

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Local authority

Inspection dates

12–15 February 2018

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 successfully addressed the vast majority of weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders and managers have redesigned the provision effectively to primarily improve the life chances of the disadvantaged communities in the Wirral and develop learners' English and mathematics skills.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are now good because leaders and managers have implemented effective quality improvement strategies.
- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They have high expectations and an ambition to improve the prospects of individuals and families living in the Wirral.
- Leaders and managers have improved the arrangements for managing subcontractors. The vast majority of subcontracted learners are successful in achieving their personal learning goals.
- Tutors accurately identify the starting points of learners, which ensures that learners are placed on the correct level of course; the majority of learners make good progress.
- Learners on family learning courses gain useful knowledge and skills that help them and their children develop and improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Staff create a positive and inclusive learning environment in which learners are nurtured, feel safe and have respect for each other and their tutors.
- Leaders and managers do not analyse the performance between different groups of learners and therefore do not identify or take action when variations exist.
- The proportion of learners who leave the service and progress to further education, volunteering or employment is too low.
- A minority of observers of teaching and learning focus too much on the activity of the tutor and not enough on learners' progress and skills development.
- A minority of tutors do not plan learning effectively. Consequently, learners, particularly the most able, do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Wirral Lifelong Learning Service (the service) is part of the Children and Families Directorate within Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC). The service provides courses in English, mathematics, family learning, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), basic digital skills, employability and well-being. Courses range from pre-entry to level 2. Approximately half of learners are enrolled on courses that lead to qualifications. The service delivers in 29 venues throughout the Wirral.
- WMBC is the largest of six local authorities in the Liverpool City Region. Its current population is approximately 321,000. The east of the area has some of the poorest wards in the country while the more prosperous wards are to the west. The proportion of adults living in the Wirral who do not have formal qualifications is in line with the national average. Wirral has an unemployment rate slightly lower than the rate for the north-west region.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the analysis of the performance of all groups of learners quickly in order to plan specific actions to ensure that there are no significant variations in performance.
- Monitor accurately the destinations of learners who leave the service. Ensure that leaders and managers use the information to make further improvements to the provision and increase the proportion of adults who progress into further education, volunteering and employment.
- Ensure that all tutors plan learning activities so that all learners, in particular the most able, are challenged to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Ensure that observers of teaching, learning and assessment provide tutors with accurate feedback that focuses on how they are helping learners to learn and make the progress of which they are capable.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have prioritised their actions to improve the effectiveness of the service for Wirral residents. They have been successful in rectifying the vast majority of weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders and managers have redesigned the provision successfully to ensure that courses improve the life chances of learners from the most disadvantaged communities. For example, leaders and managers have increased greatly the proportion of courses that lead to useful qualifications, including English and mathematics. Almost all courses are planned and developed to improve learners' use of English, mathematics, as well as digital and work-related skills to help them to progress further. As a result, in 2016/17, just under half of learners who completed courses that did not have formal qualifications progressed to courses with nationally recognised qualifications.
- Leaders and managers work effectively with a range of partners including voluntary organisations, Jobcentre Plus and schools to identify and engage groups of residents who will benefit most from the provision. As a result, they successfully engage vulnerable families, those with alcohol dependency and refugees into learning. A high proportion of learners are new learners and a large majority are from some of the most deprived communities in the Wirral.
- Leaders and managers support tutors successfully to make improvements to their teaching practices. They ensure that tutors, including tutors in subcontractors, benefit from a wide range of relevant professional training that results in improvements to their teaching techniques. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.
- The self-assessment report is largely accurate. Leaders and managers have a clear, in-depth and realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their courses. Using the results of the self-assessment process, they implement improvement actions effectively to improve outcomes for learners. For example, managers carry out regular checks on the recording of learners' progress and achievements. As a result, achievements for learners on courses that underperformed in 2016/17 have improved greatly in this current year.
- Arrangements for the management of subcontractors are effective. Managers complete extensive checks with subcontractors to ensure that they are capable of providing high-quality learning for their learners. They agree and set appropriate quality monitoring targets with the subcontractors and regularly evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Where managers identify performance issues, they support the subcontractors and their tutors effectively to improve their practices. As a result, the vast majority of learners who study with subcontractors achieve their personal learning goals.
- Leaders and managers have developed a strong ethos of respecting individuals' beliefs and treating people fairly. These values are central to the work of the service. They have ensured that tutors are skilful in helping learners to increase their understanding of British values. As a result, learners work collaboratively and demonstrate tolerance and respect for others.
- Observers accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and

