

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Latham  
Skills and Employment Manager  
Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Council Offices, 2nd Floor, 4 Civic Way  
Ellesmere Port  
Cheshire  
CH65 0BE

Dear Mrs Latham

### **Short inspection of Cheshire West and Chester Council**

Following the short inspection on 7 and 8 March 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 provider was judged to be good in March 2015.

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

Council leaders and senior managers continue to prioritise engaging learners, communities and groups with the most need. These include individuals who have been unemployed for a long time, those with mental health issues or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Since the previous inspection, further development of the four Work Zone centres in Winsford, Northwich, Chester and Ellesmere Port has resulted in the successful recruitment of a high proportion of learners who have multiple barriers to employment. In these centres, learners with significant personal and employment barriers benefit from using a wide range of services such as psychological therapy, health and well-being programmes, careers advice and guidance and pre-employment courses.

You and your team have been very successful in improving the proportion of learners who gain qualifications and this is now high. Your managers are particularly successful in monitoring and managing the 21 subcontractors who offer around half of your provision. Careful selection of subcontractors has benefited many learners, for example learners who receive specific training for local skill shortages, such as training on operating forklift trucks and health and safety in construction. The proportion of learners who progress to further courses or employment is not high enough. This is because leaders and managers do not use labour market information and learner progression data well enough to set clear improvement targets for the progression of learners; they do not evaluate fully the impact of each course on improving learners' prospects.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your staff have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and effective. Staff ensure that learners are aware of safeguarding concerns, for example in relation to modern slavery. Tutors, including tutors in the large number of subcontractors, are confident about how to report concerns, for example when learners are at risk of self-harming. The records of safeguarding incidents are detailed, well maintained and regularly reviewed. This has resulted in good monitoring of learners' well-being after referrals to external organisations, for example the police.

All staff, including subcontractors' staff, receive relevant and regular training on keeping learners safe and about their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. Tutors discuss skilfully and confidently the risks of radicalisation with learners. They adapt learning material well to help learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to gain a better understanding of how upholding British values reduces the dangers of extremism. Learners are confident that when they report their concerns staff will take their anxieties seriously and respond appropriately and promptly.

## **Inspection findings**

- Managers monitor often, and in detail, learners' achievements, including learners in subcontractors. They intervene effectively when necessary to ensure that a high proportion of learners complete their courses. In 2016/17, the proportion of learners who achieved their accredited qualifications was high. A similarly high proportion of learners achieved their personal goals on courses that do not lead to formal qualifications. Most learners on English and mathematics courses were successful.
- Managers monitor learners' attendance particularly well. They take effective measures to support learners; as a result they attend regularly and on time and improve their employment prospects.
- The proportion of learners who gain employment, start their own businesses or move on to accredited courses or training is not high enough. Managers do not set clear and demanding targets for learners' progress. Consequently, they cannot determine whether their courses help individual learners to achieve their next steps.
- Following the previous inspection, managers have improved the procedures to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning. They evaluate thoroughly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that learners receive from subcontractors. They sample learners' work regularly to ensure that assessment of learners on courses without formal qualifications is accurate and reliable.
- Managers identify accurately when tutors' practices require improvement. In too many instances, managers' evaluations focus too much on what tutors do and not enough on the skills that learners develop and the progress that they make. Consequently, tutors do not receive the feedback necessary to support them to improve.

- Since the previous inspection, managers have improved the management of subcontractors. They regularly monitor and review their performance. When underperformance is identified, they provide good support and staff development to help subcontractors improve quickly and terminate the contract of those who do not improve. However, they do not monitor sufficiently the progression of learners' progression to employment, further studies or training in individual subcontractors. They do not set clear and demanding progression targets for learners studying in individual subcontractors.
- Leaders and managers have shaped successfully the provision to improve the prospects of learners. Since the previous inspection, they have increased the proportion of courses that lead to formal qualifications, such as courses to improve learners' skills in English and mathematics. Learners benefit from attending lessons that develop their skills for employment in West Cheshire and Cheshire, for example in retail and customer service. Managers have worked with employers to offer learners the specific courses that employers require, including courses in logistics. However, leaders and senior managers do not use information about the range of vacancies and skill shortages well enough to ensure that all courses provide learners with the skills that employers require or to provide learners with clear progression routes towards employment.
- Tutors use information on learners' starting points well to set them activities that develop new skills. They use their experience and expertise competently to help learners develop good practical skills and knowledge for their next steps. For example, learners on beauty therapy courses learn how to identify contraindications before carrying out client treatments such as facials. They develop good specialist vocabulary relevant to their field of study.
- Tutors provide good support for learners that helps them to increase their confidence and improve their everyday lives. Learners on family learning courses develop skills to help their child to enhance their art skills along with improving their language skills. For example, they use the correct language such as 'smudging' when using charcoal to draw.
- On courses that do not lead to formal qualifications, most tutors record accurately what learners have achieved. As identified in the self-assessment report, not all tutors set learners demanding personal targets for their skill development.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance before they start their courses, and as a result most stay and complete. Managers have not ensured that all learners, including those in subcontractors, receive impartial advice about their next steps.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- senior managers use information about local skills shortages to set clear and ambitious targets for the recruitment and progression of learners so that the effectiveness of courses in meeting the council's priorities is regularly evaluated
- managers with responsibility for evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and

assessment focus on the skills that learners develop and the progress that they make, so that the feedback they give to tutors improves their teaching skills further

- all tutors set clear and demanding personal targets for learners on courses that do not lead to formal qualifications and record their achievements accurately
- managers put effective measures in place for providing all learners with impartial advice and guidance about their next steps, so that the learners' prospects improve
- managers set and monitor clear and ambitious targets for each subcontractor for the progression of learners, including to accredited courses and employment, so that more learners are successful in their next steps.

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Shahram Safavi  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection we were assisted by the skills and employment manager, as nominee. We visited a number of your subcontractors, met staff at all levels and learners and observed lessons with your managers and looked at learners' work. We interviewed your learners. We reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, and by seeking their views during the inspection.