

Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

26 February–1 March 2019

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study 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 a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and take swift and effective action to raise standards.
- Leaders and managers have rectified most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders, managers and staff have developed a culture of high expectations of what learners can achieve, including in partnership and subcontracted provision.
- Tutors have very good subject knowledge and direct experience of the sectors in which they teach. They use their industry knowledge and expertise effectively to help learners to develop good industry and professional practices.
- Learners benefit from high-quality, industry-standard resources and sector-specific digital technologies that they will encounter in future employment.
- Learners benefit from a wide range of additional activities and experience of work that improve their resilience, confidence, self-esteem and work-related skills.
- Learners are very well behaved and respectful towards their peers, staff, employers and learning environments; they are proud of their achievements.
- The vast majority of learners achieve their vocational qualifications and move on to meaningful and relevant destinations, including working at professional levels in their chosen industry.
- Leaders and managers do not know how successfully learners achieve from their starting points. They do not monitor strategically the progress that learners make at each centre.
- Attendance, particularly at English and mathematics lessons, is too low.
- Too few learners achieve standard or strong pass grades in GCSE English and mathematics.
- The few English and mathematics lessons that subcontractors deliver lack sufficient structure and planning to maintain the interest of learners to enable them to make at least expected progress.
- Learning targets for the most able learners are not always sufficiently challenging to enable them to achieve the high grades of which they are capable.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited (Brighter Futures) and its sister company Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited are separate trading entities and are owned by Evolve Business Services Limited. They share a number of services, including finance, human resources and administration. The senior management team is responsible for both companies. Brighter Futures offers 16 to 19 study programmes in performing arts, sport, animal care and horse management. It recruits learners from Liverpool, the wider Merseyside region, Lancashire and the West Midlands. Brighter Futures has subcontracted and partnership provision in Liverpool, Telford, Blackpool, Fylde and Bolton. This accounts for over two thirds of the provision. Brighter Futures offers education and training to learners who have disengaged previously from learning.
- Around four fifths of learners are from the Liverpool City region. The region incorporates the local authority districts of Liverpool, Halton, Knowsley, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral. It has a total population of just over 1.5 million, of which 491,500 live in Liverpool. Attendance at school is lower than across the north-west region. In 2016/17, the number of school leavers who achieved GCSEs at grades 9 to 4 (formerly A* to C), including in English and mathematics, was lower than for both the north-west region and national averages.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Implement effective strategies to improve attendance rapidly, especially at English and mathematics lessons.
- Ensure that tutors set suitably demanding targets for the most able learners, so that they achieve the grades of which they are capable.
- Increase significantly the number of learners who achieve standard and strong pass grades in GCSE English and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching in the English and mathematics lessons that subcontractor staff deliver.
- Ensure that leaders and board members have a good strategic overview of the progress that learners make collectively across each of the centres, so that they understand fully the progress that learners make over time.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have rectified most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Since then, senior leaders and board members have focused relentlessly on improving the quality of education and training that learners receive. Where areas for improvement have not yet been addressed fully, for example in English and mathematics, leaders and managers have taken appropriate actions, including appointing specialist staff, to remedy those weaknesses. However, the impact of those actions will not be evident until the results of learners' examinations are released later in the year.
- Leaders and managers have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have strengthened their approach to self-assessment. The 2017/18 self-assessment report is mostly evaluative and identifies clearly how actions taken by leaders and managers have improved the quality of the provision. Minutes of meetings show that leaders focus their management discussions fully on raising standards. During the inspection, leaders explained the impact of the prompt actions that they take clearly and articulately. However, they do not record this impact sufficiently in their minutes or in the quality improvement plan (QIP). For example, in the QIP, the progress updates on interventions with subcontractors describe what they have done, such as attend teaching and learning workshops, and carry out observations and audits. As a result, the impact of these actions on improving the quality of the provision is unclear.
- Leaders ensure that learners are involved fully in quality assurance and quality improvement processes. As a result, learners contribute actively to management decision-making processes and appreciate how much their views are valued.
- Leaders and managers have implemented effective performance management arrangements. Their strategies to improve tutors' performance are successful. Leaders and managers review the performance of tutors monthly by each centre and class. Records of individual meetings with tutors show that they discuss what is going well and where tutors might need support. They discuss individual learners' progress, including additional support sessions, catch-up work, and actions taken to improve attendance. Consequently, leaders understand fully how effectively tutors contribute to ensuring high-quality provision for learners.
- Leaders and managers have a clear and systematic approach to carrying out lesson observations. Observations take account of tutors' previous observations and what they have done to improve their teaching, including the sharing of good practice. Staff who need to improve benefit from individual training and support. As a result, tutors improve their practices rapidly. Where tutors do not improve quickly enough, leaders implement clear performance management processes.
- Staff benefit from a wide range of professional development activities. Leaders and managers are committed to supporting staff to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, staff have up-to-date knowledge of current developments and expectations. While the company training plan outlines the intended purpose of each training activity, the evaluation of the training is too descriptive. Records do not demonstrate