assessment that results in good individual coaching for tutors. However, a minority of observers do not evaluate sufficiently the impact of teaching practices on learners' progress and skills development. They focus too much on the activity of the tutor and not enough on learning and skills development. Consequently, not all tutors receive accurate feedback on how they are helping learners to learn and make the progress of which they are capable.

- Leaders and managers have greatly improved the collection of information about learners' destinations since the previous inspection. However, the proportion of learners who progress to further education, volunteering or employment is too low.
- Leaders and managers do not monitor the progress of groups of learners. As a result, they do not identify or take action when there are variations between different groups of learners.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They have high expectations of staff to improve the prospects of the most disadvantaged individuals in the Wirral and they set ambitious targets for leaders and managers. For example, leaders are set targets to increase the proportion of learners who progress to further education, volunteering and employment.
- Managers provide governors with accurate, regular and detailed information about the performance of the service. Governors use this information effectively to support and challenge leaders to improve the provision further.
- Governors have a valuable range of skills and knowledge. For example, they have expertise in commerce and education. As a result, they are able to support and guide leaders and managers skilfully to develop effective strategic priorities and operational management.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers ensure that appropriate checks are carried out, including disclosure and barring service checks, on their own staff and staff working for subcontractors.
- All staff receive up-to-date and regular training on how to keep learners safe. Leaders and managers have implemented clear procedures so that learners and tutors know how to report any concerns swiftly and effectively. As a result, learners feel safe. Managers make appropriate referrals to external agencies when required.
- Staff and staff working for subcontractors have a good understanding of the 'Prevent' duty. As a result, they ensure that learners know how to protect themselves and others against the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The vast majority of tutors plan lessons effectively to meet the individual needs of learners. Experienced and competent tutors have high expectations of learners and plan

exciting and thought-provoking activities that enable the majority of learners to make good progress. For example, in healthy cooking lessons, learners plan menus that take account of dietary needs while considering healthy alternatives to popular recipes.

- Leaders and managers identify learners' individual starting points accurately. Since the previous inspection, they have implemented a new system that identifies effectively learners' academic and vocational skills when they start their courses. Where learners' starting points in English are below what is required for the course, tutors direct learners to courses that will help them to develop their English skills to meet their individual needs and to help them make the progress of which they are capable.
- Learners are enthusiastic about their learning and are committed to their courses. They produce work of a high standard that reflects, and often exceeds, the requirements of the course. For example, learners competently design and plan an environmental garden for their children's school. They think carefully about planting and harvesting fruit and vegetables and creating a sustainable environment. When developing 'story sacks' in family learning lessons, learners create resources and undertake activities such as bingo and card-matching that bring children's books such as 'The Gruffalo' to life. As a result, they improve their own, and their children's, literacy skills.
- Tutors skilfully develop learners' personal, social and work-related skills through a wide variety of highly effective practical activities. For example, cushion design and appliqué in sewing lessons develop learners' skills for employment, and conversation techniques in British Sign Language improve learners' communication skills. As a result, the majority of learners make good progress in developing the skills that they will need for their next stages of learning or employment.
- A minority of tutors do not consistently challenge the very small minority of the most able learners or ensure that additional support is effective for learners that need extra help. This results in not all learners making the swift progress of which they are capable. For example, in a few cases, learners who complete activities quickly have to wait for the rest of the group to catch up before they can move on to the next activity.
- The vast majority of tutors set learners meaningful targets at the start of their courses and review these throughout the courses. However, a small minority of tutors do not set targets for learners early enough, which limits learners' progress. As a result, these learners do not achieve their full potential.
- Tutors' feedback to learners is detailed and helpful and supports learners to improve their work and develop their skills. Most learners address actions set by tutors successfully. A small minority of tutors do not check that learners act upon the feedback that they receive and continue to repeat their mistakes.
- A few tutors do not plan learning effectively so that their lessons lack clear aims and do not take into account learners' individual needs or targets. As a result, learners complete inappropriate activities that confuse them and make slow progress towards achieving their targets and qualifications.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners are highly motivated, enthusiastic and enjoy their learning. Since the previous inspection, attendance has improved and is now good. Learners are punctual, well

