

Inspection of Serco Limited

Inspection dates:

1 to 4 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Adult learning programmes

Good

Apprenticeships

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Since the previous full inspection in 2018, leaders and managers have changed the provision they offer. Serco Limited now works with education providers across the country to offer specialist apprenticeship provision. They also offer adult education funded by the West Midlands Combined Mayoral Authority to support adults in the region who are low paid or low skilled. There are no learners aged 16 to 18.

At the time of the inspection, there were 226 apprentices in learning with 26 on breaks in learning. One hundred and twenty-four were level 4 school business professional apprentices, 74 were studying the chartered manager degree apprenticeship and 26 were studying the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship. A few were studying the level 3 teaching assistant apprenticeship.

Serco Limited subcontracts almost all of its adult provision. Almost half of all adult learners were studying functional skills English and/or mathematics qualifications, with the rest studying a range of vocational qualifications. Sixty learners were studying either a level 2 or a level 3 care qualification, 36 were studying level 3 team leader and 36 were studying the level 3 business improvement techniques qualification. There are a few other vocational courses each with a few learners enrolled.

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

Apprentices and adult learners (learners) value the support and encouragement they receive from their coaches, facilitators, or tutors (teachers). This helps them to learn new knowledge and relevant skills that are helpful in their lives. Learners benefit from a range of strategies that teachers use to support them. The teachers know their learners well and they adapt the curriculum to meet their individual learning needs. Learners are confident that whenever they need help their teachers will respond promptly.

Adult learners are motivated and keen to succeed. They work hard and appreciate the opportunity to overcome the barriers they face so they can pursue their chosen careers. For example, two adult care learners who have worked in care for many years and brought up families are now enjoying their studies and looking forward to the new opportunities for promotion it will bring them.

Adult learners develop their confidence and self-belief alongside their new skills. They clearly articulate the changes that their learning brings to their lives. For example, as a result of improved writing skills, one learner who used to dread writing an incident report at work, can now do so confidently. Adult learners who speak English as an additional language referred to their increased proficiency to pronounce words correctly and how this helped to boost their self-esteem.

Apprentices benefit from very experienced and well qualified teachers. This helps them to develop substantial new knowledge, skills, and behaviours. Teachers use rich examples from their own experiences well to help apprentices contextualise and apply new knowledge to their own job roles. Apprentices add value to their workplace and gain the knowledge and the confidence to become effective school business professionals and managers.

Too many learners do not receive the planned and impartial careers information, advice and guidance that will enable them to make informed decisions about future career choices.

A minority of learners are not well informed at the start of their studies about the amount of work they need to do, or the pressures of studying while working when they start. A few report high levels of stress in balancing the demands of their role, work, and home lives.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for why they offer the provision they now do. They have developed their adult provision to offer the skills that adults need to be able to be successful when they apply for promotion or to move into a new career. For example, adults who currently work as hospital orderlies or health

care workers are studying English so that they can apply for roles as operating theatre practitioners or associate nurses.

Leaders and managers have a clear and ambitious vision to raise the profile of school business professionals in the sector. They have worked extensively with trailblazer groups and with school leaders to develop a niche and sector specific suite of apprenticeships which meets the needs of different schools across the country.

Apprentices' teaching staff are very well qualified and have significant experience in the school sector as recent headteachers, deputies or senior leaders. Apprentices benefit significantly from this as they can apply their learning to different types of school and different legal statuses of schools. For example, school business professional apprentices learned about fire safety legislation and how it applies to their school setting.

Teachers on the adult learning programmes are motivating, supportive and they plan their provision very flexibly to meet their different needs and circumstances of their learners. Adult learners very much value the support and help they get from their teachers. Teachers draw on the experiences of their learners to help them grasp new learning. For example, learners were able to better understand, and remember, the concept of onomatopoeia because of reference to their workplaces where, in a care setting, crockery may fall and 'crash' from the trolley serving clients.