clearly the overall impact that staff development activities have on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, or on staff's performance generally.

- Leaders and managers have effective oversight of subcontracted and partnership provision. They have a clear and in-depth understanding of the quality of the provision at each centre. Leaders undertake appropriate pre-contractual checks that demonstrate high expectations of future working relationships. Leaders and managers implement successfully the same quality processes for subcontractors and partners as they do for directly delivered provision. These include effective monthly quality meetings. Subcontractors and partners benefit substantially from Brighter Futures' staff development events.
- Leaders and managers develop the curriculum effectively to meet the needs and aspirations of learners. Since the previous inspection, they have reviewed the curriculum and discontinued unsuccessful courses, particularly where these were in direct competition with other local providers. Programmes are planned carefully with employers and industry specialists to ensure that learners understand fully the wider opportunities available to them in their chosen vocational areas. This serves to manage learners' expectations. Through wider networks, leaders and managers keep up to date about local and regional policy changes and expectations. As a result, they ensure that the curriculum complies, for example, with the Liverpool City region's educational strategies.
- Leaders, managers and staff have created a culture that recognises and promotes equality and inclusivity, and celebrates diversity. Learners demonstrate respect for each other, staff and visitors. They learn to be tolerant of differences and celebrate different cultures and backgrounds.
- Leaders and managers do not have a sufficient strategic oversight of how successfully learners progress from their starting points. They monitor learners' progress against the completion of unit criteria and not against the progress they are making to achieve expected or even better outcomes. While individual centres monitor and support learners effectively, leaders and managers rely too heavily on centres recording and monitoring learners' progress accurately so that they make the progress of which they are capable. At the time of the inspection, leaders had recognised this weakness and were moving to a new recording and monitoring system.
- The quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics delivered by subcontractors requires improvement. Where leaders have chosen to deliver English and mathematics provision directly, the quality of teaching and learning is much higher. As a result, learners in subcontracted provision do not make sufficient progress or attend regularly enough.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is effective. Board members are ambitious for learners and are passionate about raising their aspirations. They have implemented new initiatives and resources to help learners to achieve and to ensure that their wider needs are met. For example, they have supported the training of staff to become mental health first aiders.
- Board members have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They receive detailed reports that enable them to challenge leaders and

managers effectively on the impact that quality improvement actions have on raising standards. They are involved fully in the self-assessment process.

