

Plymouth City Council

Local authority

Inspection dates

11–14 June 2019

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Senior leaders have not acted swiftly enough to address the recommendations from the last inspection. As a result, the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners have declined.
- Senior leaders have failed to implement effective governance of the whole provision. Their management of subcontracted provision has not been sufficiently strong.
- Not enough learners achieve their English and mathematics qualifications.
- Leaders and managers do not use available information well enough to evaluate the effectiveness of the courses they offer.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good across all aspects of the provision. Teachers do not provide sufficiently challenging activities for learners to enable them to make rapid progress.

The provider has the following strengths

- Managers have created strong partnership arrangements to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that attracts many learners who would not otherwise access learning.
- A high proportion of adult learners achieve their level 1 vocational qualifications.
- Many learners gain in confidence, access other courses, or find work because of the good support they receive from staff.
- Staff create a highly welcoming, safe, diverse and friendly environment. As a result, learners feel secure and enjoy their courses.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Plymouth City Council's (PCC) provision was previously known as Plymouth Adult and Community Learning Service. They have no direct delivery. Since 2014, PCC has subcontracted all its adult and community learning, mainly to On Course South West (OCSW) and to four other subcontractors. The adult provision is aimed primarily at learners who have not been in learning for some time, or who may need support to find employment. Learning centres are mostly based in areas of deprivation across the city.
- In addition, the YMCA provides study programmes at their Discovery College in Plymouth for a small number of learners aged between 16 and 19. OCSW manages a number of functions on behalf of PCC, such as data management and information to support the performance of the other subcontractors.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve the governance and oversight of the provision at a senior management level by:
 - conducting regular and frequent scrutiny of the quality of all of the provision to ensure that improvements are made rapidly
 - developing clear accountability measures and processes that ensure that managers at all levels are held to account for the performance of learners and the quality of provision
 - evaluating the impact of courses on learners to determine if the provision meets the needs of learners and the local community.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that they are of a consistently good quality by:
 - providing learners with more challenging activities so that they make more rapid progress from their starting points
 - monitoring closely the progress that learners make in developing skills and knowledge.
- Increase the proportion of learners who achieve their English and mathematics qualifications.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders and managers at PCC have not addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Strategies introduced by managers to improve attendance have not been effective. The quality of teaching in English and mathematics has not improved to a high enough standard. Learners' achievements in functional skills qualifications have declined over the last three years.
- Changes in the management teams at PCC and OCSW have not provided consistent oversight to ensure that management arrangements implemented around the time of the previous inspection worked effectively. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners have declined. To their credit, senior leaders have recognised these shortcomings and are planning a major restructure in the near future to rectify the issues.
- Managers' collation, analysis and evaluation of information available to them is not good enough. They are unable to determine fully what progress learners make, the proportions who move from one level of course to another or what most learners do when they complete their courses. Consequently, senior leaders do not have a thorough enough understanding of how well the provision meets their own clear strategic priorities for adult education.
- Leaders have developed an effective strategy to attract learners who live in the most deprived areas of Plymouth, or who may be less likely to enter other types of educational and training institutions. This strategy aligns well with those of other local government agencies and boards, and is aimed at reducing poverty and improving health and well-being. Managers and staff have developed a carefully considered curriculum to improve the lives of learners.
- Leaders and managers have established useful partnerships with a wide range of charity and voluntary organisations. These partnerships help PCC identify and work with those who may have barriers to learning. For example, Open Doors International Language School (ODILS) works well with adults who are seeking asylum in the UK to develop the English language skills they need.
- OCSW managers have good operational partnerships with the other subcontractors. They monitor a range of processes well, including subcontractors' self-assessment, improvement plans, observations of teaching and safeguarding. Managers' self-assessments are evaluative and identify clearly the necessary improvements. However, these are not used effectively by PCC senior leaders to make improvements to the quality of provision.

