

Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority following publication of the inspection report on 15 July 2019 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

Stoke-on-Trent forms the largest part of the North Staffordshire conurbation. Around 30% of the households in Stoke-on-Trent have two or more indicators of disadvantage, which is higher than the national rate. Some 20% of households with dependent children do not have adults in employment. Approximately 13% of adults do not have any qualifications.

The employment, learning and skills section (the service) is part of learning services in the children and family services directorate. The service provides city-wide access to provision through adult and community learning programmes. Accredited adult learning programmes were the focus for this monitoring visit.

Themes

What progress have council leaders made in improving the quality of the adult learning provision through more effective oversight of the service?

Reasonable progress

Council leaders have been swift to establish a governing body with oversight for adult learning courses. Governors have the appropriate range of skills to hold senior managers to account for the quality of the provision. The membership includes relevant cabinet members and also external representatives. For example, the board includes a local college principal, and a local business leader. They challenge senior leaders to provide more information on the quality of teaching and learning and on learners' destinations.

Governors are clearly committed to improving the quality of the provision. They have supported significant changes to the management structure. The new managers challenge tutors to improve their performance. Governors support this new approach. Governors receive information about the performance of tutors. Managers provide additional training for tutors and end their contracts when they do not meet expected standards.

Governors meet monthly and receive accurate and timely information about adult learners' enrolments, achievement rates, retention and attendance. Governors ask questions about any unexpected variations and receive prompt responses from managers. For example, one governor was interested in the link between the assessment of learners' starting points and the numbers of learners staying on their courses, and this is something that managers have reviewed effectively.

Governors have an accurate understanding of the current quality of the adult learning provision. They review the quality improvement plan at each meeting and are aware of the progress that managers are making. Senior managers provide helpful briefing sessions for cabinet members whose responsibilities are closely linked to education, training and employment.

Governors have not yet reviewed the full breadth of performance against appropriate benchmarks. Following discussion with governors, managers are preparing a report to include information on learners' destinations and course satisfaction.

Governors and leaders should ensure that the attendance of governors and other invitees is consistently high, so that there is continuity, and impact, in their work.

What progress have senior leaders and managers made in using management information to improve the quality of adult learning programmes? Reasonable progress

Managers use a range of information about the performance of tutors well. They conduct lesson observations, review learners' work, and have regular individual meetings with tutors. They combine the information to provide an accurate picture of tutors' strengths and weaknesses. On the basis of this assessment, managers provide effective support and guidance with the help of newly appointed lead tutors.

Where the tutor's attendance is too low, managers are well supported by the human resources department. In a few cases, tutors leave the organisation.

Managers meet monthly to review attendance and retention data. Managers now look at weekly attendance data as well as cumulative data. Managers are responding swiftly and effectively to poor attendance. Learners' attendance is high and better than last year. Managers have used retention data well to review the curriculum. Managers extended the time for initial assessment for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. More learners now stay on the course.

Managers use the quality improvement plan to monitor the progress they are making in improving the quality of adult learning programmes. They address all the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Where appropriate, managers have identified precise numerical targets to supplement qualitative aspirations. Current achievement rates for adult learners are high and particularly strong in English and mathematics functional skills.

Managers do not yet monitor the progress that learners are making from their starting points. They are not aware of the proportion of learners, or particular groups of learners, who are making better or slower progress than expected. Managers cannot assess whether further management action is needed to address a broader issue.

Managers now track and report on learners' destinations. Managers need to refine the reports to demonstrate whether the successful completion of the course has helped the learner to move closer to their career or life goals.

What progress have tutors made in identifying adult learners' starting points accurately and using them effectively? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have introduced a new initial assessment process. Tutors now collect a broader range of information including learners' aspirations, prior attainment and qualifications. Tutors now add this information to the assessments in English and mathematics. As a result, leaders, managers and tutors have a much clearer and reliable understanding of learners' starting points.

Leaders and managers have enriched and extended the time for initial assessment. For example, in information technology, learners complete an introductory course which assesses their competency in word processing while developing their understanding of British values. As a result, tutors can gain a deeper understanding of learners' starting points prior to the start of their course.

Tutors are using starting points more effectively in placing learners on a course that is appropriate and challenging. For example, in information technology, tutors moved some learners to a higher-level course following introductory classes. These learners are motivated and remain on the course.

Most tutors use the range of information that is collected at the initial assessment to plan a range of learning activities and assessments which are linked to the interests of their learners.

For example, one tutor set targets for an aspiring hairdresser to develop their use of appropriate hairdressing terminology. Another tutor challenged a learner to give the correct change to support their job as a taxi driver. As a result, tutors prepare learners better for their next steps.

What progress have tutors made in ensuring that adult learners develop significant new knowledge, behaviour and skills? Reasonable progress

Most tutors have followed a programme of professional development and training. This has included external trainers and support from internal lead tutors. Tutors have acquired new techniques and approaches to curriculum design and teaching, learning and assessment.

For example, the mathematics tutors are putting into practice their understanding of 'mastery techniques'. Another mathematics tutor deploys 'flipped learning' whereby learners are asked to complete a reading task prior to the lesson, so that the tutor can spend lesson time exploring the more challenging aspects of the topic.

Learners in mathematics are able to discuss the new knowledge and skills that they have acquired. For example, one learner was able to explain how the 'Box Method' enabled them to decide more systematically on which factors to choose to solve a mathematics problem. Another learner was able to say how they had used their new understanding of 'area' and 'perimeter' to help their children with their homework. An aspiring nurse was able to describe how a greater accuracy in using percentages was going to help them with dispensing medicines.

Managers and tutors have adapted the English curriculum at entry level so that there is more focus on phonics and spelling techniques. Tutors now allow learners more time and opportunities to repeat and recall their learning. Learners remember more. Learners have improved their spelling through the use of the 'look, cover and spell' strategy. A learner in level 2 English is able to identify key linguistic features within a short scenario. This is something that they had not been able to do before the start of the course.

Managers are not yet able to demonstrate the impact of these changes on learners across the provision. Not all tutors have participated in the training. Managers are aware that they need to address both these issues.

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