- Board members worked effectively with leaders to review and develop the new curriculum following the previous inspection. Their relentless focus is on what Brighter Futures can deliver successfully for their learners. They monitor carefully the approval process for new subcontractors and have a good understanding of current subcontractors' strengths and weaknesses. They have strengthened the contractual requirements for subcontractors since the previous inspection to ensure that subcontractors provide good-quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Board members have a good range of skills, knowledge and experience that they use effectively to support leaders and managers to raise standards. They take an active part in the strategic management of the organisation. Each board member takes on specific roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to quality improvement actions. For example, they undertake joint lesson observations with managers to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers place a strong emphasis on keeping learners safe. They have extended this culture effectively to embrace their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. All safeguarding leads have a level 3 qualification in safeguarding. Learners, staff and board members receive regular and appropriate training on safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and 'Channel' training. As a result, they are clear about their responsibilities and the procedures for reporting concerns. For example, one group of sports learners has undertaken 'Prevent' and 'Channel' training from specialists from the Lancashire police force.
- The designated safeguarding leads have a comprehensive understanding of the organisation's statutory duties. They have effective agency contacts that they call upon when necessary. For example, the local children's safeguarding board recommended that, for practical sports sessions, leaders follow the Football Association's safeguarding protocols and fitness regimes that include sport-specific considerations such as in the use of changing rooms. Leaders have extended these protocols to other subject areas.
- Leaders and managers have put in place rigorous procedures to ensure that learners aged 16 and 17 who are living away from home are protected fully. For example, performing arts learners have access to 24-hour support from matrons and chaperones when in their accommodation. These procedures extend to visits and trips.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are updated regularly and understood fully by staff and learners. Leaders and managers have extended recently their safeguarding responsibilities to include mental health issues, human trafficking and modern-day slavery. Their approach to safeguarding is replicated across all subcontractors and partners.
- Leaders monitor health and safety across all their delivery sites effectively. Risk assessments are comprehensive and robust. Many are learner led. For example, in addition to the provider's risk assessments, learners assess risks concerning visits and

trips themselves. Consequently, they develop a greater awareness of their surroundings and the safety measures that they need to adopt. Learners on dog-grooming courses undertake risk assessments in the salon before starting work. They identify a dog's likely reaction and behaviour at certain points during the grooming session. As a result, they are aware of potential dangers associated with animals. They take the necessary measures to avoid injury, such as fitting muzzles or more secure restraints, as well as seeking assistance from peers or tutors when relevant.

- Leaders and managers follow strict safer recruitment practices. They ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on all staff, including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. They scrutinise carefully job applicants' suitability for the post for which they have applied.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Tutors use a wide range of activities to interest and motivate learners. Consequently, learners enjoy their learning and make good progress. They develop relevant technical understanding and vocabulary. For example, in horse management lessons, learners discuss the most appropriate feed for an individual horse's needs. They identify whether the feed is high energy, fattening or low fat, how to recognise when the food is contaminated and what illnesses contaminated feed can cause. In performing arts lessons, learners discuss the history of jazz, dance and the 'Fosse' technique and how it originated. Learners on performing arts courses regularly use topics such as the Holocaust and the impact of bullying to communicate difficult messages to audiences. These sessions include working with school children through dance, drama and singing events that learners design themselves.
- Tutors plan teaching and learning effectively on vocational courses. Tutors set work for learners that relates to previous learning. This extends and consolidates learners' knowledge, practical skills and understanding. Tutors provide more challenging tasks within vocational sessions for the most able learners to help them develop higher level skills.
- Tutors integrate English and mathematics creatively into vocational lessons. For example, sports learners use industry-standard vests that contain global positioning system technology to analyse data about their personal performance and fitness when playing and coaching. They look at angles in their hips to determine how to generate greater power. They interpret information from charts and graphs and compare the results with each other's performance and that of professional and semi-professional footballers. This helps to improve and optimise learners' technical and tactical ability, as well as develop their mathematical skills. Learners on dog-grooming courses complete written health-check documents comprehensively and accurately prior to starting to groom. They record detailed information about what they have done as well as comments about the behaviour of the dog. Performing arts learners budget for forthcoming shows and work out the cost of make-up, costumes, hire costs and value-added tax.
- Tutors use a wide range of resources to engage their learners, extend their knowledge and enable them to develop good independent study skills. For example, in performing arts lessons, learners benefit from viewing recordings of classical and contemporary

versions of 'Swan Lake' to promote discussion on the evolution of ballet over time. They also look at video clips from the musical 'Hairspray'. This helps them critically analyse and discuss how a scene has been influenced by historical factors such as the United States civil rights movement.

