

St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

Local authority

Inspection dates

5–8 December 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Adult learning programmes	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

- Leaders and managers have addressed most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection successfully.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are now good.
- Leaders and managers have high expectations of staff and learners. They are clearly ambitious to provide an outstanding service for learners.
- Courses are planned effectively to meet the needs of those who are hardest to reach and furthest away from the job market.
- The vast majority of learners achieve their learning goals, and achievement of qualifications is high.
- Learners receive good support from their tutors. They enjoy learning, become more self-confident and self-assured, and make good progress.
- Learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses make good progress and improve their English speaking skills to help them in their daily lives.
- Staff have created successfully a culture of tolerance and respect. As a result, learners' behaviour is exemplary.
- Tutors carefully plan learning to meet learners' individual needs. Activities help learners to develop their personal, social and vocational knowledge and skills.
- Governors do not receive detailed reports on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and are unable to challenge leaders and managers about the quality of education and training.
- Tutors do not review consistently or amend learners' targets to recognise the progress that learners are making.
- Leaders and managers collect information on learners' destinations, but they do not analyse it to inform future curriculum planning and to evaluate the impact of the service on its strategic objectives.
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from areas of high deprivation do not achieve as highly as their peers.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Adult and Community Learning service (the service) is part of the Libraries and Leisure Services Department within St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council. When the provision was inspected previously, the service was in the Public Health and Well-being Directorate. The vast majority of courses offered are non-accredited. The majority of accredited courses are functional skills in English and mathematics at entry level and level 1. Annually, the service offers around 177 courses in 43 venues throughout the borough.
- St Helens is one of six local authorities within the Liverpool City Region. Its current population is 177,445, of whom a quarter have a registered disability. St Helens is currently ranked the 36th most deprived local authority in England. It has an unemployment rate in line with the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Analyse thoroughly the destinations of learners who leave the service, to inform future curriculum planning and to evaluate the extent to which the service is achieving its strategic objectives.
- Ensure that governors receive more detailed information on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that they can support and challenge managers to improve the quality of education and training further.
- Continue to monitor achievement rates and take appropriate action to ensure that the gaps in achievement rates between different groups of learners are eliminated and that all learners achieve at the highest possible level.
- Ensure that all tutors:
 - review consistently and amend learners' targets to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable
 - provide high-quality oral and written feedback that helps learners to improve as quickly as possible.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have a clear ambition to deliver an outstanding service that is focused on improving the skills and life chances of the most vulnerable adults in the borough. They have created a culture of high expectations for staff and learners.
- Leaders and managers have addressed successfully most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The management team has been strengthened and restructured appropriately. There are now clear lines of communication and accountability for staff and a good focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, outcomes for learners have improved and are good. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is also good.
- Leaders and managers plan courses effectively to meet the local and regional priorities identified in the area-based review of the Liverpool City Region. They have developed a clear strategy to develop courses that focus on engaging learners who are economically and socially disadvantaged. As a result, courses engage learners successfully, especially those who are furthest away from the workplace and hardest to reach, helping them to improve their personal, social and employability knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Leaders and managers have developed highly effective partnerships with local agencies and public bodies to ensure that learners from very diverse and marginalised groups are enrolled on courses. For example, the local council is supported in the resettlement of vulnerable Syrian refugee families through enrolling them onto ESOL courses. This helps them to improve their English speaking skills and become more active citizens in their local communities.
- Managers and staff successfully enrol learners with mental health difficulties onto a range of courses that improve their health and well-being. This enables them to develop their personal and social skills and progress to further learning, employment or volunteering.
- Managers evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment rigorously. The self-assessment report is accurate and takes account of the views of learners. As a result, the accompanying quality-improvement plan focuses actions accurately on areas for improvement. The observations of teaching, learning and assessment correctly identify key strengths and weaknesses. However, feedback and actions given to tutors from observations are not always precise enough to enable them to improve their teaching techniques swiftly.
- The focus on continuing professional development is strong. Since the previous inspection, managers and staff have received extensive professional development focused on identified weaknesses. For example, all tutors have participated in staff training on how to integrate British values into teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, learners have a good understanding of British values and life in modern Britain.
- Performance management is effective. Tutors' performance is monitored regularly. Managers support and manage staff effectively if their performance does not meet the required standard. As a result of managers' interventions, a number of tutors have improved their teaching techniques and classroom-management competencies. Learners have benefited considerably from these improvements.

