

Inspection of Merton Adult Education

Inspection dates: 8–11 October 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Merton adult education provides adult education programmes. The courses are managed by a range of subcontractors, with three providing courses at the time of the inspection. The aims of the service are to improve social, economic and health outcomes for residents, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas of the borough. The borough is characterised by a difference between the more deprived east, Mitcham, and the more prosperous west, Wimbledon.

At the time of the inspection, there were 1,400 learners. Around two thirds were on community learning courses, with the rest on courses leading to qualifications. The main curriculum areas were: English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); GCSE and functional skills English and mathematics; arts and crafts and programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Courses are from entry level to level 2.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners gain a range of benefits from their courses. They enjoy the subjects they study. Those facing social isolation build their self-confidence and form new friendships while they study. Learners are taught valuable skills that help increase their self-esteem and play a more active role in the community. Learners who are not confident with English improve their speaking and comprehension.

Tutors create a positive work ethic among learners. It helps learners to develop the behaviours they need to go on to study at a higher level or increase their prospects of employment. Tutors help learners to recognise and overcome the barriers that hinder their learning. Consequently, learners can set and achieve clear personal goals.

Learners receive a range of advice and guidance that enable them to make the right career and study choices. Specialist careers advisers know what learners who have been out of work for some time need to help them seek employment. Tutors help learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families find the right next step for them.

Learners appreciate the high-quality accommodation at the community venues in which lessons take place. They make productive use of the resources at the various community settings. They like working quietly and respectfully together in relaxed and calm learning spaces. Learners feel safe and know who to approach should they have any concerns.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Tutors are experienced, knowledgeable and well qualified in their subjects. They have high expectations for their learners. Most plan their teaching in a logical order so that learners have a sound foundation on which to build their knowledge and skills. For example, functional skills tutors in mathematics build on the basics of numbers, moving on to more complex topics such as ratios. ESOL tutors use verbs in basic sentences before moving learners on to more complex sentences and different types of text.

Tutors help learners to retain their knowledge and skills well. For instance, ESOL tutors use frequent spelling practice and reciting of words and sentences so that learners improve their spoken and written English and use the correct verbs.

Tutors use assessments effectively to help learners improve their skills and use the new knowledge they gain. For example, they assess well what learners know and can do at the start of their courses. Tutors then help learners to address specific gaps in their knowledge. Tutors check learners' homework assiduously to make sure learners have gone over and practised new concepts and skills. They use frequent tests that help learners on GCSE courses secure their knowledge of English and mathematics.

Tutors get to know their learners well and create a nurturing culture where learners feel able to approach staff if they are struggling with their course or have any concerns about their welfare. Learners' attendance at classes is high. They arrive on time and are ready to learn. They keenly take part in their classes.

Leaders and managers ensure that learners benefit from high-quality courses. They pay close attention to planning a curriculum that meets the social, economic and health priorities of the borough. For example, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from courses such as cookery, information and communication technologies and gardening. Tutors teach these well and consequently learners improve their well-being and develop the skills they need for work and their personal lives.

Leaders and managers work well with local partners to shape and deliver the curriculum offer. They work with subcontractors who offer courses that meet their curricular ambitions. For example, specialist subcontractors are skilled at supporting adults who are unemployed or in low-skilled jobs. They are adept at helping them learn the skills and knowledge that they need to gain employment or move forward in their career.

Effective governance has resulted in leaders working well together to improve the quality of the curriculum. Most learners, wherever they study, benefit from high-quality teaching. It supports them well to achieve their goals and qualifications and move on to further study.

Staff make sure that learners understand the importance of British values to their lives and the wider world. They build these aspects well into their programme of study. For example, ESOL learners discussed the role of the Queen and the prime minister and the relationships with the president of the United States of America, when building on their speaking and reading skills.

Across the provision, leaders ensure that the curriculum extends beyond learners' courses. This adds value to the learners' experiences and helps them develop a greater breadth of understanding of their subject. For example, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are taught by staff how to use public transport and become more independent in their lives. Those studying creative arts visit exhibitions to help them recall critical artwork they have discussed in lessons. Learners on ESOL courses take part in activities such as charity events. This gives them a chance to practise and develop their language skills.

Leaders do not have a clear picture of the social, economic and health benefits of the courses for learners. They recognise this and are strengthening their information to help them better measure the impact.

ESOL tutors do not always check that learners have fully understood vital topics. As a result, they do not remember some important components from previous weeks and struggle at the beginning of their next class. A few learners on ESOL courses do not complete homework or understand the importance of this.

For a few learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, additional learning support in the classroom is not consistently effective. This hinders a few learners from engaging in the class, fully understanding the topic being taught and completing work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers place a suitable priority on safeguarding. Leaders are thorough in checking the safeguarding arrangements at subcontractors before working with them. They carry out frequent safeguarding reviews while working with them. Leaders and managers ensure that appropriate checks are in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with learners. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. When they need to act to safeguard learners and promote their welfare they do so promptly and effectively.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that ESOL tutors check that all learners understand key components of knowledge during classes. Between classes, get learners to practise going over the knowledge they have gained, so they can remember it.
- Improve the quality of learning support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that all learners can fully engage in classes, complete work and understand key topics.
- Gain a fuller picture of the impact of the curriculum on the outcomes that learners achieve. Ensure that leaders use this information to better understand the social, economic and health benefits to the community.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53325
Address	Merton Adult Education, Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX
Contact number	020 8545 3640
Website	https://www.merton.ac.uk
CEO	Ged Curran
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	13–16 November 2017
Main subcontractors	Merton College (South Thames Colleges Group) Richmond and Hillcroft Adult and Community College Global Solutions Services

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the service manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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