- Tutors are passionate about their subject and have good subject knowledge and experience. Many are current practitioners. They are highly qualified and use their knowledge and experience effectively to help learners develop good industrial and professional practices to meet employers' needs. Tutors teach learners to identify their future career aspirations and opportunities. For example, in sports lessons, learners write and present a dialogue based on a football match. Consequently, they learn about various alternative sports careers, such as being a journalist, commentator, sports coach or referee.
- In most lessons, tutors use questioning techniques effectively to challenge learners and to check on their progress. This helps learners aim for higher grades in their vocational qualifications and raises their aspirations. For example, in animal care lessons, tutors question learners' understanding of which types of cutter and what comb size they would use for a particular breed of dog and why. In performing arts, learners refine and perfect their aerobic techniques with support from demonstrations and questioning by the tutor, and feedback from their peers.
- Learners receive effective oral feedback in both theory and practical sessions. Consequently, learners make rapid progress and improve, and produce work to industry standards. For example, in ballet, the feedback helps them to improve their technical skills such as in foot positioning. In football coaching lessons, tutors help learners to relate theoretical concepts directly to what they physically experience in practical lessons.
- Learners develop effective communication and social skills. For example, sports learners present research findings to their peers and answer relevant questions professionally. In dog-grooming lessons, learners are given the opportunity to role play the 'salon manager'. As a result, they become confident to reassure nervous owners on arrival and to meet and greet returning owners when they collect their pets. They ensure tactfully and respectfully that their peers meet deadlines and follow basic instructions around the cleanliness of the salon.
- Learners with additional needs receive effective support to help them remain on their course and achieve their qualifications. For example, learners who have mental health issues or high levels of anxiety attend small class sizes. They have access to a service dog that helps them to feel calm and deal positively with their challenges. Learning support is effective in helping learners to remain focused and complete tasks within required timescales. Tutors and learning support assistants work together collaboratively to ensure that learners with support needs achieve their full potential. Learners who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively to travel independently and safely on public transport. They plan their journeys efficiently and calculate accurately the cost of the fares.
- Tutors do not provide useful feedback on a minority of learners' work. They do not help learners to identify fully how to improve their written work further or what they need to do to achieve at a higher level.
- Not all tutors set targets for learners that are personalised, meaningful and

challenging. Targets are often too general and focus on the achievement of units of qualifications. As a result, target-setting for learners does not help learners to focus on what they need to do to improve further between the termly reviews. Tutors in a minority of sessions do not set targets that challenge the most able learners to improve their work further.

- Learners who achieved a standard pass grade in English and mathematics are not challenged sufficiently to develop their skills further. For example, tutors do not insist that learners routinely check the meaning of new terminology independently, or work out more complex calculations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners are well behaved and respectful towards their peers, staff, employers and learning environments. They develop professional attitudes towards wearing the correct personal protective equipment, uniform and attire for their profession. They work collaboratively and are supportive of one another. For example, in sports activities, learners shake hands after a match. Performing arts learners applaud each other after a rehearsal.
- Most learners attend vocational lessons regularly and on time. They arrive fully prepared to start learning. Learners are motivated, enthusiastic and attentive. They enjoy their learning. Tutors issue yellow and red cards as warnings to learners on sports programmes if they are late. As a result, attendance and punctuality have improved this term.
- Tutors challenge learners effectively when they do not conduct themselves professionally enough. For example, learners who have not attended classroom-based lessons, including for English and mathematics, are not allowed to take part in practical football coaching activities. Instead, they support their 'team' from the sidelines and video their peers' performance on the pitch for later analysis and discussion.
- Learners feel safe and are safe. They have a good understanding of safeguarding arrangements and how to report concerns. They are knowledgeable about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Tutors and managers alert learners and staff promptly by email and newsletters about any new dangers to be aware of on the internet. This includes, for example, any new concerns relating to specific social media applications.
- Learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. They learn about the importance of good nutrition and eating a balanced and healthy diet. Tutors provide regular and effective information on mental health and how to remain positive. For example, mental health awareness sessions help learners to deal effectively with personal issues and professional setbacks, for example following unsuccessful interviews, auditions and sports trials. Learners discuss the importance of following NHS guidelines on safe alcohol consumption and the risks associated with substance misuse. Learners are actively involved in the community in raising awareness of mental health issues and link their work to local initiatives in Liverpool.
- Learners benefit from a variety of planned and structured work and work experience. They complete an 'employability and behaviours assessment' at the start of their

