

Plymouth County Council

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	53927
Name of lead inspector:	Steven Tucker, Her Majesty's Inspector
Inspection dates:	9–10 June 2021
Type of provider:	Local authority
Address:	Hyde Park House Mutley Plain Plymouth PL4 6LF

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Plymouth City Council (PCC) was inspected in June 2019. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

During periods of lockdown, learners continued their education online. Since the easing of restrictions in March 2021, leaders have reopened centres to provide some face-to-face lessons.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

Progress of learners on study programmes, including the implementation of the curriculum now that teaching is face to face

Reasonable progress

Study programmes for 16–18-year-old learners are provided by Discovery College on behalf of PCC. During the time that Discovery College was closed due to the pandemic, learners continued to make progress through online learning, as well as regular one-to-one contact with tutors. Even so, they were not able to take part in the wider range of activities that enrich their education. That has changed now they are back to face-to-face lessons. For example, business students can now develop their negotiation and collaborative skills in an outdoor team development activity. Childcare learners gain valuable practical skills by attending work placements. However, tutors have not ensured that health and social care learners have the same opportunities to put the theory they have learned into practice because they are still not able to work directly with clients.

Tutors ensure that learners know about the job opportunities that are available to them when they finish their course. They know their learners well and therefore are able to provide very precise advice to each one. Tutors are introducing extra support for learners during the summer term to prepare them to move on to their next stage of education. This includes mock interviews, guest speaker presentations and additional lessons on the skills learners need to make themselves employable.

Some learners remain on courses at the same level for two or three years. Leaders have not reviewed the curriculum sufficiently to find out whether they could help these learners to make progress to a higher level course more quickly.

Leadership of improvements to the range of courses offered and the quality of provision

Reasonable progress

PCC's leaders have responded well to the recommendations following the previous inspection in June 2019. They have established an adult education advisory board, which provides support and challenge to managers. Managers monitor the performance of subcontractors closely through rigorous termly meetings. They use a wide range of appropriate criteria for evaluating the quality of provision in each subcontractor. However, managers do not focus sufficiently on the content of the curriculum when reviewing the quality of courses or identifying the actions they need to take to make improvements.

Managers help subcontractors to improve their courses. They encourage subcontractors to work together to share good ideas and provide practical support to improve. For example, one subcontractor is reducing its reliance on paper records as a result of support from PCC staff to implement a digital system.

Leaders offer a range of courses that help learners in their first steps into employment. These include basic English courses that help speakers of English as an additional language become more independent and employable, basic construction courses that help those leaving prison to demonstrate their potential to employers, and courses that help learners with complex problems bring order and stability to their lives.

Leaders have built very strong links with local communities, as well as with groups working with vulnerable and disadvantaged residents in Plymouth. Their subcontractors are a very important factor in this success. These subcontractors have very good reputations built over many years of successfully helping local people. This has led to many learners finding their way into education and training through word-of-mouth recommendation and referrals from agencies such as the probation service and charities working with refugees and asylum seekers.

Leaders respond well if they are told about a need for new courses. For example, the local careers service advised PCC leaders about a specific need for digital courses, which leaders duly provided.

Leaders acknowledge that a small number of courses they currently offer are not fully aligned to the main purpose of PCC and they are reviewing these.

The extent to which courses bring about improvements to the lives of local people and help them develop their careers

Reasonable progress

Adult learners explain very clearly how their lives have been improved by studying a course with PCC. For example, people who had previously relied on interpreters or English-speaking friends to speak to a doctor or to go shopping can now do this independently. Others, whose aspirations to higher level studies were only held back by their poor English language skills, have now secured university places. Learners who believed that they would not find work on leaving prison are enthusiastic about

their future as a result of the bricklaying and plastering skills they have learned and the work placement with a local builder that tutors have arranged.

Leaders have established links with the local college and a Plymouth-wide strategic group. These partnerships aim to provide a progression route to higher level courses and to help local employers fill their job vacancies. The partnerships present a valuable opportunity to help the learners at PCC who are unemployed, or in low-paid or insecure employment, into higher levels of training and careers. However, it is too early to evaluate whether the partnerships are effective in achieving this.

Most learners know about the opportunities available to them once they complete their course. However, a few learners do not get the information, advice and guidance that they need to make informed decisions about their next steps.

In a small number of cases, staff in different agencies do not share relevant and useful information about learners. As a result, a few teachers cannot plan how best to meet the needs of individual learners in their lessons, and some managers do not know whether their courses have succeeded in helping learners gain employment.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021