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Inspection of Primary Goal Ltd

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 July 2022

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

Information about this provider

Primary Goal Ltd is a national training provider based in Solihull specialising in delivering digital apprenticeships. At the time of the inspection, 159 apprentices were on standards-based apprenticeships at levels 3 and 4. Of these, 55 study the level 3 digital support technician standard, with a further 37 apprentices enrolled on the level 3 infrastructure technician standard. Exactly 51 apprentices are enrolled on the level 3 information and communications technician standard, which has recently replaced the legacy level 3 infrastructure technician standard. The remaining apprentices are studying at level 4, with 16 apprentices enrolled on the level 4 network engineer standard. Most apprentices are aged 19 and above, with a few apprentices aged 18 and below. The provider does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Apprentices enjoy their learning and are motivated to achieve. They value highly the support of their trainers and work-based coaches. Apprentices benefit from a positive learning environment where employers are well involved. Employers and apprentices appreciate the significant, up-to-date understanding and expertise their trainers and work-based coaches have of the digital sector in which they work.

Apprentices undertaking the level 3 infrastructure technician standard who are in senior leadership or teaching roles in schools do not always get the time they need to complete their apprenticeship. Apprentices' time is focused on the day-to-day operations of working in a school. Apprentices do not get enough time to develop the full range of knowledge and skills they need to achieve as well as they could at their final assessments.

Apprentices do not receive sufficiently comprehensive careers advice and guidance. Apprentices know well the range of next steps available to them within their own employer. However, too many apprentices do not know the full range of options available to them on completion of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices feel safe. They know where to go to report any issues that they may have. Apprentices understand how to live a healthy lifestyle. Senior leaders prioritise the well-being of their apprentices. Apprentices have access to a wide range of support, including professional services to support their mental health.

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

Senior leaders have a clear focus for the curriculum that they offer. They have developed a largely ambitious curriculum to support employers to improve the digital skills of their employees. Senior leaders have positive relationships with employers and stakeholders. They work with large employers to utilise their apprenticeship levy funds to support smaller businesses to develop their workforce.

Leaders and trainers plan the curriculum in a logical way. For example, apprentices on the level 3 information and communications technician standard develop their understanding of 'binary', 'IP addresses' and devices such as 'routers' early in their apprenticeship. Apprentices are then supported to apply this understanding to more complex content such as working with a 'subnet mask'. However, for apprentices undertaking the level 3 digital support technician standard (application pathway), particularly those working in teaching roles, the curriculum has not been designed sufficiently well to provide these apprentices with the time they need to develop their knowledge and skills sufficiently well.

Trainers and work-based coaches identify what apprentices already know and can do when they start their programme. Apprentices undertake 'skills scans' at the beginning of their programme. However, where apprentices already have a range of pre-existing knowledge, skills and behaviours linked to digital skills, trainers and

work-based coaches do not explore this extensively enough. Where this is the case, particularly for those apprentices on the level 3 digital support technician standard (application pathway), a significant minority of apprentices do not develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, where apprentices are in senior leadership roles and already have significant experience in driving cultural change within an organisation, it is not clear how the apprenticeship helps them to develop further.

Trainers and work-based coaches on the level 3 information and communications technician standard use the information they gain from skills scans to plan learning systematically. Apprentices undertake a range of projects which are linked to the workplace well. On- and off-the-job training are planned carefully to make sure apprentices quickly apply their knowledge to practical activities in the workplace. However, trainers and work-based coaches on the level 3 digital support technician standard (application pathway), do not plan on- and off-the-job training sufficiently well. They do not plan carefully enough how those apprentices in teaching roles will have sufficient opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills across all areas of the standard. Apprentices are not being prepared well enough for their final assessments.

Trainers and work-based coaches are experts in their vocational areas. They use this understanding well to share content with apprentices clearly. Apprentices benefit from regular online teaching sessions, which help to build on their prior learning. Leaders have recently invested in a range of teaching resources. Trainers and work-based coaches use these resources well to help apprentices to apply theory to practice in teaching sessions through the use of 'virtual servers'.

Trainers and work-based coaches check routinely that apprentices understand key concepts at the end of each module. However, they do not always plan assessment sufficiently well to ensure that apprentices know specifically what they need to know for their final assessments. Trainers and work-based coaches do not support apprentices to understand the requirements of their final assessments early enough in their programme.