programme and work towards individual targets, such as in developing effective interview skills and applying for specific job roles. Learners work regularly with sector professionals. They gain a valuable insight into their chosen industry's standards and expectations that will benefit their future careers. For example, sports learners act as match stewards at football events. They support older people with activities such as boccia and walking football, and undertake football stamina coaching with very young children. Animal care learners provide a free grooming service for dog rescue charities. Performing arts learners arrange and perform at events which benefit local hospices and charities.

- Performing arts learners perform regularly in high-profile national and international competitions and other events. Learners have appeared, for example, at the Brit Awards, at a Cunard charity performance, in twice-yearly live cinema performances, and in pantomimes in Liverpool and Wales. They often perform in front of paying audiences in theatres, on television shows and at conventions. Two level 3 performing arts learners achieved recently the runner-up award in the 2019 BBC The Greatest Dancer competition. All performing arts learners take part annually in the international Move It convention in London, where they meet high-profile artists and develop a greater insight into the industry.
- Learners have a good understanding of British values. Tutors, including those in subcontracted and partnership provision, reinforce the development of these values through the enrichment 'honour award' programme, as well as within lessons and practical activities. For example, on a dog-grooming course, learners discussed articulately the implications of Brexit for animal welfare and its potential effects on the food chain. Other learners discussed the impact of 16-year-olds being too young to vote in the referendum on EU membership.
- Tutors provide effective and impartial careers information, advice and guidance for learners at the start of their programmes and throughout them. Tutors set targets with learners to help them to aspire to their chosen careers. They manage learners' expectations skilfully and ensure that learners have considered contingency plans should their original choice of career not materialise.
- Attendance at English and mathematics lessons is too low. Too many learners do not attend these lessons regularly, particularly GCSE English and mathematics classes. Attendance records often include 'authorised absences'. As a result, records and monitoring documents do not reflect actual attendance and mask the low attendance rates in English, mathematics and a small minority of vocational lessons.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The vast majority of learners achieve their vocational qualifications. Achievement rates have risen significantly over the past three years. Achievement rates are now high and have risen substantially in functional skills English and mathematics qualifications. Where performance has declined, leaders and managers have taken appropriate and effective action to rectify concerns, such as terminating subcontracting arrangements.
- Learners make good progress from their starting points. Just over half of leavers in 2017/18 achieved a merit grade or above. Most learners on performing arts courses achieved distinction grades or above. Learners benefit from achieving additional

qualifications that are related directly to their vocational programmes such as first-aid, canine first-aid, coaching and referee qualifications. Learners value these additional qualifications to enhance their future career prospects.

- Learners develop good practical skills in their vocational subjects. They work to high industry and professional standards. Most learners take pride in their written and practical work. They enjoy their learning. Many learners overcome significant barriers to learning and find vocational opportunities that they would otherwise have never thought possible.
- The vast majority of learners move on to higher education, further education, employment or an apprenticeship. A minority of learners set up their own businesses. In 2017/18, over four fifths of leavers progressed to a meaningful destination. Almost all of these related to the vocational programmes that they had achieved.
- There are no discernible differences in achievement between particular groups of learners. Learners who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and learners from different ethnic backgrounds achieve at the same levels as their peers.
- The achievement of standard pass grades in GCSE English and mathematics is very low. The impact of actions to improve achievement will not be evident until examination results are published later in the year.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54725
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–19
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	324
Principal/CEO	Ian Smith
Telephone number	0151 236 1748
Website	www.brighterfutures.uk.com

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+
	1	2	46	-	284	1	-	-
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			
	-		-		30			
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:	Merseyside Career Development Training Coaching Connexions SALT trading as Liverpool Football College							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, 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, employers and staff; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and scrutinised learners' work and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider and its subcontractors.

Inspection team

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