

# Essex County Council

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 10033940

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

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**Type of provider:** Local authority

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

### Context and focus of visit

This is the second 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. The focus of this second visit, around three months after the first, was to judge against the themes previously agreed the progress that leaders, county councillors and managers have made to improve the provision.

### Themes

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

Leaders have strengthened all weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, and safeguarding arrangements now ensure that all learners and apprentices are safe. A broad range of further safeguarding training for staff has taken place since the last re-inspection monitoring visit. Additional accountable safeguarding leads have been recruited and are currently receiving appropriate training. All staff have conducted training on safeguarding and, separately, on the 'Prevent' agenda. As a result, the majority of tutors now ensure that their learners have a good understanding of British values and the dangers of extremism; a significant improvement since the previous monitoring visit. Leaders have plans in place to ensure that all staff take up additional safeguarding training; thus far, the majority of staff have undertaken training on the promotion of online safety and a minority on supporting learners with mental health concerns. Leaders commissioned a review of their safeguarding arrangements by an external consultancy company and are now implementing the recommendations from this audit in order to ensure that their safeguarding arrangements exceed statutory expectations.

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

Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders and managers have continued to implement a series of actions to strengthen teaching, learning and assessment. These include staff professional development events on recording and monitoring learners' progress and achievement, target-setting and effecting greater challenge in teaching. Just over a third of all tutors attended training events in the spring term. A specific training initiative entitled 'moving to outstanding teaching, learning and assessment' targeted successfully the majority of tutors who teach for a very few hours each week. Leaders have clear plans in place to ensure that all tutors

attend further training events in the remainder of the summer term, including a focus on how vocational tutors can improve learners' English and mathematics skills. A total of eight mentors are currently being trained to provide specific support and challenge to teachers whose practice is judged to be not good. Leaders have recently improved performance monitoring processes to tackle concerns regarding continued underperformance. As a result, a few teachers whose practice continued to be poor despite much coaching support have left the service.

Leaders document in their quality improvement plan that the impact of the training programme is yet to have a significant effect on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The proportion of teaching, learning and assessment that is effective has increased since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit. However, too much is weak and results in too many learners and apprentices not making the progress of which they are capable. Not enough tutors plan and execute learning that challenges their learners and apprentices to acquire the understanding, knowledge and skills required to accelerate their progress. Not enough tutors provide tasks and set work that meets the differing needs and abilities of their learners and apprentices; few of the most able are challenged to excel.

Too many weaknesses identified at the previous re-inspection monitoring visit remain. In too many lessons, particularly on accredited courses, tutors continue to dominate their lessons to the detriment of the learning process. Too few tutors deploy questioning techniques to check learners' and apprentices' understanding or extend their mastery and application of theory. Too many tutors still do not provide incisive feedback that enables learners and apprentices to produce high standards of written work. Too many tutors of non-accredited courses still fail to record and monitor effectively the progress their learners make or set targets that challenge them to make swift progress. Consequently, too many learners are not sufficiently clear about the progress they have made and what they need to do to improve.

Too much teaching, learning and assessment on accredited adult learning courses continues to fail to ensure that learners understand relevant job sectors, industries and pathways to employment and higher levels of learning. Not enough teaching on apprenticeships programmes challenges apprentices to grasp underpinning theory and understand its relevance to the practical skills required in the workplace. Too many tutors do not work productively with learning support staff and volunteers; as a consequence, their roles are often confused and this impedes learners from making good progress.

As identified at the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, not enough vocational tutors enable learners and apprentices to improve their mathematics skills and problem solve proficiently. Too many learners and apprentices do not understand the value of these skills within their lives, places of work and their contribution to achieving career aspirations.

A minority of tutors, particularly of English GCSE and functional courses, use pertinent assessment information to effectively inform their teaching and assessment and ensure that learners and apprentices make good gains in learning. These tutors use incisive questioning techniques and stimulating assessment activities to gauge learners' and apprentices' comprehension and provide extension tasks that enable them to accelerate their progress. These tutors motivate learners and apprentices to routinely self-assess their progress. As a result, learners and apprentices improve their self-confidence and raise their aspirations to work hard and excel.