The governance of the provider

- Senior leaders do not scrutinise the work of OCSW or other subcontractors well enough. They do not provide sufficient support and challenge to managers to improve the quality of provision.
- Senior leaders acknowledge that governance arrangements have been weakened since the previous inspection. As result, they are in the process of establishing an adult

education advisory board to scrutinise performance more effectively and provide challenge to managers. At the time of the inspection the board had not yet met, therefore it is too early to evaluate its impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers have ensured that staff are well informed and designated safeguarding officers have completed appropriate training. They have developed appropriate policies, including for the 'Prevent' duty. There are appropriate checks in place for staff.
- Managers have good links with relevant external agencies such as local safeguarding boards. They deal with the few safeguarding incidents that occur appropriately and keep effective records. Learners feel safe and know how to report any concerns they may have.
- Most learners understand fundamental British values and have an awareness of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism because staff share their knowledge with them effectively. However, learners in the land-based sector have only a superficial understanding of these issues as staff do not discuss relevant topics with them in sufficient depth.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- At the time of the inspection there were 623 learners following courses with PCC. To date just over 2,000 learners have attended courses during 2018/19, almost all of them adults. Just over a third of adult learners attend community and family learning courses, and the large majority of adults follow courses at level 1 and below.
- Not enough teachers have high enough expectations of learners, including those who teach English and mathematics functional skills. Many teachers set learners work that is either too easy or does not help them to make rapid progress towards their goals. Teachers do not consistently make it clear to learners what they will be learning or why it is relevant.
- A small proportion of teachers do not provide sufficient support to learners. For example, they do not provide less-confident adult learners with sufficient opportunities to participate fully in class discussions or check their understanding of concepts well enough. Consequently, these learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Staff do not monitor effectively the progress learners make in developing skills and knowledge towards specific targets to help them achieve their potential. In community learning particularly, teachers do not use targets well enough to show learners how they can improve. On modern language and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, teachers check learners' skills development well and provide useful feedback on improving pronunciation.
- Managers' identification of learners' starting points at the beginning of their courses is too inconsistent. The quality and accuracy of this assessment vary too much between subcontractors and centres and the results are not recorded well. As a result, a small minority of learners do not make the progress of which they are capable or do not

develop the skills they need for their long-term goals.

- Most teachers have a good range of knowledge in the subjects they teach, and many are very enthusiastic. They create very effective relationships with learners, who enjoy the classes they attend.
- Teachers use a wide range of resources such as online videos, which learners access at home to practise their skills, for example in speaking Italian. Learners on sports-related study programmes at the YMCA benefit from high-quality gymnasium facilities, while those on forestry and arboriculture learn very effective practical skills on local land estates.
- Teachers use vocational and community learning courses to develop learners' relevant English and mathematics skills appropriately. For example, forestry and arboriculture learners use geometric principles for setting correct blade angles on chainsaws and classroom assistant learners use their improved English skills to help young pupils with their writing.
- Staff help learners develop appropriate skills to enter part- or full-time work, volunteering programmes and community projects. The Shekinah Mission, a subcontractor that works closely with people who are homeless or recovering from drug and alcohol issues, holds useful taster sessions in construction skills such as painting and decorating for people undergoing rehabilitation. Learners on these courses gain a health and safety qualification that they need to work on construction sites. Teachers on study programmes support learners well so that they make good progress towards achieving their qualifications and long-term ambitions.
- Staff use learners' varied cultural and religious backgrounds well to promote and celebrate diversity. For example, learners designed a presentation about the benefits of meditation on mental health using different religious perspectives.
- Managers at OCSW recently introduced online courses to support staff development in all subcontractors. This was particularly useful in helping volunteer staff at Shekinah Mission to improve their understanding of supporting and safeguarding learners who may be vulnerable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Staff do not ensure that learners receive high-quality information, advice and guidance at the beginning of, and during, their courses. As a result, not enough learners know what options are available to them, or how they might use subsequent courses to enhance their career or life choices. Consequently, a small minority of learners are on courses at too low a level or they attend purely for social reasons.
- Learners' attendance at many centres is too low and is too varied between subcontractors. Managers have put measures in place to improve attendance, but they have had limited impact.
- Learners behave well. They are proud of their work and the confidence they gain as a result of their courses and the good pastoral support from staff.
- Learners enjoy the social aspects of their courses and support each other well. They share their varied and wide cultural, spiritual and religious knowledge with other learners

