

Short inspection of West Berkshire Council

Inspection dates:

16 and 17 November 2022

Outcome

West Berkshire Council continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

West Berkshire Council receives an annual funding grant to provide community learning and skills to adults local to West Berkshire. They commission a broad range of internal partners and external subcontractors to provide this training.

At the time of the inspection, there were 540 learners enrolled. Most learners were on community learning programmes, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, many of which are delivered at family hubs across the district. A small number of learners were on accredited qualifications, including English and mathematics functional skills, taught at Newbury College and progression awards taught at Newbury Community Resource Centre.

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

Learners enjoy their training. They value the support they receive from tutors, which helps them to develop their confidence. Learners on the supporting children programme feel better able to help children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and now understand how to access help from support services. Learners with dementia benefit from creative arts courses, which support memory and recall effectively.

Most learners gain new knowledge and skills, helping them to achieve qualifications and personal learning goals. For example, learners on ESOL courses improve their spoken and written language skills rapidly. This enables them to get better jobs and to support their children with homework. The small number of learners who take qualifications continue to achieve these well.

Learners feel safe. They know how to raise concerns and feel confident that concerns they have will be listened to and acted on appropriately. Learners understand how to keep themselves safe in training sessions. For example, in

woodworking classes, they confidently describe health and safety considerations and understand how to operate sharp tools, such as saws, safely.

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

Leaders have a clear rationale for the courses they offer, which meet identified local needs well. They use carefully selected subcontractors to teach a wide range of courses that align well to the council's priority objectives: supporting families to improve their quality of life and address health and well-being issues. Courses support learners with mental health issues and those struggling to cope with everyday stresses and anxieties effectively. Learners who had little previous education or are refugees from their home countries study helpful courses to improve everyday English skills and gain employment.

Leaders and managers continue to work highly effectively with partners. Leaders place a strong emphasis on working with local organisations as training delivery partners, which ensures learners can access training across West Berkshire. Leaders and managers make good use of venues, such as parish council offices, libraries and primary schools, to break down barriers to learning. As a result, many learners from identified priority groups, such as those with a learning difficulty and the unemployed, successfully participate in learning close to their home.

Leaders and managers monitor the quality of education provided by subcontractors highly effectively. They monitor teaching closely and provide developmental feedback, which leads to improvements in teaching. Where they identify common themes, such as limited use of digitally enhanced learning, leaders provided training for all tutors, which helped them to improve their practice.

Staff set clear expectations about behaviour, attendance and attitude with learners from the start. Staff demonstrate strong levels of professional conduct, respect and sensitivity. As a result, learners quickly grow to exhibit these key behaviours. They treat each other with exceptional levels of respect and trust as they discuss highly sensitive topics, such as parenting styles. Attendance and engagement within courses are high, which supports learners to develop the skills and knowledge they need quickly.

Most tutors sequence teaching appropriately and logically so that learners build their knowledge and skills based on what they know and can do. For example, in an ESOL course, learners start with learning the alphabet and quickly progress to responding to basic questions. In entry level 2 English, learners take exams in reading before moving on to exams in speaking and listening, followed by writing. Consequently, learners can focus on one thing at a time.

Most tutors teach well-structured, highly effective lessons, which maintain learner engagement throughout. Tutors on accredited English courses use questioning well to test and reinforce learning. They wait appropriately for learners to process

questions before replying, and do not jump in too quickly. As a result, learners are quickly building up the skills and confidence they need to contribute to class discussions.

Learners develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours, which they apply confidently in their workplaces and their home lives. For example, parents adopt behaviour management techniques such as 'time-out' to calm children and stop temper tantrums from escalating. Learners with limited English language skills use translation software and QR codes to enable them to quickly understand key concepts.

Staff use of recognition and recording of progress and achievement is not consistent. In too many cases, where learners are on courses that do not lead to a qualification, recording of learner progress is underdeveloped. Consequently, learners are not always clear about the progress they are making or understand the transferrable skills they have developed by the end of the course. A very small number of learners do not feel that the course is preparing them well for their intended career goals and do not know how to achieve the steps toward these goals. Leaders have recognised this weakness and implemented training for subcontractors, but it is too early to see a positive impact.

Leaders and managers rightly recognise that teaching is not consistently good across the full scope of their provision. In the small number of instances where teaching is weaker, it provides limited challenge to learners. For example, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on the community furniture provision are not fully challenged, and their programme of study is not ambitious enough. As a result, they are not developing new knowledge and skills as rapidly as they could.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place, which make a positive contribution to keeping learners safe. They work closely with subcontractors to ensure compliance with policies.

Leaders ensure staff recruited by subcontractors are safe to work with vulnerable learners. They provide helpful training on safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty for tutors and robustly monitor attendance during updates. As a result, tutors are confident about embedding these topics into the training sessions.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that all learners are clear about the progress they are making and how to improve.

- Leaders and managers must ensure that teaching is consistently good and provides sufficient challenge to all learners.
- Leaders and managers should improve the information, advice and guidance provided to learners so that they better understand how the course is helping them work toward their intended career goals.

Provider details

Unique reference number	55307
Address	Council Offices Market Street Newbury RG14 5LD
Contact number	01635 551111
Website	www.westberks.gov.uk
Principal or equivalent	Rose Carberry
Provider type	Adult and Community Learning
Date of previous inspection	25 and 26 November 2015
Main subcontractors	Newbury College West Berkshire Training Consortium The Newbury Community Resource Centre Limited The Berkshire School of English Limited Recovery in Mind East Family Hub Creative Communities

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since West Berkshire Council was judged to be good in November 2015.

The inspection team was assisted by the post-16 advisor, 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

Viki Faulkner, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alun Maddocks

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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