On English courses, tutors adeptly challenge learners to hone their reading and writing skills by providing them with helpful techniques that they apply successfully when working on challenging tasks and activities. As a result, the large majority of learners accelerate their English skills and produce good standards of work.

**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?** **Insufficient progress**

Despite leaders' actions to improve the observation process, as detailed in the previous re-inspection monitoring visit report, too many observations are not evaluative or focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on learners' experiences and outcomes. The large majority of observers record descriptive text that focuses overwhelmingly on tutors' and assessors' actions at the expense of assessing incisively whether learners and apprentices are making progress and at what rate. Commentary is often overgenerous and made up of contradictory judgements that undermine the legitimacy of the process. Too many action plans following observations lack rigour. The majority of action planning places too much emphasis on ensuring that staff improve paperwork rather than focusing on the actions needed to improve practice and ensure that learners and apprentices make good progress. Observers put insufficient emphasis on the standards of learners' and apprentices' work. Most observers do not take into account levels of attendance. A minority of actions to rectify weaknesses are not sufficiently time bound and fail to address swiftly the negative effect of poor practice on learners' and apprentices' progress. A few observations are fit for purpose and focus appropriately on the progress that learners and apprentices make and why. On joint observation of lessons during the inspection, the majority of the provider's judgements were accurate.

Leaders are aware fully that their understanding of the quality of teachers' and assessors' practice is flawed because too many observation judgements are overly-optimistic and fail to focus on the progress that learners and apprentices make. Leaders have recently strengthened the observation moderation process but it is yet to help secure the required urgent improvements.

**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?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders have continued to strengthen their self-assessment and action planning since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit report. The curriculum and quality improvement group monitors effectively the impact of the majority of actions contained in the service's quality improvement plan (QIP) and reports regularly to the senior management team. Team members understand accurately the majority of current strengths and weaknesses of the service. The QIP is updated regularly and features much detailed monitoring and action planning to rectify the majority of the weaknesses identified at inspection. An accompanying 'ACL management reporting pack' has recently been established that presents progress clearly against a broad range of key performance indicators and aids leaders' and managers' action planning. Leaders pay good attention to improving achievement, retention and attendance of learners and apprentices at overall and subject level. The focus on recording and analysing learners' and apprentices' destinations after their learning has ended is particularly strong.

However, leaders' capacity to tackle all weaknesses and secure sustainable improvement is impeded because they do not monitor and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and assessment. Their QIP and 'ACL management reporting pack' lack any focus on such characteristics. The flaws in the observation process undermine leaders' understanding of what proportion of practice is of high quality. Leaders do not assess the impact of teacher and assessor training on raising the quality of their practice. This lack of analysis limits leaders' capacity to ensure that future staff professional development opportunities rectify weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. A few actions and progress updates in the QIP are too ambiguous to secure improvement.

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

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders have improved the quality of performance information they provide to county councillors. The 'ACL management reporting pack' presents clearly the progress made against a broad range of performance indicators. A good level of relevant data is provided regarding the achievement, retention, attendance and destinations of learners and apprentices at overall and subject level. Comprehensive financial data is also provided to equip councillors with a detailed insight into the financial health of each aspect of the service. However, the challenge that councillors can effect is impeded because the information that leaders provide lacks focus on the strengths and weaknesses of teachers' and assessors' practice or any evaluation of the impact of staff training on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

County councillors are acutely aware of the need to strengthen the service and now demonstrate a tenacity to propel the service forward and urgently secure improvements. For example, the cabinet member with responsibility for the service, who chairs the adult and community learning forum, has requested that leaders also provide a greater focus on the progress that learners make in-year, particularly the progress they make against their starting points.

The councillor membership of the adult and community learning forum is now being complemented with additional county councillors with new responsibilities to improve the service. For example, a new post of lead councillor for teaching, learning and assessment has recently been established to provide challenge to leaders on the quality of teachers' and assessors' practice.

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