabling county councillors to be provided with meaningful data on performance from which they can challenge leaders effectively. Leaders have produced overview data at headline level, but recognise that they need to provide county councillors with greater detail on the performance of the quality of provision and outcomes for learners and apprentices. Leaders have revised the quality improvement plan to incorporate the post-inspection action plan; county councillors review progress of the plan's actions at four Adult and Community Learning Forum meetings each year. The Adult and Community Learning Forum is chaired by the cabinet member with responsibility for the service and involves three cross-party councillors, an employer, a tutor and a learner in addition to leaders. County councillors are acutely aware of the findings and judgements of the recent inspection and are intent on improving the quality of provision swiftly. Further learning walks to observe teaching, learning and assessment to involve county councillors, so as to enhance their challenge of leaders, were yet to be planned after the forthcoming local government elections.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Urgently provide county councillors with pertinent data and information on all aspects of key performance in order for them to support and challenge leaders on the quality of provision and outcomes for learners and apprentices.

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