

Inspection of Agincare Group Limited

Inspection dates: 14–17 January 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Agincare Group Limited is a privately-owned care provider based in Portland, Dorset. The company has approximately 3,500 employees delivering a wide range of domiciliary, live-in and residential care-related services to adult clients across 20 care homes in England. The company commenced delivery of its apprenticeship programme in May 2017. At a new provider monitoring visit undertaken in January 2019, inspectors judged that the company had made insufficient progress against two of the three themes evaluated.

At the time of inspection, the company had 78 apprentices in learning, all on standards-based apprenticeship programmes. Most apprentices are working towards an apprenticeship in adult care support worker level 2 or lead adult care worker at level 3. The remaining apprentices are working towards a range of qualifications in business administration and team leader supervisor at level 3 and health care practitioner at level 5. The provider directly delivers all training. There are no subcontractors.

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

Most apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours that they confidently apply in their work settings. As a result, they become more effective care workers and are better able to support their service users. Apprentices' learning is enhanced because of the regular training and support that they receive.

Apprentices, many of whom have been out of formal education settings for a long time, value the qualifications they are studying. They develop good relationships with teaching and learning coaches (TALCs) and feel valued by their employers. Many build confidence and resilience because of the curriculum they receive. Apprentices' understanding of specific client groups, such as the elderly and those with complex support needs, develops during their training.

The curriculum ensures that apprentices participate in charitable fundraising and community initiatives which contribute to their sense of well-being. Apprentices have a good understanding and awareness of British values and of the dangers posed to them and their colleagues by extremist ideologies.

Not enough apprentices make good progress while on their programmes. Changes in teaching staff have been disruptive to their learning. However, apprentices report improvements in the past few months as they have received more frequent contact with newly appointed TALCs.

Too many employers do not give apprentices enough time for off-the-job training to complete their studies. Shift patterns and job pressures mean that too many apprentices struggle to complete their learning within planned working hours.

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

Until recently, trainers and assessors focused too much on unchallenging tasks that apprentices needed to complete, rather than setting work that makes them think hard and gain a deeper awareness of what they are learning. The learning activities that trainers planned failed to improve apprentices' understanding and application of key theoretical concepts and principles. Over time, this has slowed apprentices' progress. Following the appointment of more-experienced and skilled TALCs, an increasing proportion of apprentices are now making more assured and rapid progress in their learning.

All apprentices undertake a detailed assessment of their starting points that includes English and mathematics, vocational skills and previous qualifications. However, apprentices, particularly those with extensive prior experience in the care sector, do not always find the allocated work sufficiently demanding. These apprentices do not reach their full potential or extend their learning.

A large majority of TALCs set work to develop knowledge and understanding of the health and social care sector. For example, they plan learning activities that

effectively develop apprentices' knowledge about the different care needs of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with differing levels of personalised support. However, too often, TALCs provide insufficiently clear or developmental feedback that enables apprentices to identify precisely what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work.

Most TALCs now set clear targets for apprentices' acquisition of new skills and knowledge. They use their good sector knowledge and appropriate range of learning and assessment methods to help apprentices to learn and remember more. As a result, apprentices develop and retain detailed knowledge that they apply to their workplace. TALCs know their apprentices well. They encourage them to share and reflect their learning and workplace experiences, so that they are well prepared and confident in responding professionally and with sensitivity to service users' needs as they arise.

The curriculum extends apprentices' knowledge and skills through a range of relevant additional training courses related to the care sector. Apprentices can develop higher levels of confidence and useful personal and social skills including improved communication skills, for example managing epilepsy; working with challenging behaviours; supporting clients with additional learning needs and caring for clients with dementia. As a result, apprentices who complete these extra courses become more skilled and responsive in meeting the varied and different needs of their service users.

Too many apprentices are not supported well enough with improving their English and mathematical skills. Available learning resources in these essential skills are not always well-matched to the individual needs of apprentices. For example, mathematical worksheets are often too general and lack appropriate explanation to enable apprentices to work independently. In addition, opportunities such as the availability of online English and mathematics coaching support are not promoted well enough to all apprentices.

Apprentices routinely show respect for one another, their customers and clients. They attend well and are punctual, especially domiciliary care workers who must work to a rigorous schedule when visiting clients at home at agreed times. Apprentices readily incorporate fundamental British values such as ensuring service users' dignity and safety into their day-to-day professional behaviour. They listen carefully to the stated preferences of clients and service users as to how their differing care needs can be best met.

Most apprentices who successfully complete their apprenticeship gain promotion and increased levels of responsibility at work. The few apprentices with declared additional needs progress and achieve well in line with their peers.

Leaders and employers do not ensure that all apprentices receive the time they need to complete their training whilst in the workplace. Too many apprentices are unable to access the planned study time that is an integral part of their programme. As a result, they struggle to complete their training at the expected pace. While recent

actions taken by leaders have increased the proportion of apprentices who are able to access their training at work, not all apprentices receive their full training entitlement.

Leaders and managers have developed a curriculum that is aligned to the needs of their parent company, as well as skills shortages in the care sector more generally. Staff liaise with employers to develop and deliver training that is tailored to employers' needs and focussed on supporting apprentices' career progression. However, whilst apprentices receive appropriate information and advice before they sign up to their course, they do not receive detailed next steps guidance as they near the end of the programme. As a result, too many apprentices are unclear on the wider care sector opportunities outside of their current employment role.

Governors have a range of skills and expertise that they use well to provide appropriate challenge and support to leaders. Since the monitoring visit, they have substantially increased their level of scrutiny and oversight of the apprenticeship programme. They now receive appropriately detailed management reports and ask pertinent questions of leaders and managers to understand key aspects of performance, such as the development of apprentices' vocational skills. However, it is too early to judge many of the impacts of these changes, some of which are very recent.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated lead for safeguarding is appropriately qualified and supported by two trained safeguarding officers. Safeguarding concerns are swiftly acted on and result in effective support for apprentices. Board members and leaders ensure that effective safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and that staff know how to use them well to protect apprentices and those for whom they care. A 'Prevent' duty action plan, risk assessment and policy are in place and have an appropriate focus on regional priorities.

Staff are appropriately trained and have established a culture in which apprentices feel well supported. Apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep safe online and using social media.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all apprentices receive their full entitlement of off-the-job training.
- Provide all apprentices with helpful careers advice and guidance which promote sector-wide career opportunities and support them well to achieve their career aspirations.
- Leaders and managers should continue to implement initiatives to improve the overall quality of provision so that the proportion of apprentices who make at least expected or better progress in their learning rapidly improves.

- Ensure that recently appointed TALCs' training and development focuses on helping them to improve the range and effectiveness of techniques they deploy to make sure all apprentices make rapid progress.
- Swiftly review the suitability of the resources used to support the development of English and mathematics to help apprentices learn more effectively. Ensure that all apprentices know how to access functional skills support provided as part of their programmes.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1276529
Address	Admiralty Buildings Castletown Portland DT5 1BB
Contact number	01305 777977
Website	https://www.agincare.com
Principal/CEO	Raina Summerson
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operations managers, 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 apprentices' work, seeking the views of apprentices, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Paul James, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lyn Bourne	Ofsted Inspector
Margaret Garai	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Hunter	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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