

# Essex County Council

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 10034391

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**Inspection date(s):** 31 October 2017

**Type of provider:** Local authority

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

This is the third re-inspection monitoring visit following the inspection on 6–9 December 2016 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 apprenticeship provision were judged as requiring improvement. The focus of this third visit, around four months after the second, was to judge against the themes previously agreed, and assess the progress that leaders, county councillors and managers have made to improve the quality of provision.

### Themes

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

Leaders have maintained the strengths identified at the previous re-inspection monitoring visit. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and ensure that all learners and apprentices are safe. Leaders have established a regional safeguarding peer group comprising local authority community learning and skills providers to peer-assess safeguarding arrangements and share good practice. All staff have conducted safeguarding and ‘Prevent’ duty training since the inspection of December 2016. Nearly all staff have also undertaken further training on the promotion of online safety. Plans are in place to ensure that the remaining few complete this shortly. Additional training for staff on the promotion of British values is planned for November 2017. Learners are shown a video on the importance of British values by tutors during their induction. Tutors take responsibility for ensuring that their learners have a good understanding of British values and the dangers of radicalisation.

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

Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders and managers have provided further training opportunities for tutors on the promotion of English and mathematics, mental health, behaviour management, questioning techniques, the use of resources to enhance teaching, the recording of learners’ progress and target-setting. Leaders also facilitated one-day teaching, learning and assessment conferences at two locations in the county and provided a series of workshops on improving practice. However, some tutors do not attend mandatory training events, which diminishes the impact of this support.

Mentors continue to improve their skills in order to provide tailored support and challenge to tutors whose practice requires improvement. Leaders have recently appointed a newly established full-time post of learning practitioner in order to improve the quality of tutors' practice. A second full-time learning practitioner post is to be advertised imminently. Leaders continue to implement improved monitoring processes to rectify poor performance.

Far more teaching, learning and assessment is effective than previously. Where teaching is effective, tutors deploy a range of approaches that stimulate learners and challenge them to learn and accelerate their skills quickly. These tutors use questioning techniques skilfully to ensure that learners grasp new knowledge and are able to apply it proficiently. Some tutors use peer assessment effectively to consolidate new learning. Most tutors provide good verbal feedback in lessons that challenges learners to extend their understanding and skills. Some tutors provide incisive written feedback on learners' work that helps learners make good progress. Far more tutors of non-accredited courses now record and monitor effectively the progress their learners make than was the case previously.

Despite these overall improvements, some tutors still do not plan work that meets the needs of different learners. Too many tutors adopt a one-size-fits-all approach in lessons and fail to stretch the most able learners. As a result, too many of the most able learners waste valuable time as they wait for others to complete tasks. Not enough tutors challenge their learners to excel. Too many tutors provide bland written feedback that promotes mediocrity and fails to help learners know what they need to do to produce high standards of work. Some tutors either do not set targets for their learners at all or provide ambiguous targets that demand little of their learners. Not enough vocational tutors enable learners to improve their English and mathematics skills.

**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?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders and managers have ensured that most observations are evaluative and focus specifically on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on learners' experiences and outcomes. Most observers' recordings are now incisive and consider fully whether learners and apprentices are making good progress, at what rate and why. Most action plans following observations now identify key weaknesses and plan resolution within agreed, specific timescales. Managers' monitoring of such actions is mostly assiduous and ensures that tutors improve their practice.

Some observations continue to be overgenerous and a few action plans following observations lack specific information on how to improve practice. All observers continue to place insufficient emphasis on the standards of learners' and apprentices' work. Also, observers still do not take into account levels and trends of learners' and apprentices' attendance.

On joint observation of lessons during the inspection, nearly all of the observation team's evaluations aligned closely with the inspector's. Leaders' and managers' efforts to improve the observation moderation process, including more frequent moderation activity, are now helping to secure improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.

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

**Reasonable progress**

At the time of the re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders were writing their self-assessment report of the 2016/17 year. Leaders pay good attention to ensuring that the self-assessment process secures an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and assessment. The draft self-assessment report includes a specific focus on teaching and assessment that demonstrates robust self-critical analysis and candour. The service's quality improvement plan is updated regularly and features specific monitoring and action planning to rectify most of the weaknesses identified at inspection. Particular emphasis is now placed on actions to secure improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. This is aided by the recent improvements to the observation process that now secures a more robust understanding of the impact of tutors' practice on learning. However, leaders are yet to assess the impact of tutor training on raising the quality of their practice. Leaders' provisional judgements for leadership and management and personal development, behaviour and welfare are overly optimistic and do not take into account that, for too long in 2016/17, the quality of tutors' practice was poor. As a consequence, subsequent quality improvement planning fails to identify and plan actions to rectify some weaknesses in leadership and management and personal development, behaviour and welfare. This slows down the rate of 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 continued to refine the quality and quantity of performance information they provide to county councillors. The 'ACL management reporting pack' is now an established medium that is provided to county councillors at 'ACL Forum' meetings. The data provided includes an array of key information that provides county councillors with the opportunity to challenge leaders. Leaders' information on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now robust because they have improved the rigour of their observation process. Leaders' data reporting demonstrates a high degree of self-critical analysis in many aspects of performance. However, despite the request of the chair of the ACL Forum, leaders are yet to provide information on the progress that learners make during the year against set targets. Leaders do not provide any evaluation of the impact of staff training on raising the quality of tutors' practice.

Leaders provide headline data on the overall and timely achievement of apprentices, but this is not broken down by age or level. A priority of the service and the local authority is to provide high-quality apprenticeship training for young people, but leaders do not inform county councillors on the performance of such programmes. The information that leaders provide on the proportion of learners who achieve high grades at GCSE English, mathematics and science lacks clarity.

Recordings of ACL Forum meetings that have taken place since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit illustrate that county councillors do not challenge leaders sufficiently on the performance data provided. In contrast, these minutes evidence that county councillors provide very robust challenge to leaders on the findings of the re-inspection monitoring visits. County councillors remain acutely aware of the need to strengthen the service and they continue to demonstrate a keen desire to secure improvement. A total of four county councillors have specific responsibilities to improve the service, including lead councillors with accountabilities for safeguarding and teaching, learning and assessment. County councillors continue to undertake learning walks of the provision with leaders and managers across the county.

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