

Inspection of Newcastle upon Tyne City Council

Inspection dates: 12–15 October 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Newcastle City Learning (NCL) is part of Newcastle upon Tyne City Council's Education and Skills division located within the Children, Education and Skills directorate. It is among the small number of local authority adult learning services that offers education and training across all four main types of provision. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,747 adult learners, 75 apprentices, 34 learners aged from 16 to 19, and 27 learners with high needs. On adult learning programmes, learners on programmes in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) make up over a quarter of all learners.

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

Learners of all ages thrive in a learning culture that celebrates diversity. NCL offers courses for many of the city's most marginalised groups, such as asylum seekers, refugees, vulnerable adults and young people from difficult backgrounds. Staff promote and value the aspirations of all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds.

Young people like the way that they are treated as adults by all staff. They respond positively to the high standards that they are expected to observe in terms of their behaviour in classrooms and around the campus. As a result, levels of attendance and punctuality have improved significantly since the previous inspection.

Learners develop a practical understanding of core values such as the rule of law and tolerance of other people's views. Learners with high needs and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities agree their own ground rules for how they want to be treated by each other at the beginning of each course. They then ensure that these rules are upheld.

Learners aged from 16 to 19, learners with high needs and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities get opportunities to develop their physical health through exercise programmes on the campus playing fields. They also receive support developing safe and consensual relationships with their peers.

Learners and apprentices develop substantial new knowledge and skills while on programmes. For example, apprentices on the team leader standard use the concepts that they have learned about emotional intelligence to develop and foster good relationships at work. Despite being on the course for only a short time, adult learners in beauty therapy can carry out effective client consultations and use body massage techniques correctly.

Learners' standard of work improves over the time they are on programmes. For example, young people's written work shows steady improvement in their analysis of text, their structuring of essays and the accuracy of their spelling and punctuation.

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

Leaders and managers have successfully adapted the service's curriculum to reflect long-term changes in the local jobs market and the more short-term impact of the pandemic. For example, they have widened the vocational curriculum by introducing higher-level qualifications in subjects such as beauty therapy and through the creation of a care academy. The very recent partnership with a subcontractor specialising in digital coding provides progression opportunities into apprenticeships in this growing occupational sector in the city.

Across NCL's different types of provision, managers and teachers design and teach effective programmes that enable learners to acquire the skills and knowledge that

they need to progress in education, find employment and lead more independent lives. For example, ESOL programmes give learners the ability to communicate more fluently with potential employers, and with staff at housing and support agencies. Staff have designed education programmes to meet the needs of young people with challenging personal circumstances who have made limited progress at school.

Leaders and managers use high-needs funding appropriately to develop and provide challenging, personalised learning programmes that promote the progressive development of learners' knowledge, skills and behaviours. The programmes focus well on enhancing learners' employability skills and promoting their independence and autonomy.

Teachers across all programmes are well qualified and experienced in their subjects. Teachers of ESOL use their expertise to develop learners' fluency, pronunciation, and appreciation of a range of words, idioms and colloquialisms. Teachers on the team leader supervisor apprenticeship standard call on their occupational experience in the public sector to plan and deliver off-the-job training that is relevant to apprentices and employers.

Since the previous inspection, teachers have significantly improved the way they identify the starting points of learners and apprentices. Consequently, they plan and teach programmes that enable learners and apprentices to develop significant new knowledge and skills. ESOL teachers spend the first three weeks of the course carrying out a range of exercises to assess learners' English skills before agreeing a set of goals for each learner's language development. Teachers use information in education, health and care plans effectively to set personalised targets to develop the communication skills of learners with high needs.

Teachers plan and teach sessions in a considered way to build the knowledge and skills of learners and apprentices over time. On adult learning vocational programmes such as beauty therapy, teachers make sure that learners understand the requirements to keep clients safe before developing learners' communication skills and basic massage techniques. They then progress to supporting learners to acquire more complex and challenging knowledge and practical skills in body electrotherapy, facial electrotherapy, Indian head massage and microdermabrasion. On leadership and management apprenticeships, apprentices receive a grounding in the theories of team dynamics and group conflict before developing strategies on how to apply this conceptual knowledge at work.

