

Short inspection of Middlesbrough Council

Inspection dates:

11–12 February 2020

Outcome

Middlesbrough Council continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Middlesbrough Council delivers adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and education programmes for young people under the name of Middlesbrough Community Learning. The council works with six subcontractors to deliver community learning programmes and apprenticeships. At the time of inspection, there were 395 learners on adult learning programmes, of whom 187 were on community learning courses. The large majority of adult learners study courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) or courses leading to functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. There were 123 apprentices, just over half of whom were on standards-based programmes. Most apprentices are employed by the council and are on programmes from level 2 to level 5. Six learners were on traineeships and supported internships.

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

Learners and apprentices are highly motivated and have positive attitudes to their training. Managers and staff set high expectations of behaviour and conduct, resulting in a positive and peaceful learning environment.

Learners and apprentices flourish in an inclusive and supportive environment. Staff help learners and apprentices to build their confidence and self-esteem. For example, learners receive help to access transport and attend group support sessions with other learners to share experiences and build friendships.

Younger learners benefit from flexible programmes that enable them to explore potential career options. Staff quickly adapt training activities to meet learners' needs. Consequently, younger learners receive high-quality support and develop significant life skills and essential skills for work.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They are respectful of staff and value diversity when working with people from different cultures. Most learners and apprentices attend well; however, a few are not punctual to their lessons.

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

Leaders and managers implement an ambitious curriculum for learners and apprentices, many of whom are unemployed or have challenging personal circumstances. They make effective use of funding and innovative council projects to provide extensive support to learners and enhance learning beyond the classroom. For example, learners benefit from a focused work placement programme or extensive coaching to help them prepare for work. Leaders work successfully with subcontractors to enable them to provide courses that reduce isolation and enable adults to re-engage in learning.

Leaders and managers demonstrate strong capacity to improve the provision. Since the previous inspection, they have offered effective support to tutors and assessors to improve their teaching practice. Staff benefit from one-to-one coaching and peer mentoring to improve their approach to assessment. They work with colleagues to develop new curriculum content and lesson activities that they use successfully to check learners' and apprentices' understanding.

Tutors carefully plan the curriculum using their knowledge of learners' starting points. They sequence training effectively to build on the key knowledge that learners require in their chosen subjects or at work. As a result, learners make good progress in the development of new knowledge and skills. For example, learners on ESOL courses learn basic terminology to use in their everyday lives. Tutors then take learners to a cafe so that they can practise their spoken language skills when ordering food and drinks.

Tutors regularly check learners' understanding through the effective use of questioning. They use frequent recap activities that help learners to reinforce their learning. Tutors provide constructive feedback that helps to tackle learners' misunderstandings and strengthen their work. Consequently, learners are clear about the progress that they make and know what they need to do to improve.

Staff provide flexible and individualised support to learners and apprentices, including those who have high needs. Tutors deploy learning support assistants well in lessons and provide helpful one-to-one guidance in and outside of the classroom. Consequently, learners develop their independence and demonstrate confidence in the application of valuable life skills and skills for work.

Learners receive practical guidance about their next steps and have meaningful opportunities to explore their progression aims. Leaders and managers have invested in staff training to provide learners with access to specialist information, advice and guidance. However, advice and guidance for a few apprentices is not helpful enough to enable them to understand their options for career development.

Learners are well prepared for their next steps in learning, and the majority progress to positive destinations. However, progression to employment is low for adult

learners, and a few younger learners who leave the programme are not in education, employment or training.

Until recently, leaders and managers did not have sufficient oversight of the progress that apprentices make and, consequently, too few apprentices achieved their apprenticeship on time. They have taken sensible actions to address this, but it is too soon to see the impact of these actions. Assessors do not focus consistently well on the skills, knowledge and behaviours that apprentices gain or need to develop. They do not systematically include workplace managers in discussions about changes to apprentices' work tasks and the progress that apprentices make. Consequently, assessors are often unable to identify emerging priorities at work in order to plan and coordinate delivery of on- and off-the-job training activities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Managers and safeguarding staff deal with incidents effectively. They provide swift intervention and are very responsive to learners' and apprentices' needs. Leaders and managers work in collaboration with local agencies to provide specialist support to learners and apprentices who need it. Staff work very well with the police and social services to provide a vital role in monitoring learners who are at risk.

Leaders and managers are well informed about local risks. They use their knowledge to provide insightful training for staff. For example, in response to a recent local housing crisis, all staff were trained in managing community tensions so that they were better equipped to tackle local issues and prepare learners to manage their concerns.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the proportion of adult learners who progress to employment.
- Increase the proportion of apprentices who complete their programme on time by ensuring that assessment focuses on apprentices' development of knowledge, skills and behaviours and swiftly identifies what apprentices need to do to improve.
- Ensure that all apprentices receive clear guidance on how to develop their careers beyond their apprenticeship.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50168
Address	Middlesbrough Community Learning Service Lodore Grove Acklam Middlesbrough TS5 8PB
Contact number	01642 811403
Website	www.mcls.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Claire Kemp
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	26–29 January 2016
Main subcontractors	Ctees Darlington Borough Council JD Training Nur Fitness CIC Savvy Health, Hair and Beauty The Northern School of Art

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Middlesbrough Council was judged to be good in January 2016.

The inspection team was assisted by the head of service, 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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