

Clearline Recruitment Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Ann Monaghan, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Clearline Recruitment Ltd, trading as Next Step Apprenticeships, began to offer apprenticeships in November 2019. At the time of the visit, there were 126 apprentices studying on 19 different standards-based apprenticeships. Most apprentices are studying on level 2 and level 3 early years or level 3 business administration apprenticeships. The remainder are studying on a range of other apprenticeships, including accountancy, customer services and hospitality. Thirty apprentices are studying at level 2, 90 at level 3 and 6 at level 5. There are 23 apprentices aged 16-18 and 103 who are over the age of 19. Thirty-five apprentices are studying functional skills English qualifications and 43 are studying functional skills mathematics qualifications as part of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices work for small and medium sized employers, including a nursery chain, in the Brighton and wider Sussex area. At the time of the visit, most training took place remotely through videoconferencing software with some on-site visits to employers now taking place.

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

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers offer an increasing number of standards-based apprenticeships in response to local skills needs. They work productively with their local authorities and use their well-established relationships with a range of employers to plan and review the apprenticeships they offer. A senior manager from a local legal firm referred to the helpful advice and guidance given by Next Step Apprenticeships staff to choose the most suitable apprenticeship standards to meet the needs of their business. Employers are very

involved in the learning and development of their apprentices. They value the detailed and frequent communication with leaders and the skills coaches. This results in bespoke training plans for each apprentice. On- and off-the-job training is carefully aligned so that apprentices can put into practice their new learning quickly and confidently. On-the-job training is of high quality and motivates the apprentices to develop their skills with confidence.

Most skills coaches maintain their professional competence by spending time in their industry. For example, by continuing to run their own business or shadowing a manager in a nursery. However, not all skills coaches are teaching their apprentices the substantial knowledge, skills and behaviours that the apprentice is capable of learning. Instead they direct apprentices through a series of tasks for them to complete on their own. This results in limited off-the-job training for a few apprentices.

Leaders have a reasonable understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement for their provision. They have started to formally review the quality of their provision but there is more to do to make sure it is evidence based and focused on the impact on apprentices and their learning. For example, leaders do not focus sufficiently on the amount of new learning taking place when they observe training sessions and provide feedback to skills coaches.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Reasonable progress

Apprentices are highly motivated by the supportive approach of their skills coaches and the very close involvement of their employer in planning their training. Apprentices are able to apply their new learning quickly and contribute to their teams at work. For example, business administration apprentices apply their project planning skills skilfully and liaise with colleagues to ensure the project meets business needs.

Skills coaches use comprehensive assessments at the start of their training to identify apprentices' starting points and existing skills. They liaise with employers in detail to ensure that each apprentice can develop the substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to their roles during on-the-job training. Apprentices benefit from frequent review meetings where they reflect on their learning to date and discuss their progress with their skills coach and their employer. This helps them to have a very good understanding of what they have achieved and what they will learn next.

Apprentices benefit from good careers guidance at the start of their training, which is then reinforced throughout their programme. Many apprentices have ambitious plans to continue to develop their career. For example, early years apprentices who would like to specialise in supporting children with special educational needs and/or

disabilities or business administration apprentices who plan to move into para-legal work. Most apprentices have a good understanding of the requirements of their final assessments and what they need to do to achieve a distinction grade.

Apprentices complete scenario-based and sector relevant assessments. This helps them to apply their on- and off-the-job training coherently. Apprentices benefit from concise and informative feedback on their work and performance, which helps them to see what they have done well but also how they could improve further. However, a few apprentices do not benefit from this precision but instead their feedback merely affirms the completion of tasks.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have implemented a range of measures to keep apprentices safe. They have revised their safeguarding policy and processes to enhance their ability to monitor and mitigate risks. Leaders and managers are developing their links with local agencies to ensure they keep up to date with national guidance and with local risks.

Leaders and managers have ensured that all staff are appropriately trained to carry out their roles and keep apprentices safe. Skills coaches have a good understanding of how to keep their apprentices safe and they make frequent welfare checks. They are confident to discuss safeguarding concerns with their apprentices and make referrals as appropriate.

Most apprentices know how to keep themselves safe while learning online and at work. They know not to show photos or images that may show their address or location, and to keep their social media accounts private.

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