

Inspection of North Northamptonshire Council

Inspection dates:

25–28 January 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

In March 2021, Northamptonshire was reorganised into two new unitary authorities: North and West Northamptonshire. North Northamptonshire Council provide learning across the county to residents of both authorities.

Currently 1,670 adult learners study courses in community learning. Fifty-nine levy-funded apprentices study business administration, leadership and management or health and social care. Thirteen young people study employability courses, previously managed by Kettering Borough Council.

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

Learners are very positive about their learning and how it supports their personal and professional development. The curriculum supports adult needs well. Those farthest away from the workplace progress to further training, voluntary work or employment. Tutors help newly recruited apprentices to understand the organisation where they work, its policies, values and culture. Dedicated tutors support young people, many of whom left school early, to participate in education again.

Most learners make substantial progress from their starting points. They gain a range of useful employability skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork and communication. Young people develop organisational and timekeeping skills over time. Apprentices contribute more effectively to their workplaces and progress in their careers.

Learners and apprentices benefit from managers working closely with employers and community groups to develop the curriculum. Specific regional needs are prioritised. For example, courses in family learning, well-being, confidence, resilience training and improving parenting skills. Managers work closely with local agencies, schools and colleges to identify those 16- to 18-year-olds who are at risk of dropping out of education. Courses start in November and May to reengage these vulnerable learners.

Tutors develop learners' confidence and character well. They build trust with learners and encourage them to recognise their potential. Tutors plan opportunities for apprentices and young people to practise challenging tasks, such as presenting to their peers. Adults in functional skills classes quickly gain mathematical skills that they apply in their everyday lives. As a result, learners quickly develop their self-belief and confidence levels.

Leaders and tutors create a positive and caring culture across the various settings in which learners study. Learners feel safe and appreciate that staff are highly supportive of them and want them to achieve. This helps learners who are often disenchanted with education to participate in learning.

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

Leaders and managers have selected and developed an appropriate curriculum for adults, apprentices and young people. Tutors sequence the curriculum coherently and logically. The Keeping Families Safe Online course starts with topics parents are likely to be familiar with, for example how to send emails, before they look at more complex aspects such as setting parental controls on applications and games. Parents build their learning in meaningful steps over time. Trainers work with apprentices' line managers to check that the curriculum meets apprentices' needs. They alter the order of units, so the topics better fit with the activities apprentices

undertake at work. On employability courses for young people, tutors take into account learners' individual needs when they plan the curriculum.

Managers are aware that the design and implementation of short introductory Get Ready courses is not helpful in preparing adult learners for the next steps with English and mathematics. They have not carefully selected course content or ensured it is suitable for learners' starting points. As a result, some learners find the course too easy and others too difficult.

Leaders and managers have established thorough systems to identify and support learners who have special education needs or disabilities. They offer substantial individual support to learners to ensure they can access the curriculum and make good progress.

Tutors are suitably qualified and experienced. They present information clearly and demonstrate practical skills well. Learners participate fully in lessons and practise building their knowledge and skills through well-designed activities. Tutors make sure lesson material is contextualised and relevant to learners. For example, learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses practise shopping routines and returning unwanted purchases. Most young people thrive in this supportive environment and make very good progress from their starting points. A very small minority of learners still struggle to commit and remain in learning.

Teachers use a range of techniques and strategies to help learners remember more and grasp new concepts. This includes targeted questioning, worksheets, quizzes, discussions and practical activities. In a few cases, tutors do not check fully that learners have understood key learning points, or they provide learners with the answers before first checking their understanding.

Most tutors use assessment well. Tutors build several assessment checkpoints into the curriculum, such as peer marking, questioning and practice papers, to ensure that learners have retained key information. Most tutors use the information gathered about learners' starting points effectively in order to plan lessons that meet learners' skills development needs. However, in a minority of cases, the learning goals agreed with adult learners are too general. They focus too much on overarching course objectives and not enough on the development of learners' skills. Consequently, not all learners make the swift progress that they should from their respective starting points.

Learners achieve well on most courses. Managers have identified and tackled historical weaknesses within apprenticeship provision. Apprentices now successfully complete their qualifications. Most secure full-time jobs at the end of their courses, and a small number go on to higher education. Adult learners are prepared well for their next steps and a large majority progress to higher level training or into employment.

Leaders and tutors set clear and suitable expectations for learners at the start of their studies. Where necessary, these expectations are revisited by tutors. Despite

this, attendance levels for adults on family learning courses and young people are too low.

Tutors use lessons to promote equality and diversity well and to celebrate difference. This helps broaden learners understanding of their communities. For example, when they practise speaking and listening, ESOL learners talk about their culture and background while sharing their national dish.

Tutors promote good mental and physical health. Most young people face personal challenges, such as poor eating or sleep patterns, so tutors work with them to set helpful targets on how to deal with these challenges. Adults attend courses on healthy eating, shopping and budgeting, and tackling food poverty. These courses help them and their families to live healthier lives.

Learners have access to suitable independent careers advice and guidance. This helps them to make decisions about their next steps. Leaders work closely with external agencies to provide adult learners with the help they need to progress into employment. Apprentices close to the end of their courses receive useful guidance, including options outside their current organisation.

Throughout a period of considerable change at the provider, leaders have kept a keen focus on the needs of learners and apprentices. As a result of this, performance across all provision types has been largely positive. Managers supported tutors well to move courses online during the national restrictions. They provided a wide range of helpful training events. Tutors benefit from professional development on the craft of teaching as well as subject-specific training.

Managers undertake an array of quality improvement activities, such as observation activities, which link appropriately into staff development. These are largely effective as a means of identifying what teachers do well, and what they need to improve. On a few occasions, observation reports are overly descriptive and do not focus enough on the experience of learners.

The governing body was formed recently, following significant structural changes at the council. Current representatives have a sound understanding of all aspects of the provision. Board members are visible and understand the value of meeting learners and apprentices face-to-face. They have a clear understanding of the challenges that learners face in the county. As the board is newly formed, they are still in the early stages of providing challenge to senior leaders on the quality of provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Designated safeguarding leads and deputies are well qualified for their roles. Managers follow safe recruitment practices and all tutors complete appropriate

training. There are suitable systems in place for recording and acting on safeguarding concerns.

Managers are vigilant when it comes to the safeguarding of young people. They use risk-assessments and input from external agencies well. Safeguarding is also covered for adult learners and apprentices. For example, apprentices complete initial training on radicalisation, extremism and staying safe online. Leaders use a variety of means to ensure that part-time adult learners are aware of key safeguarding information.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Managers and tutors should review and develop the curriculum content of the introductory Get Ready courses so that these better meet learners' needs and prepare them for their next steps with English and mathematics.
- Managers should support tutors to devise more useful, individualised learning goals with adult learners. Tutors should then use these to inform their teaching and help learners make more rapid progress.
- Managers and tutors should intervene more quickly to review the reasons why adult learners struggle to attend lessons and make timely interventions to support them to learn and achieve. They should continue to closely monitor the attendance of young people and make appropriate referrals to support them.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50178
Address	41 Meadow Road Kettering NN16 8TL
Contact number	01604 366 237
Website	northnorthants.gov.uk
Principal/CEO	Rob Bridge
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the adult learning 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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