- Leaders and managers are committed to developing and improving learners' skills in English and mathematics. They recognise the importance of improving these skills and the impact this has on learners' future prospects. Managers have supported tutors with training to help them to integrate these skills into their teaching. Consequently, tutors are helping learners successfully to improve these important skills and the associated knowledge.
- Managers have effective links with the local chamber of commerce, which provides careers guidance on behalf of the National Careers Service. As a result, learners receive good impartial guidance on their next steps.
- Leaders, managers and staff have created a culture of tolerance and respect. Learners' behaviour is exemplary and they value the views of their peers. This has resulted in inclusive and safe learning environments.
- In 2016/17, managers identified that learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from areas of high deprivation were not as successful as their peers. Managers have put suitable actions in place to reduce the achievement gaps for these groups. They are monitoring the impact of their actions very closely.
- Leaders and managers now collect information on learners' destinations, a weakness at the previous inspection. However, they do not analyse the information sufficiently to inform the future planning of the curriculum or to evaluate how successfully the service is meeting its strategic objectives.

The governance of the provider

- Due to recent council restructuring, a new governing body has been established. Members have a good understanding of the service's strengths and weaknesses. They meet regularly and have identified appropriate actions to improve the effectiveness of the board further.
- Currently, members of the board do not receive sufficiently detailed information to enable them to support and challenge leaders and managers and to hold them to account for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers follow safe recruitment and selection practices. Arrangements for recording and monitoring safeguarding concerns are comprehensive and thorough.
- Leaders and managers ensure that all staff receive appropriate and regular training on how to keep learners safe. As a result, learners feel safe. They know to whom they should report any concerns they have.
- Managers have in place an appropriate risk assessment and 'Prevent' duty action plan. All staff have received appropriate training in safeguarding. Learners have a good understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Tutors promote British values in lessons particularly effectively, and learners have a good understanding about life in modern Britain.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Tutors plan learning carefully, providing most learners with highly personalised learning sessions that meet their needs very effectively. Tutors use their good subject knowledge and experience skilfully to motivate, enthuse and involve all learners in activities. Tutors provide learners with interesting and varied activities that develop good personal, social and vocational skills.
- Tutors assess learners' starting points skilfully and accurately before they join their courses. They continue to assess learners' skills and abilities accurately during their courses. Learners are enrolled on courses at the correct level to meet their personal, social and academic needs. For example, the vast majority of learners who completed the 'stress less' course progressed to the 'mindfulness' course. Learners make good progress. Learners who are anxious about joining beginners' information and communication technology (ICT) courses are supported effectively to identify their existing skills and where their skills need to be developed.
- Learners benefit from and appreciate the high levels of very effective support they receive from tutors. Learners on ESOL courses benefit from a translator during the induction to establish group contracts and learn about expectations. Translators join learners' progress reviews to ensure that learners understand clearly the progress they are making. As a result, learners develop very good relationships with their peers and their tutors. They participate enthusiastically in activities and make good progress.
- Learners develop their English skills quickly and skilfully. For example, ESOL learners who arrived in the UK recently with little or no English language are able to write simple sentences legibly, describing members of their family. They are also able to contact their children's schools by telephone confidently to explain absences. In 'Me Time' creative classes, learners use technical terminology, such as 'cross hatch' and 'slick', accurately. In mindfulness classes, learners explain confidently and accurately the specialist terms relating to the development of emotions and personality.
- Learners develop mathematical skills competently during practical activities. These include problem solving when estimating how much clay is needed to make a clay animal and modelling the clay into spheres and cylinders to make the animal's body parts. ESOL learners are able to work out simple reductions in prices such as half price and a third off everyday goods during retail sales.
- Learners on supporting teaching and learning courses have good enrichment activities, such as safeguarding and first aid. They use the knowledge, skills and understanding from these activities to good effect in their placements.
- Tutors set meaningful targets for learners at the start of their courses. However, they do not amend learners' targets consistently in order to recognise and record their progress and achievements accurately. Tutors do not ensure that all learners make the progress of which they are capable.
- Learners receive good, detailed oral feedback from tutors in lessons. Learners make good use of this feedback to improve the quality of their work. Feedback on a minority of learners' work is insufficiently detailed or specific and it does not help learners sufficiently to improve their work. A few tutors do not identify spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in learners' work consistently, which results in learners repeating their mistakes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners enjoy their learning. They are highly motivated, enthusiastic and have positive attitudes to learning. Learners are punctual and fully prepared for their sessions. Attendance, since the previous inspection, has improved and is now good.
- Learners are proud of their achievements and produce work of a high standard. These include decoupage boxes in creative activity sessions and water droplet techniques in photography. Learners on supporting teaching and learning courses research information thoroughly and, as a result, respond comprehensively to written knowledge questions on aspects of child development.
- Tutors have high expectations of learners and they support them competently. Learners develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem, and acquire new knowledge and skills that help them to become independent learners. For example, learners on photography courses complete work between classes that improves their photographic techniques and helps them become more dexterous in handling cameras. ESOL learners are able to identify specific UK compass locations and discuss the similarities and differences in the weather in the north west with that in Syria and Lebanon.
- Relationships between learners, their peers and tutors are very good. Tutors promote the values of living in British society with all learners. Learners have a good understanding of, and demonstrate, these values very effectively. They have high levels of mutual respect for their peers. They are tolerant and respect the views and opinions of others. Learners' behaviour is exemplary.
- Tutors provide good initial information, advice and guidance. They place learners on the correct course to meet their needs and help them to prepare for their next steps. Highly effective careers information, advice and guidance from the service and the National Careers Service support learners in achieving their career and educational aspirations. Learners are prepared very successfully through the adult learning courses for progressing to higher-level courses within the service or at local colleges of further education.
- Learners develop good skills for employment, further study and volunteering as they improve their knowledge, skills and understanding in, for example, English, mathematics and ICT. Employability programmes help learners to develop good-quality curricula vitae, and improve their oral communication skills to prepare for interviews. Learners on courses such as 'Me Time' develop good technical skills as they produce craft items using a range of precision tools with high levels of accuracy. A few ESOL learners volunteer in local businesses, such as garages, hospices and charities, which helps them to develop their oral and written communication skills.
- Tutors promote diversity very successfully. Learners celebrate diversity enthusiastically through practical activities such as making lanterns to use for a range of religious and cultural celebrations such as Diwali, Hanukkah and Christmas. They enjoy discussing typical food associated with these events and the traditions in other countries. Learners on English courses have recently collated a number of favourite family recipes which they shared with each other at the end of term. Learners develop a greater understanding of the diverse communities in which they live and work as a result of activities such as these.

