

Inspection of Swindon Borough Council

Inspection dates: 11–13 March 2020

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

Information about this provider

Swindon Borough Council (SBC) delivers adult learning programmes across the Swindon area. The provider was last inspected in September 2017 and graded as requires improvement for overall effectiveness. SBC currently offers a range of programmes, the majority of which are from pre-entry level to level 1, and a minority are at level 2. Over the last three years, the council has reduced the number of its subcontractors from eight to three. SBC now directly delivers 70% of its own training. These subcontractors work with adults in the borough who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

SBC has focused on developing its employability curriculum and has almost doubled the number of learners on these programmes over the last two years.

At the time of inspection, 100 adult learners were enrolled on community learning programmes. The vast majority of these learners study courses which do not lead to formal qualifications. The courses are designed to help learners progress into further training or employment or improve their health and well-being. Courses offered include support for parenting, cookery, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), digital skills and programmes which help learners explore their work options. A small minority of learners gain qualifications in English, mathematics and employability skills.

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

Learners enjoy their learning and value the care they receive from staff. Learners returning to education feel at ease in sessions and develop new and positive relationships with staff and their peers.

Tutors are compassionate and sensitive. They encourage learners to talk positively about their personal experiences and challenges. This helps learners feel quickly accepted as part of the learning group. Learners are not afraid to make mistakes. They meet challenges with good humour and are optimistic about making the changes they want in their lives.

Many learners talk with pride about having been recognised for the high quality of their work and their efforts. This includes winning 'learner of the month' awards.

Learners benefit from attending courses in local community settings that are close to where they live. This helps them to overcome barriers they may experience if they need to travel far and strengthens their sense of being part of a local community.

Tutors adapt teaching to build on learners' personal interests. Learners appreciate the links that staff make to what they enjoy or hope for outside of training. As a result, learners consider their training to be highly relevant and of benefit to their lives now and in the future.

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

Leaders and managers have developed an ambitious curriculum which supports adult learners to improve their job prospects and play a more active role in their communities. Leaders have made good progress in improving the provision since the last inspection. They now use regular meetings to support staff in improving their teaching skills by sharing best practice and supporting them to try new ideas in their sessions.

Tutors take careful account of learners' needs. They take time to understand the challenges that learners face and adapt the curriculum accordingly. All learners have targets, which are based on their individual learning needs and goals. Targets for learners with mental health challenges are based on developing new ways of staying mentally and physically healthy.

Tutors skilfully and sensitively support learners, many of whom face significant challenges to their health and well-being. They look actively for opportunities to relate learning to learners' personal situations. They support them well to develop their own ways of overcoming any barriers to learning. This approach is helping learners overcome the various challenges they face. Tutors have established an exceptionally nurturing environment and focus on the development of the learners as individuals. Managers arrange highly successful schemes, such as a wide range of 'adult learner awards' and 'learner of the month', to celebrate learners' success.

Overall, learners are motivated and value the training they receive highly.

Managers plan courses carefully to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours learners will need in their future lives. Tutors teach learners to master complex skills by developing their basic level of knowledge and then adding more difficult concepts until learners become fluent. For example, in parenting classes learners develop their knowledge of praise and empathy before being taught about child attachment theory. On cookery courses, they learn techniques which lead to them preparing increasingly complicated meals. They improve their literacy through learning new words from recipes and identify cooking techniques such as dicing and sweating. They also work closely with other learners to prepare meals jointly. This helps them improve their communication and team-working skills. However, tutors are not using naturally occurring opportunities in sessions to develop learners' mathematics skills effectively or quickly enough.

Tutors use assessment successfully to help learners recognise the progress they are making. This contributes to their increasing levels of confidence and a sense of pride in their achievements. For example, tutors on employability programmes use questioning skilfully to help learners identify what they have learned and how they can use their new skills. As a result, they recognise that they are more able to communicate in a professional setting.

Tutors regularly repeat tasks to ensure that learners retain and consolidate their new knowledge. Sessions routinely include quizzes, in which learners are keen to demonstrate their new knowledge. Some tutors have developed enjoyable practical activities, which help learners remember what they did in previous sessions. For example, cookery learners select and curate photos of their cookery from the preceding week. This helps them remember what they did, why they did it and what were the most important elements of producing the meal.

Leaders and managers have cultivated a culture of tolerance. They have high expectations for learners' behaviour and conduct. They work with learners to help them recognise the positive behaviours that underpin their personal progression. As a result, learners' development of positive attitudes is exceptional. They learn to reflect on their actions and the impact they have on themselves and others. They develop as responsible, respectful and active citizens. As a result, they become better equipped for public life.

Learners benefit from high-quality careers advice. Tutors set targets with learners during their one-to-one reviews, which encourage learners to think deeply about their options after the programme. Over time, learners reflect on their targets and often change their plans as their knowledge and confidence grow. Tutors use the information they have about learners' previous life experiences well to help them make informed choices about what to do next. As a result, the vast majority of learners progress to employment, volunteering or further training, or they apply the skills they have learned to better engage in their communities.

Leaders' tracking and analysis of learners' progress inform the development of a curriculum that supports progression. Leaders effectively identify a small minority of programmes on which learners complete the training but do not progress to more challenging courses. For example, on craft programmes, too many learners simply re-enrol and do not progress onto other courses that could extend their skills and knowledge further. However, leaders recognise that tracking processes will require further development to remain effective, as their provision grows.

Senior members of the council provide effective governance. They have successfully challenged leaders to improve the quality of the curriculum and to plan carefully for the future. Governors understand the provision well and meet monthly to check the performance of the service. They ensure that leaders are given clear targets and areas to improve. However, they recognise that current governance arrangements could be strengthened, for example, by adding more external partners including business leaders and other education providers to provide additional local knowledge and expertise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers place a high priority on the safety of their learners. They use their extensive links with partners to gain local intelligence, which they share effectively with staff and learners.

Leaders' 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan consider local priorities well. Managers ensure that tutors focus on such aspects with their learners. As a result, learners understand how they could avoid being targets for extremist views or being unwittingly drawn into crime. They are aware of the potential threats they face and are better equipped to stay safe.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all learners develop their mathematics skills quickly.
- Ensure that the governance structure is strengthened by the appointment of external members.
- Ensure that all learners progress onto higher-level courses where they are able.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54719
Address	4th floor, Wat Tyler House West, Beckhampton Street Swindon Wiltshire SN1 2JH
Contact number	01793 466482
Website	https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20032/schools_and_education/402/adult_community_learning
Principal/CEO	David Haley
Provider type	Adult and community learning
Date of previous inspection	October 2017
Main subcontractors	Smiley Cats Ltd The Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority Madanu Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the commissioning manager, education and skills, 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.

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