prepared for their lessons and have positive attitudes to learning. Learners develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem and gain skills that help them become more independent in their learning and lives. For example, learners with no prior computer skills are able to use computers confidently to shop and access important services, such as health advice, online.

- Learners develop good work-related skills. Employability courses help learners gain a range of vocational skills. For example, in level 1 sewing lessons, learners work out the costings and profit margins of making garments, including the impact of fabric waste. Learners produce work to a high standard. They are proud of the skills they are developing and many have high aspirations and plan to use their skills to set up their own businesses.
- Tutors integrate English and mathematics skilfully into lessons. Consequently, learners develop good levels of literacy and numeracy that prepare them well for their next steps. For example, as learners explore mathematical concepts to support the development of their child's numeracy skills they use technical terminology such as partitioning.
- Tutors provide effective information, advice and guidance for learners. Managers have developed good relationships with Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service, which provides learners with access to qualified and knowledgeable advisers. As a result, learners receive impartial and personalised advice and guidance that allows them to make informed choices about their next steps on completing their courses. Learners receive good support with the writing of their CVs and job applications as well as useful guidance on how they can develop effective interview techniques. This helps to prepare them well for employment. The vast majority of learners know where they want to progress to next.
- Tutors promote diversity through carefully planned and relevant activities. For example, in ESOL lessons learners share with each other the differences in cultures from their homelands such as how they celebrate festivities at New Year.
- Staff have created an inclusive and safe learning environment that is valued by learners. They provide good pastoral support for learners. Learners feel safe and know who they can contact to report any concerns. Learners have a good understanding of British values. As a result, they work well together in lessons and demonstrate tolerance and respect for each other and their tutors.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have implemented rigorous measures for recognising and recording the progress and achievement of learners on courses that do not lead to qualifications. As a result, tutors set personal and individualised targets for learners and use reliable processes to record and monitor progress. The majority of learners on these courses, many of whom face significant personal barriers to learning, successfully achieve their personal learning goals.
- Learners' achievement of qualifications in 2016/17 was high and has improved further in the current year. The proportion of learners on courses leading to formal qualifications in English and mathematics has increased markedly this current year. Learners' achievement of qualifications in functional skills English and mathematics in the current year is high.
- Leaders and managers monitor effectively the performance of subcontractors. Learners

with subcontractor partners make good progress. As a result, the vast majority of learners achieve their personal learning goals.

- Learners enjoy learning. They develop good and useful practical skills that help them progress. Consequently, they increase their confidence and self-esteem and are proud of their achievements. For example, learners on cookery courses can now cook healthy and nourishing meals for their children while working within a budget.
- Since the previous inspection, managers have improved the collection of information about learners' destinations. In 2016/17 just over half of learners who left the service progressed to further learning or employment. However, the proportion of learners who progress to further education, volunteering or employment is not high enough to meet the aspirations of the learners.
- In 2016/17 leaders and managers did not identify achievement gaps for different groups of learners. For example, achievements for women were significantly higher than for men. Achievements for learners from white backgrounds were higher than achievements of learners from other ethnicities. While achievement gaps have narrowed for learners from these groups in the current year, leaders and managers do not analyse systematically the performance between different groups of learners.

Provider details

Unique reference number	55402
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2704
Principal/CEO	Paul Smith
Telephone number	0151 666 5254
Website	www.wirral.gov.uk/lifelonglearning

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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	–	1228	–	62	–	–	–	–
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 whom the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Amber Button Bee Wirral Ferries Family Groups Home Start Wirral Leasowe Nursey School & Family Centre North Birkenhead Development Trust Tranmere Rovers Community Trust Wirral Environmental Network Youth Federation Health Junction							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality 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, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning lessons, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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