- Tutors have created positive and inclusive learning environments in which learners feel safe and are respected. Learners know to whom they should report any concerns or issues they may have. Learners with complex needs and barriers to learning, such as mental health difficulties or learning difficulties and/or disabilities, receive good support from staff, tutors and external agencies.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The majority of learners, many of whom have low prior academic attainment, make good progress from their starting points. They acquire new knowledge and skills that prepare them for their next steps. For example, learners in creative-inspiration workshops gain new knowledge and skills such as communication, language and physical development linked to the early years foundation stage. Learners on 'mindfulness' and 'stress less' courses develop strategies that help them to control their anxieties successfully. As a result, they gain confidence to undertake further learning or volunteering.
- Learners who attend ESOL courses make good progress. They become more active citizens in their local communities as a result of improving their English skills. For example, learners now use their English speaking skills in a range of settings, including working as volunteers in local businesses and community groups, and communicating with their children's schools.
- In 2016/17, according to the service's data, learners' achievement of qualifications improved further and was high and above that of similar providers. The proportion of learners who achieved functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics improved and was also high.
- Arrangements for recognising and recording progress and achievement have improved since the previous inspection. The vast majority of learners completing courses that do not lead to qualifications achieve their learning goals. As a result, they become more self-confident, improve their self-esteem and develop more positive attitudes to learning and life.
- The majority of learners progress to positive destinations, including, for example, further learning, volunteering and paid or voluntary employment. Managers have improved their collection and monitoring of learners' destination data. However, they do not analyse and evaluate sufficiently the destinations of learners who leave their courses early. This includes learners who gain employment related to specific vocational courses and learners who progress to higher-level qualifications with other providers.
- In 2016/17, managers identified that learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from areas of high deprivation are less successful than their peers. Actions are in place to improve the outcomes for these groups of learners, and managers are currently monitoring the impact of their actions very closely.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54563
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,325
Principal/CEO	Sue Williamson
Telephone number	01744 677325
Website	www.sthelens.gov.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+
	-	282	-	21	-	17	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operational and service development manager 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 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

Elaine Price, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dilys Taylor	Ofsted Inspector

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