

# Inspection of Plymouth City Council

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 January 2022

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

## Information about this provider

Plymouth City Council (PCC) offers courses for adults and young people between 16 and 18 years of age. It does this through its adult learner service, On Course South West (OCSW), and six subcontractors. PCC aims to provide education and training to disadvantaged people that help them to be successful in their lives and their work. Each subcontractor specialises in working with a specific community or group of people. This includes ex-offenders, refugees and young people at risk of being not in education, employment or training. Learning centres are based in areas of deprivation across the city. OCSW was previously operated by an independent subcontractor, but was transferred back into direct PCC control in August 2019. This followed an inspection in June 2019, when inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

Nearly all the 4,000 learners that PCC teaches each year are adults. A small number of young people are on study programmes taught by the Discovery College. Of these, a very small number are learners with high needs.

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

PCC learners improve their prospects for employment, further education or personal fulfilment as a result of the courses they complete. This happens because staff at PCC and its subcontractors understand how to help the communities they serve and focus on the people most in need of the courses they teach. Leaders at PCC have taken great care to enter partnerships with organisations that work closely with vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Plymouth.

Learners receive high-quality and effective support that helps them overcome their barriers to being in education. Leaders at PCC work closely with outside agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus, housing associations, the probation service and community groups, to offer learners the specialist support that many need. Staff in the training and community centres used for hosting courses are welcoming and well practised in how to gain the confidence of people who are anxious about starting a course.

Learners are highly complimentary about how their training and education have a positive impact on them. They learn new knowledge and skills because their teachers have the high levels of subject knowledge and the ability to impart this knowledge effectively. Young people at Discovery College develop a positive attitude to their studies due to the small size of the college and the positive relationships they build with their teachers. Learners feel safe.

Learners of all ages receive useful careers advice and guidance. Adults receive this from teachers who understand the next steps available to learners. Young learners are well informed about their future options as a result of regular information from teachers, careers advisers and industry representatives.

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

Teachers plan and teach a curriculum that develops learners' skills and knowledge over time. Teachers identify what learners already know when they start their course, and any gaps they have in their prior knowledge. Teachers use this information to place learners on a course at an appropriate level and to adapt the curriculum when necessary. For example, teachers in health and social care at Discovery College use the first unit or topic on dementia to assess their learners' current knowledge. They use this information to implement a curriculum that builds on this foundation. Teachers have developed an effective way of assessing learners' existing knowledge on courses in English for speakers of other languages that ensures they place learners on the right level of course.

The curriculums in the various subjects focus well on the knowledge and skills learners need in order to achieve qualifications and progress to their next steps. For young people, their curriculum builds on their core vocational qualification well by including relevant work experience. For adult learners, the curriculum not only teaches the subject knowledge they need, but also, when necessary, the confidence to make changes to their lives and play a role in their community. For example,

learners make new friends, volunteer in their locality or share solutions to common problems they face in their lives. As a result, most learners achieve their qualifications and progress to further study and employment. However, for a small number of adult learners, the step from their course to the next level in another institution is too great. Adults who are studying courses that promote well-being do not get enough feedback from teachers on the impact of the course on their well-being.

Leaders support and value their teachers and managers. They provide most staff with valuable professional development that helps them to become better teachers. However, teachers in health and social care do not have enough opportunities to update their occupational competence.

Teachers are closely involved in decisions about how the provider contacts and engages people in its targeted communities. New staff are given a thorough induction and supported to familiarise themselves with their new role. They are encouraged to balance their work and life, for example by being encouraged to take decent lunchbreaks.

Leaders have dealt with the concerns that inspectors had raised in previous inspections. They have raised the standards of the courses, established effective governance and managed the return of OCSW to PCC well. They are resolutely focused on using their funding to focus on disadvantaged learners and communities and continually seek new opportunities to bring education to these groups. For example, by working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions, they learned about the difficulties facing people in Whitleigh who are unemployed. Leaders began providing employability courses in this area of the city. PCC now provides some of its adult courses at City College Plymouth, so that learners have opportunities and support to progress to higher level courses at the college.

PCC employees and education leaders on the adult education board, which provides OCSW's governance, use their experience and knowledge well to challenge and support leaders. Their extensive knowledge of Plymouth and its residents helps leaders when planning courses. Board members have supported leaders in their successful establishment of PCC as a valued and respected partner that contributes significantly to the educational and social well-being of people in Plymouth. However, the board does not have members who can fully represent the views and needs of local employers.

Leaders use funding for learners with high needs well to provide education and support that allow these learners to work successfully alongside their peers. Learners with high needs follow a curriculum that prepares them well to move on to higher level courses and employment. Learners with high needs develop their communication skills through effective support, work experience and a curriculum that builds on learners' prior knowledge well. Teachers track the progress that these learners make in their academic work and towards the targets they have in their education, health and care plans. However, they do not assess sufficiently the progress that these learners make in developing self-confidence and life skills.

Senior leaders at Discovery College are not monitoring all aspects of the study programmes closely enough. Consequently, some young people miss valuable parts of the personal development programme because leaders do not check that teachers are including this in their curriculum. A small number of college teachers are not using assessments effectively to help their young learners improve the standard of their work.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff employed by PCC, and those at subcontractors, with the training they need to keep their learners safe. Staff deal effectively with any concerns that their learners raise about their safety and welfare. As a result, learners feel that the support they receive helps them to stay on their course. Learners' concerns are reported and logged, but leaders do not analyse the reports to see whether they can learn anything that should inform their plans.

Leaders check on the suitability of staff to work with their learners. Where necessary, they also check learners with unspent convictions carefully and assess whether they pose any risk to other learners when deciding whether to enrol them.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Check that senior leaders at Discovery College monitor all aspects of the study programmes, so that all young learners are taught the personal development programme and teachers use assessments to help these learners improve the standard of their work.
- Ensure that local employers' views and needs are represented on the adult education board.
- In adult learning programmes, teach the personal skills that learners need on courses that aim to help learners progress to higher level courses at other institutions. Also, assess the impact that the well-being courses have on learners' well-being.
- Provide vocational teachers with the opportunity to update their vocational competence regularly.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	53927
<b>Address</b>	Floor 1 Hyde Park House Mutley Plain Plymouth PL4 6LF
<b>Contact number</b>	01752 660713
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.oncoursesouthwest.co.uk">www.oncoursesouthwest.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Tina Brinkworth (Head of skills and post-16)
<b>Provider type</b>	Local authority
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11 to 14 June 2019
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Open Doors International Language School Shekinah Sunflower Women's Centre Discovery College Greenlight Training Mount Batten Watersports and Activities Centre

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the strategic quality lead for adult 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 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

Steven Tucker, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Emma Barrett-Peel

Her Majesty's Inspector

Terri Williams

Ofsted Inspector

Lyn Bourne

Ofsted Inspector

Alun Maddocks

Ofsted Inspector

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](mailto: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/](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2022