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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ms Chantal Lommel
Head of Service
Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8DF

Dear Ms Lommel

Short inspection of Hertfordshire County Council

Following the short inspection on 21 and 22 June 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 June 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

The advisory board, senior leaders and managers have continued to ensure good quality education and training for the courses the council delivers itself and for subcontracted provision. Since the previous inspection, arrangements for a well-skilled and experienced advisory board are in place. As a result, the board provides high levels of scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders and managers. For example, the recent review of the self-assessment report (SAR) resulted in actions to strengthen your collection and use of data on learners' progression and destinations, in collaboration with similar providers, and your setting of regional targets.

Along with the advisory board, you have set a clear strategic direction using a broad range of information from external sources, such as the local enterprise partnership. You and your team are highly responsive to the skill requirements of the local community and to your local economic priorities. Consequently, the courses and programmes you offer enable learners who are furthest away from the labour market, and those at risk from marginalisation in society, to gain skills, confidence and qualifications to enhance their chances of gaining employment. This results in a high proportion of learners progressing to further education at a higher level or employment.

Senior leaders and managers ensure that there are robust arrangements in place for managing your subcontractors. You and your management team work effectively with external partners, local community centres and charitable organisations, and

with the subcontracted managers within these organisations, to successfully develop courses and programmes which match your partners' and employers' skills gaps.

The advisory board and the senior management team recognise they need to further improve the recruitment process to ensure that more male learners can access programmes and close the recruitment gap between male and female learners. While you and your management team have taken action in this regard and developed more suitable venues to attract male learners, it is too early to comment on the success of these approaches.

Leaders have established rigorous processes to ensure that subcontracted provision meets high standards. You recognise that at present teaching, learning and assessment require improvement within a minority of community and family learning programmes. As a result, you and your team have put in place several actions, such as sharing good practice between teachers, and weekly staff development sessions. Your subcontractors benefit from such activities. For example, their staff join the observation team in order to better promote improvements in teaching and learning.

You have implemented the 16 to 19 study programmes very effectively. Your 16 to 19 study programmes provide tailored courses for young people who have previously not accessed education or employment and those who have complex personal challenges. You and your team identified correctly the key areas for development in your SAR. Actions to address these have been successful; achievement rates in English and mathematics functional skills and for learners' main vocational qualifications have improved.

The advisory board and senior leaders recognise the high drop-out rate of apprentices in health and social care. Health and social care apprenticeships provision makes up a very small proportion of your provision. Despite your efforts in ensuring the quality of the provision, current apprentices make slow progress. Too many apprentices did not remain in their programmes and did not achieve their qualifications. Current apprentices do not make the progress expected because their employers do not allow them sufficient time to complete their training. You and your management team have recently made the decision to halt further growth of apprenticeship provision and taken decisive action to support current apprentices.

Safeguarding is effective.

The advisory board, senior leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are robust and highly effective. Leaders and managers ensure that staff are checked comprehensively prior to recruitment. Staff ensure the safety of all learners. Learners say they feel safe and are aware of whom to contact regarding any concerns and their welfare.

Leaders and managers ensure that designated safeguarding leads are well informed of their statutory obligations and are fully trained. Designated safeguarding staff attend training updates regularly and have strong working relationships with

relevant agencies, such as local authority social services and health and community services.

The management team has high standards and expectations relating to learners' safety, and ensure that subcontractors fulfil their duties in safeguarding vulnerable adults and young people. Any concerns raised by staff are investigated comprehensively, and referrals to external and internal agencies take place in a timely manner.

Staff speak confidently about how to keep learners safe from radicalisation and extremism. Most learners have a good understanding of such threats, and teachers promote British values successfully within their lessons.

