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23 February 2018

Ms Sue Cook  
Interim Chief Executive Officer  
Suffolk County Council  
Endeavour House  
8 Russell Road  
Ipswich  
IP1 2BX

Dear Ms Cook

### **Short inspection of Suffolk County Council Community Learning and Skills (CLS) Provision**

Following the short inspection on 7 and 8 February 2018, 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 council's CLS provision was judged to be good in May 2014.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

You have worked well with your subcontractor, Realise Futures, to maintain the quality of provision and deal with many of the weaknesses from your previous inspection. As a result, you have raised achievement rates; although they dipped in 2016/17, they still remained higher than at the previous inspection. You took prompt action to deal with the dip in performance. You have maintained, and improved upon, the previously identified strength of good initial advice and guidance. However, there is one aspect about the advice and guidance that requires improvement, regarding the information available for external courses.

You have managed extremely well the changes to subcontracting arrangements. Until this year, you subcontracted the provision, and all aspects of managing it, to Realise Futures, who in turn subcontracted out specialist aspects of the provision. This year, you directly subcontract the specialist aspects of the provision and are planning to directly manage all aspects of the subcontracted provision from September 2018.

Leaders and managers use observations of teaching, learning and assessment well to monitor and improve the quality of provision. The process is rigorous and the managers at Realise Futures, who carry out observations, accurately identify teachers' key strengths and weaknesses. Managers use this knowledge effectively to focus on the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. You have made improvements, but there is still some work to do on the use of information and

learning technology (ILT) and target setting based on assessments of each learner's starting point.

Staff share good practice effectively to ensure that they develop learners' understanding of British values, and extremism. You have extended your previous good work on the promotion of equality and diversity to include these aspects of learners' personal development.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They take highly effective action to safeguard learners. Learners are safe and feel safe, and contribute well to ensuring their own safety and that of others. Arrangements for physical security are robust, and staff follow them well to ensure that risks to learners are minimised. Learners speak highly of the support they receive to help them stay safe.

Appropriate processes and records for safeguarding learners are in place and used well. Staff deal promptly and effectively with any potential safeguarding concerns. The register of safeguarding issues is clear and detailed, enabling staff to monitor the progress being made to resolve issues. Staff have good relationships with the relevant safeguarding agencies across the county.

During the transition period for subcontracting arrangements, your staff keep a record of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks that subcontractors are required to do as part of their contract. However, the date of your staff record is the planned date for the renewal and not the date of the DBS check. In addition, your staff carrying out the work do not record their name. Records kept by Realise Futures about their staff are clear and detailed and include the actual date of the check. However, they also do not record the name of the person verifying the check.

Realise Futures' staff carry out and monitor well the detailed risk assessments for venues and activities, as do their subcontractors. At each lesson, they confirm and record that risk prevention measures are still in place. You hold detailed risk assessment records for the subcontractors you now directly manage. Staff are appropriately trained to carry out the risk assessments and also to audit the quality of the risk assessments.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have acted swiftly and effectively to implement the changes in subcontracting arrangements brought about by changes in funding rules. You have worked well with Realise Futures' staff and elected council members to ensure that actions to take over this management function are in place for the start of the next academic year. Your staff have built on the existing good relationships with Realise Futures' staff to minimise the impact on learners during this period of significant change. The interim arrangements are robust and

ensure that you are developing well your capacity to take on this role from Realise Futures.

- Leaders and elected members of the council have worked together very well to identify and develop the changes needed in governance, as part of the changes to the management of the provision. Leaders are focused well on ensuring that this will give robust oversight of the quality of the provision. The membership of the governing body is set up to ensure that you have a broad range of skills and expertise relating to both education and employment.
- Staff continue to provide learners with good information, advice and guidance as identified at the previous inspection. Managers use labour market information very well to identify the skills needed. They also liaise very effectively with Jobcentre Plus advisers to ensure that courses meet the needs of unemployed learners. For example, a programme was set up quickly to update learners' management skills to enable them to be competitive in the labour market.
- Learners have a good understanding of the progression opportunities open to them. In addition to your own advice and guidance, staff work well with National Careers Service advisers to provide learners with additional careers information. Learners have a good understanding of the programmes they can take to develop more specialist information technology (IT) skills. However, staff do not routinely provide learners with enough information about available external courses to continue with their skills development while waiting to start their next course with you.
- Managers took swift and effective action to identify, and deal with, the reasons for the dip in achievement rates in 2016/17. Managers correctly identified that this dip was mainly due to a poorly performing subcontractor and took prompt action to stop contracting with them. In addition, leaders reviewed and amended your arrangements for managing and monitoring the performance of subcontractors. For example, you have changed your requirements for data from subcontractors to ensure that you get an early warning of potential achievement issues.
- Staff now monitor attendance more closely than before and, as a result, there is a better knowledge of what is working and what needs to be improved. Staff have had additional training to help them work effectively with the changing cohort of learners, many more of whom have complex needs. You have introduced other changes to promote learners' retention and achievement. For example, a positive change has been putting on classes at a day and time to coincide with buses coming into the town from rural areas.
- Your arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are robust. Managers' observations are accurate and they capture well the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The information is used very effectively to help staff improve their skills. As a result, you have made progress in dealing with many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. However, there is still some work to do to ensure that improvements in teaching, learning and assessment percolate throughout the provision. The improvements needed relate to the use of ILT and setting targets based on an assessment of learners' starting points.

- Teachers are generally making better use now of initial assessment information to set meaningful individual targets for learners. Inspectors saw excellent examples of detailed target setting for individual learners, which, as seen on one course, are successfully helping adult learners to gain confidence. Targets were clear, reviewed frequently and successfully involved learners in setting their own targets. However, there are examples where targets are too generic and focused on the aims of the course and do not include sufficient reference to the aims for learners.
- Teachers are now making better use of ILT in lessons. For example, as seen in one lesson, the teacher made very good use of computers to share learning resources and course files with learners. However, in some cases, teachers do not use ILT effectively or appropriately, such as setting the learners a computer-based task without checking that all of them had a computer at home on which they could complete the task.
- Teachers receive regular training on British values and on extremism and use this knowledge well to help learners develop their understanding. As a result, learners have a good understanding of these topics and how they relate to both their personal and social lives, and the world of work. They use this understanding well to keep themselves safe.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- records of DBS checks capture the date of the actual check and the name of the person recording the information
- learners on IT programmes are given full information about learning opportunities both with you and externally, to ensure continuity of learning
- managers improve the effective use of ILT
- teachers, supported by managers, use information from the assessment of learners' starting points, to set meaningful and individual targets for learners.

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

Yours sincerely

Derrick Baughan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors were assisted by the quality manager for Realise Futures, as nominee. We held meetings with staff and managers. We observed teaching, learning and assessment, and looked at learners' work and their learning resources. We spoke with learners and incorporated their views in our findings. We reviewed documents, including those related to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding learners, as well as qualification achievement rates.