and staff. Many become more active members of their communities, through taking part in activities such as volunteering. Others gain improved independent living skills or find employment. For example, learners from a variety of cultural backgrounds who improved their English skills now work in the educational sector. The Shekinah Mission has implemented a successful introduction to construction course that is attracting more women into the sector.

- Most learners are aware of the importance of healthy eating and improving their mental and physical health. For example, adult learners on an introduction to mindfulness course with OCSW improve their sleep patterns and manage pain more effectively. However, learners on land-based courses with Lyhner Training do not understand fully the occupational health issues that may have an impact on their employment in the sector.
- Younger learners on study programmes with the YMCA undertake useful vocational work experience. This helps them to understand working in the relevant sector and whether they wish to pursue a related career. Adult learners benefit from enrichment activities such as employer events and careers fairs that improve their awareness of the types of employment available to them.
- The very small number of learners with education, health and care plans are supported very well by staff to attain their goals. Learners improve their knowledge, skills and behaviours well and make good progress.
- The large majority of learners understand how radicalisation and extremism have an impact on their lives in Britain. Learners with the YMCA and Shekinah Mission are aware of how young people are drawn into crime, for example through drug trafficking. However, other subcontractors do not develop this wider awareness well enough.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The proportion of learners achieving their English and mathematics functional skills qualifications has continued to decline since the previous inspection and was too low for all age groups in 2017/18. The number of learners who have remained on their English and mathematics courses has improved this year and is high.
- Not enough adult learners who returned to do further courses went on to higher levels or courses that would help them achieve their ambitions. The proportion of adult learners who move on to further or higher education or employment has increased this year but is not high.
- The proportion of the small group of learners aged 16 to 19 on study programmes at the YMCA who achieved their qualifications in 2017/18 was too low. Learners currently on these study programmes are making good progress from their starting points and produce goods standard of work. Most have remained on their courses over the last two years. A few learners went on to university after achieving their level 3 qualifications in 2017/18.
- The proportion of adult learners who achieved their qualifications in 2017/18, mostly on short courses leading to awards at level 1 or below, was high with all subcontractors. Adult learners' work is mostly at an appropriate standard, although a small proportion do not produce work that fulfils their potential. The proportion of different groups of learners who achieve their qualifications, for example different genders, is broadly similar.

- A high proportion of adults on employability courses with OCSW have been successful in gaining employment, work placements, or voluntary roles in 2018/19. In a few cases, learners had been unemployed for a number of years. Learners with ODILS who are newly arrived refugees or immigrants, many of whom are illiterate in their first language, gain useful insight into living and working in the UK. Learners on forestry and arboriculture courses with Lyhner Training gain essential skills and qualifications that are needed to work in the land-based industry and most go on to work in the forestry sector.
- Learners who have previously been socially isolated at home, had poor educational experiences, or come to the UK from overseas as refugees, gain confidence, social, intercultural and English language skills. Many move on to other courses with PCC subcontractors that improve their language skills and/or understanding of employment.
- Families who home-educate their children benefit from attending courses at OCSW with their children in science, English and mathematics. Such courses provide parents and carers with useful activities and knowledge that they can use at home to help their children learn. For example, children and their families understand the difference between acidic, alkaline and neutral substances and the hazard symbols associated with household chemicals.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53927
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16–18,19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,946
Service Director	Judith Harwood
Telephone number	01752 307465
Website	www.plymouth.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	4	473	10	112	24	–	–	–
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	2							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	On Course South West YMCA Shekinah Mission Open Doors International Language School Lynher Training Mount Batten Centre Charity Trust							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of education, 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 sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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