Teachers use a range of effective techniques to ensure that learners and apprentices retain the knowledge that they have learned and can apply the practical skills that they develop. In ESOL, teachers provide opportunities for learners to practise and rehearse spoken English and encourage them to listen carefully and to respond in the correct register. Teachers help learners on education programmes for young people to improve their understanding of place value in mathematics by practising its application using a number of well-designed examples.

Learners benefit from constructive feedback that develops their understanding and builds their confidence. For example, teachers provide feedback to learners with high needs on the different strategies they can use on how to improve their pronunciation of unfamiliar words.

Managers and teachers recognise and record the achievement of learners with high needs accurately using a range of different mediums, including the use of photographic evidence and learner self-assessment. Success is celebrated through regular reviews, which ensure that learners with high needs fully understand the progress they are making over time.

Teachers do not push apprentices sufficiently to achieve at the very highest standard on their programmes. They do not make clear to apprentices or their employers the possibility of achieving a distinction grade at the end-point assessment. As a result, too many apprentices have the low ambition of gaining a pass grade rather than striving for a distinction grade.

A few staff do not consistently check the work produced by learners with high needs for spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, or provide these learners with information and guidance on how they can improve their writing skills further. As a result, a few learners with high needs continue to repeat the same mistakes in their writing.

Managers ensure that learners and apprentices receive impartial and independent careers advice at different stages of their learning programmes. Staff from the National Careers Service are based at NCL's two main campuses, alongside specialists in job-search and employability-skills training. Consequently, learners and apprentices have good access to advice about their career goals and how to achieve them.

Leaders and managers have successfully tackled most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. For example, teachers' identification of learners' starting points and the more effective use of assessment have resulted in learners making more substantial progress in their acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

Since the previous inspection, leaders' and managers' approach to the development of teaching staff's pedagogical skills and the management of learners' behaviour has become more effective. Leaders and managers have moved away from a 'one size fits all' model to one that identifies the developmental needs of individual teachers. As a result, there has been an improvement in the quality of teaching and the behaviour of learners in classrooms.

Leaders and managers have not invested sufficiently in the buildings on the main campus where adult learning takes place to provide learners with a comfortable and inspiring environment in which to learn. The fabric and décor of the building are shoddy, and the outside areas, such as the car park for staff and learners, are untidy and poorly maintained.

Advisory board members bring a good mix of experience and skills to their governance role. The chair and other members are qualified teachers with

experience of managing the quality of adult learning provision. A cabinet member sits on the board, demonstrating the high level of commitment that the council gives the service.

Board members hold service managers to account for the quality and performance of the provision. They provide challenge when needed. For example, they have made senior managers change the style of reports to the board to focus more on the impact of actions on learners and apprentices.

Board members are knowledgeable about the improvements that managers have implemented since the previous inspection. For example, they supported the introduction of a new approach to the assessment of teaching and learning to resolve one of the major weaknesses at the previous inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff and learners have a good understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism that they might be exposed to in the north east, such as right-wing activism and radicalisation through online recruitment. Staff are quick to identify and act on other risks that learners face in the community, such as involvement in county lines and forced marriage.

Staff have established relationships of trust with their learners, particularly those with high and special educational needs. This enables learners to disclose to their teachers sensitive issues about sexual abuse and harassment. Leaders and managers take swift and sensitive action to report these disclosures to the police and social care services, and to provide learners with ongoing pastoral support.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that teachers have high ambitions for apprentices and provide them with the guidance and teaching that they need to achieve distinction grades on their programmes.
- Ensure that teachers identify and correct errors in the standard of written English produced by learners with high needs, so that they can provide learners with feedback on how to improve the accuracy of their work.
- Invest in the internal and external fabric and facilities of the buildings used by adult learners so that they can enjoy a more comfortable and inspiring learning environment.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53504
Address	Westgate Community College West Road Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 9LU
Contact number	0191 2773504
Website	www.newcastlecitylearning.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Gillian Forrester
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	13–16 March 2018
Main subcontractor	Baltic Training Services Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the service manager, 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 visiting 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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