However, only a minority of English and mathematics teachers hold specialist subject qualifications at a level higher than that they are teaching. This limits their ability to give detailed explanations to learners about the subject they are teaching. For example, English teachers cannot always explain the specifics of language features to learners and do not always teach topics such as regular and irregular verbs in an appropriate order.

Leaders have carefully planned and sequenced the apprenticeship curriculum so that apprentices gain new knowledge, skills and behaviours in an effective way that builds on their different starting points. As a result, the majority of apprentices develop into very capable school business professionals and leaders in their educational setting. They contribute significantly to the management team of their school. For example, an employer outlined how their apprentice's learning had contributed to financial savings and efficiency in their school.

Learners benefit from useful feedback from their teachers. It is precise and comprehensive so that learners are clear what is going well and what they need to do to improve. For example, as a result of feedback, apprentices studying a finance module better understood how to structure their work and how to incorporate case studies. Adult learners studying business improvement techniques understand the importance of wider reading before they complete assignments.

Leaders and managers have not adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of the few apprentices with additional learning needs. They do not provide adequate or

appropriate adjustments or implement adjustments in a timely way. For example, a chartered manager apprentice struggling with reading does not have the text to speech software they require. School business professional apprentices with dyslexia do not receive the support they require until near the end of their programme.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that teachers benefit from opportunities to update their teaching skills, especially when teaching remotely or online. While many teachers use effective strategies so that learners can participate and discuss their learning in a range of ways such as the use of break-out rooms and chat boxes, others do not. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not check learners' understanding sufficiently well.

Leaders and managers do not have an accurate oversight of the curriculum for adult learners or apprentices. For example, they have not ensured that learners benefit from an appropriate personal development programme so that they learn about risks relevant to the areas they live and work in. They do not monitor how off-the-job training is planned or happens. As a result, a minority of apprentices do not have a coherence to their studies, including too many deadlines at the same time which means that apprentices are too rushed when completing their assessments.

Leaders and managers do not have a good enough knowledge of the quality of their provision. Too often, they focus on compliance checks without developing an understanding of the day-to-day experiences of learners. For example, they do not routinely monitor learners' attendance or reasons for absence, those who are falling behind with work or reasons for learners leaving. This means their own self-assessment is overly positive and they are not identifying or implementing appropriate improvement actions in a timely way.

Governance or external scrutiny is relatively underdeveloped with the current board recognising that they would benefit from more external members to help them better challenge and support leaders and managers. Although they are aware of many of the current challenges, the information they receive does not help them to understand issues fully. For example, they consider papers outlining numbers of withdrawn learners, but they are not given sufficient information to help them understand the reasons why.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Teaching staff benefit from appropriate training which ensures they are alert to keeping their learners safe and know how to refer to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL).

Leaders and managers recognised the need to strengthen their focus on safeguarding and have recently appointed an additional qualified and experienced DSL. They have also recently started to work with relevant expert organisations to ensure they are better informed of the risks in different parts of the country.

However, they acknowledge that they need to do more to ensure that they have a detailed understanding of the risks facing their learners, as well as monitoring the support that their more-vulnerable learners receive.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers must implement rigorous arrangements to ensure that they can more effectively and frequently scrutinise and understand the quality of the adult and apprenticeship provision, setting actions for improvement when required.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that learners with additional learning needs receive the support they need in a timely way.
- Leaders and managers should implement a personal development programme so that learners have access to information beyond their specialist learning, including risks in their local areas and radicalisation.
- Leaders and managers should take appropriate steps to ensure that learners receive appropriate impartial careers information, advice, and guidance so that they know about their future options.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that all apprentices have sufficient time to complete their studies. They need to reduce the burden of completing assessments and other off-the-job learning in apprentices' own time.
- Leaders and managers should develop existing governance arrangements by ensuring that the information they provide to governors is more detailed and focused on the quality of education.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54333
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Head of Employment, Skills and Enterprise	Colm Croskery
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	6 to 9 March 2018
Main subcontractors	Central Building and Welding Academy Gateway Training Solutions Ltd Pathways First Ltd Transworld Publications Services Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Head of Education, 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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