Inspection findings

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good across the vast majority of the council's own learning programmes and on study programmes. A high proportion of current learners are making good progress in achieving their qualifications.
- Staff work effectively in close partnership with charitable organisations for those with mental health difficulties and the homeless to develop new programmes that enable learners with complex barriers to develop good personal, social and work-related skills. As a result, a high proportion of learners enhance their confidence to gain further study and employment.
- Leaders and managers have put in place comprehensive procedures to ensure a high standard of teaching, learning and assessment. They effectively hold subcontracted provision to account and conduct regular and accurate observations of teachers' performance. As a result, they provide subcontracted staff and their own staff with good-quality feedback on what is working well and actions to improve. Despite this support, a small minority of subcontracted staff have yet to improve their standards of practice.
- Almost all learners following 16 to 19 study programmes make good progress in their main vocational qualifications and enhance their personal, social and work-related skills effectively. All learners have undertaken pertinent work placements.
- The advisory board, senior leaders and managers place a significant priority on improving learners' English and mathematics skills this year. The proportion of learners achieving level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics functional skills was low in the previous year. However, leaders' in-year data indicates an exponential increase in the proportion of learners achieving at entry and level 2 English and mathematics functional skills.
- On courses leading to qualifications in family and community learning, most teachers make good use of the information they gain on learners' starting points and plan and execute effective learning for most learners. However, a few teachers do not challenge the most able learners sufficiently to extend their knowledge and skills.
- Almost all learners on community and family learning courses gain new skills to

enable them to progress to further study or work. For example, most teachers provide the vast majority of learners enrolled on family learning programmes with practical techniques and knowledge to enable them to understand how their children learn. The vast majority of learners apply these techniques ably, which gives them increased confidence to improve their skills further.

- The majority of teachers within the council's own provision plan lessons that enable learners to learn new skills and knowledge rapidly because of their skilful coaching and mentoring techniques. For example, teachers make use of examples that learners can relate to easily within their daily lives to enable them to understand theoretical concepts, including theories of child development.
- Most teachers promote an environment which enables learners to boost their confidence and contribute positively to meaningful discussions and debates to enable them to develop relevant work-related skills. For example, teachers expertly led a discussion that required learners to draw upon their own experiences in a 'boost your confidence' course with vulnerable female learners, and adeptly guided the discussions to ensure that most learners contributed successfully.
- The majority of adult learners enrolled on to programmes leading to a qualification and younger learners enrolled on study programmes develop the skills they need to reflect on their own progress, to enable them to improve their skills and knowledge. For example, a group of entry-level learners reflected on their grammatical use of past and present tenses and corrected their own and their peers' mistakes confidently. In a session to prepare learners for employment, learners evaluated their own performance in job interviews. However, for a majority of learners enrolled on courses with subcontractors that do not lead to qualifications, teachers do not promote such important skills and, as a result, these learners do not learn how to reflect on and evaluate their performance so they can improve their progress.
- The majority of teachers provide learners with helpful feedback to enable them to improve their skills. However, some teachers' feedback is infrequent and overly positive; they do identify errors or help learners to improve their work.
- Teachers do not place enough emphasis on high-quality writing and do not promote the importance of literacy skills to learners in their main subjects. Too often, teachers do not help to improve learners' written work and do not correct errors in their spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, learners repeat mistakes and often do not realise the importance of these skills for their future employment or further study.
- Too many teachers in subcontracted community and family learning lessons do not make good use of learners' development plans. The progress learners make is not recorded sharply enough; short-term and long-term goals are not sufficiently detailed or precise to promote more rapid progress. Where courses lead to a qualification, teachers record and monitor learners' progress rigorously and, as a result, learners have targets and goals to achieve that are matched well to their long-term aspirations.
- Too many apprentices have not remained in their programmes. Current

apprentices make the progress expected of them; however, too many employers do not allow apprentices to complete their off-the-job training time.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take swift action to make sure that those apprentices who remain on their programmes receive their off-the-job training so that they complete their apprenticeship programmes within the time allocated to them
- teachers provide high-quality feedback to make sure that learners can identify and routinely correct their errors in their written work
- they improve learners' English and mathematics skills and increase the proportion of learners achieving their functional skills level 2 qualifications
- teachers of subcontractors' provision record learners' progress effectively in their learning plans so they know what they need to do to improve for their next steps and to help them to excel in their subjects
- they put in place further action and monitoring with subcontractors to improve teaching, learning and assessment with the minority of community and family learning programmes that require improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Harpreet Nagra
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors, assisted by the head of service as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with managers, staff, subcontractors and the advisory board. They observed lessons and reviewed key documents, including those related to management, contract-monitoring, quality improvement, learners' work and achievements, and safeguarding.