Trainers provide frequent and timely feedback to apprentices on their work. In some cases, the feedback they provide is precise and clear. Where this is the case, apprentices improve the quality of their work over time. The majority of apprentices' work is of a good standard. However, in a minority of cases, the feedback provided to apprentices on their work is cursory and lacks precision. Where this is the case, apprentices do not know what they need to do to improve their work.

Leaders, trainers and work-based coaches do not ensure that those apprentices who require functional skills English and mathematics qualifications receive sufficiently well-planned support. The development of apprentices' English and mathematics is not prioritised early enough in apprentices' programmes. Where apprentices already hold the required English and mathematics qualifications for their apprenticeship, trainers and work-based coaches do not identify well enough any gaps in knowledge apprentices have. As a result, apprentices are not supported well enough to close

any gaps in knowledge that they have.

Leaders support apprentices to develop their skills beyond the standard for their apprenticeship. For example, apprentices benefit from undertaking a range of vendor qualifications in areas such as cyber essentials and security. Leaders understand clearly the extent to which employers value such qualifications. As a result, leaders make sure apprentices benefit from completing these qualifications as part of their apprenticeship.

Leaders undertake a range of activities to help reassure themselves as to the quality of provision. For example, leaders complete observations of teaching and learning and routinely evaluate the quality of apprentices' work. However, these activities do not focus sufficiently well on the quality of teaching that apprentices receive. Leaders focus too much on what trainers and work-based coaches do, as opposed to focusing on whether apprentices know more and can do more as a result.

Leaders use the outcomes of quality improvement activities to plan some useful training for trainers and work-based coaches. For example, trainers benefit from targeted support so that they can use online resources and platforms well in their teaching. However, because quality improvement does not focus sufficiently well on the craft of teaching, leaders do not know well enough the support needs that trainers and work-based coaches have.

Those in governance roles have a range of skills and expertise which they use well to hold leaders to account. For example, board members frequently challenge senior leaders on the progress that apprentices are making towards their final assessments. However, board members do not yet receive sufficiently focused and timely information on the quality of teaching apprentices receive. As a result, board members are not able to hold senior leaders to account as well as they could.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders ensure a culture of vigilance to safeguard apprentices. Those responsible for safeguarding are appropriately trained. Senior leaders have in place a clear process for the reporting of any safeguarding concerns. Where any concerns are raised, they are promptly investigated. Leaders put in place timely and effective support for apprentices. Leaders take swift action, where needed, to support the welfare of apprentices. The safeguarding lead has positive links with local 'Prevent' duty leads to understand clearly the range of risks within the local area. Wider staff are provided with frequent and useful training so that they too understand such risks. Leaders take appropriate steps to ensure that they employ only those safe to work with apprentices. When senior leaders receive information at the recruitment stage that they need to act on, they do so decisively. Leaders have a clear understanding of the requirement to develop apprentices' understanding of sexual harassment and violence, including when online. Leaders are clear on the need to develop their curriculum so that apprentices understand these risks more securely.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Senior leaders must improve the quality of education for apprentices undertaking the level 3 digital support technician standard (application pathway). Where apprentices are in senior leadership or teaching roles within schools, the curriculum must be revisited to make sure that apprentices get sufficient opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need so that they achieve as well as they could at their final assessments.

- Senior leaders must urgently improve the information and support they provide to apprentices on the risks associated with harmful sexual behaviours so that apprentices understand these securely.

- Leaders must ensure that trainers' and skills coaches' analysis of what apprentices already know and can do when they start their programme is more rigorous so that where apprentices already have existing knowledge, skills and behaviours, teaching is planned more carefully to enable all apprentices to make rapid progress from their starting point.

- Leaders must ensure that all apprentices benefit from routine and precise feedback on their work, in order that apprentices can improve the standard of their work and produce work of a consistently high level.

- Leaders must prioritise the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills from the beginning of the apprenticeship. Leaders must ensure that apprentices receive the support they need to close any gaps in their knowledge.

- Leaders must ensure that all apprentices receive comprehensive careers advice so that apprentices know the full range of options available to them for their next steps.

- Leaders must improve their quality assurance processes so that they focus more sharply on the quality of education that apprentices receive. Leaders must provide this information to governors so that they can scrutinise more effectively the steps leaders are taking to ensure that all apprentices receive high-quality teaching.

Provider details

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Website   www.primarygoal.ac.uk

Principal/CEO   Louise Campton

Provider type   Independent learning provider

Date of previous inspection   Not previously inspected

Main subcontractors   None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, 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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