

Inspection of Westcountry Schools Trust

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 July 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Westcountry Schools Trust is an education and training organisation based in Plymouth, Devon. It provides apprenticeships to apprentices working in schools, which are also part of the Trust.

At the time of this inspection, seven apprentices were studying the level 3 teaching assistant apprenticeship and five apprentices were studying the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship. A further three apprentices were studying other apprenticeships at level 3. All were standards-based apprenticeships. All apprentices were aged 19 and over.

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

Apprentices are supported well by their tutors and valued as members of staff in the schools where they work. They are enthusiastic about what they learn by example from more experienced work colleagues. Apprentices acquire new knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable them to become more effective employees. They grow in confidence and work well with children and with their peers.

Tutors do not mark apprentices' written work promptly or give them clear and precise feedback on what they need to do to improve. This hampers the progress of apprentices, who are nevertheless motivated and keen to complete their qualifications. Apprentices do not have a clear enough understanding of the progress they are making in learning the content of the curriculum.

Apprentices do not receive sufficient information, advice and guidance from staff before and during their apprenticeships. Some apprentices do not receive enough information about what the apprenticeship will entail. For example, some were unaware of a requirement to attend sessions on Saturdays for the Master's degree qualification they are studying and so are not forewarned of the impact on their family responsibilities. During the apprenticeship, apprentices do not routinely receive impartial information about careers and opportunities outside the Trust. Instead, they rely heavily on informal advice from their tutors.

Apprentices' attendance at training sessions outside their workplaces is good. Apprentices feel safe at work and in training.

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

Leaders have developed a curriculum that is aligned well to meet the needs of local employers and tackle skills shortages. Their apprenticeships are aimed suitably at enabling apprentices to secure roles and progress in the organisations where they work. For example, leaders have recognised and responded well to the growing requirement from schools to have qualified staff to coach and mentor children.

Apprentices receive their entitlement to both on- and off-the-job training and additional time to complete their studies. As a result of studying the curriculum, apprentices develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours. For example, teaching assistant apprentices know how to lead read and write groups with children and the learning development theories behind play and games. Senior leadership apprentices understand techniques about how to present effectively to senior school staff and governors. They know how to link theory to practices in their school, for example risk management and performance management of colleagues.

Leaders do not plan the curriculum content well enough to ensure that apprentices acquire an in-depth knowledge of many of the wider subjects, such as fundamental British values. They place too great a reliance on apprentices gaining further insights into these topics through their employers' professional development programmes. Leaders do

not ensure that employers are involved sufficiently in the planning and sequencing of training.

Tutors are well qualified and have suitable expertise in their vocational areas. They hold relevant undergraduate degrees in business, education and management. A few tutors also hold postgraduate degrees, for example in inclusive education.

Tutors do not have high enough aspirations for level 3 apprentices. Although apprentices' work meets the standards required by their apprenticeships, tutors do not encourage apprentices to practise, improve and master their skills in areas such as academic writing. Consequently, they do not prepare them well enough for moving on to studying higher level qualifications.

Tutors ensure apprentices studying at level 7 benefit by learning from each other. For example, apprentices attend sessions where they network with their peers and discuss assessments and projects that enhance what they know and can do. However, tutors do not provide the same opportunities for level 3 apprentices to discuss topics of mutual interest.

Tutors do not use the information they have about their apprentices' starting points to plan and identify strategies which help them to know how to improve their knowledge and use of English and mathematics.

Leaders and trustees do not focus enough on the quality of the education and training that their apprentices receive. Arrangements to evaluate and improve the quality of training are not yet effective. Leaders and trustees do not have the information they need to take swift and effective remedial action. As a result, leaders have been slow to remedy important weaknesses.

Trustees responsible for governance do not have sufficient understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship training or of leaders' progress in improving its quality. As a result, they do not challenge or hold leaders to account. However, leaders and trustees have recently reviewed governance arrangements to ensure clearer accountabilities and a stronger focus on the quality of training.

Apprentices studying at level 7 complete a good range of additional qualifications alongside their apprenticeships. These include Master's level study in strategic leadership and the national award for special educational needs coordination. As a result, apprentices are better prepared for future jobs, including specialist roles. A few higher-level apprentices have been promoted at work and given additional responsibilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff responsible for safeguarding are suitably qualified and experienced. They respond to concerns appropriately. They share knowledge with their peers and attend local

professional updating networks. As a result, they have a good understanding of current local safeguarding issues such as peer on peer abuse and sexual harassment. Leaders have the safeguarding information they need to ensure that apprentices are safe but do not organise this well. Leaders have recently implemented measures to strengthen their monitoring of safeguarding.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that the curriculum is planned and taught effectively so that apprentices gain an in-depth knowledge of all the content, including the wider subjects.
- Leaders must ensure that they involve employers in the planning and sequencing of their apprentice's training so that apprentices have better opportunities to apply what they are learning off the job in the workplace.
- Tutors should ensure that the marking of apprentices' work is prompt and that the feedback they provide is clear and precise so that apprentices know how to improve continually their work, and how much progress they are making in learning the curriculum.
- Leaders must ensure that tutors have high aspirations for level 3 apprentices. Tutors must encourage them to practise and master their skills so that they are prepared fully for moving on to studying higher-level qualifications.
- Leaders must ensure that tutors use the information they have about their apprentices' starting points to plan and implement strategies which help them to know how to improve their knowledge and use of English and mathematics.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices receive sufficient information, advice and guidance before and throughout their apprenticeships.
- Leaders must ensure that they and the trustees have the information they need about the quality of the apprenticeships to improve it. Trustees must hold leaders to account and provide the necessary support and challenge to help bring about significant improvements to the quality of training.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2497161
Address	Morley Meadow 51 Encombe Street Plymouth PL9 7GN
Contact number	01752891790
Website	www.westst.org.uk
Principal/CEO	Iain Grafton
Provider type	Independent training provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director 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.

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