

Short inspection of Tower Hamlets Idea Store Learning

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 January 2023

Outcome

Tower Hamlets Idea Store Learning continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Idea Store Learning is the community learning and skills service for the council of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Courses take place in a range of settings in the borough, with the two largest being in Whitechapel and Shadwell. Most learners live in Tower Hamlets, many in postcode areas identified as economically disadvantaged. All learners are 19 years and older.

At the time of the inspection, approximately 1,800 adults were enrolled on courses. About half of the provision is in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) at entry level and English and mathematics from entry level to level 2. A wide range of community learning courses is offered, including in digital skills, creative and performing arts, languages, health and fitness, well-being, and courses for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

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

Learners are taught by tutors who expertly adapt what they teach to reflect the context of learners' lives. For example, in digital skills classes for the parents of school children, learners are taught about the way their children use technology. Tutors make sure learners know how they and their children can stay safe online. Learners feel secure in each stage of learning a subject, as tutors make sure they understand the fundamentals of the subject before moving to the next stage. For example, learners studying fashion and textiles have a solid grounding in working from standard patterns. They then move on to more advanced skills, such as altering commercial patterns to fit different body shapes.

A high proportion of learners achieve their learning goals. Learners who study ESOL learn how to complete forms like job applications, using correct vocabulary and sentence construction. Learners who study creative and performance subjects learn new skills, improve their creativity, and see benefits to their well-being. For many

learners, their studies are a steppingstone to employment, such as learners who achieve qualifications in English and mathematics so that they can go on to train as teaching assistants. Most learners have a good understanding of what they can do once they complete their course.

Across different programmes, learners participate in a range of activities that extend beyond their subjects. For example, English and mathematics learners have a chance to talk to employers about local job opportunities. ESOL learners participate in 'Green Week', where they learn new vocabulary related to this topic and discuss climate change and sustainability issues with local councillors. Visual and creative students attend art exhibitions and have teaching sessions with local artists to further develop their practice.

Tutors create positive learning environments in which learners feel confident to take part in discussions and where they are treated with respect. Learners feel safe in the range of settings in which they are taught. They take pride in their achievements, which is reinforced by a strong culture of celebrating success created by staff. For example, visual arts students are motivated to produce high-quality work for their exhibitions.

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

Leaders and managers work effectively with partners in the council, and with other stakeholders, to make sure the courses they offer, and the content they teach, are relevant to the needs of residents and employers. This includes creative arts courses for learners with SEND and employability programmes set up to meet employers' immediate needs in sectors such as construction and care. They use their partnerships with schools to good effect to enable parents of primary school children to learn English, mathematics and digital skills. As a result, learners become more able to support their children and to participate more fully in their school life.

Tutors are very supportive of their learners. They know their learners well and are adept at putting them at ease and encouraging them to participate in practical tasks. They use a range of thoughtfully considered activities to involve learners and to ensure they retain the knowledge and skills they are taught. For example, visual and creative tutors recap prior learning about techniques used to create portraits with charcoal, and they demonstrate how to add tone to their images. Tutors provide good explanations and demonstrations so that learners are clear about what is expected of them. In contemporary dance, learners follow the precise demonstration from the tutor on techniques such as travelling across the stage. However, at times, ESOL tutors do not check well enough in lessons that learners apply correctly what they have learned. For example, they do not pay sufficient attention to learners' correct formation of sentences.

Tutors have good subject knowledge and teaching expertise and use effective strategies so that learners understand the topics they are being taught. Mathematics

tutors show learners how to answer mathematical questions using more than one method. They break down questions into small components to ensure all learners can answer them. ESOL tutors teach language structures, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling through situations that are relevant to learners' lives, such as finding work.

Tutors are not consistent across different programmes in their use of individual learning plans. Managers of visual and creative subjects have ensured that the way tutors assess and record learners' progress and achievement for non-accredited courses is rigorous and accurate. However, in English, mathematics and ESOL, tutors do not always set out clearly the steps learners need to take to achieve their goals. As a result, learners do not always receive the help they need to understand and meet their targets.

Leaders and managers have suitable arrangements in place to provide support for learners who need extra help. However, they are in the early stages of revising how they manage and provide the support they offer and recognise that in its reach and scope it is not quite sufficient to meet the demand among their learners.

Leaders use their quality assurance processes to good effect to evaluate the quality of education and to make continuous improvements. They have an effective way of evaluating the performance of staff. Where necessary, they use an action plan for further development, agreed with the staff member, which they link well to their appraisal process. Through their self-assessment process, leaders and managers evaluate each course and then each curriculum area accurately. They use this evaluation to create purposeful quality improvement plans with a clear focus on improving the things that will make a difference to learners.

Leaders provide good training for staff and have a positive culture regarding continuous professional development. For example, tutors attend weekly in-house training and are supported well to attend external training events and courses.

The demographic of the borough is evolving, with a relatively high proportion of young residents. Leaders continuously review the suitability of their courses to ensure they meet this evolving demographic. They know that, in creative subjects, they do not recruit many male learners or learners from ethnic minority groups. They also do not offer any courses leading to accredited qualifications in creative subjects, limiting the progression opportunities for some learners.

Leaders, managers and governors have good oversight of the service. The head of service provides those responsible for governance with the information they need to understand the service's strengths and areas for development, and to hold leaders to account. Those responsible for governance provide good support and value highly the contribution the service makes to the borough's strategic objectives. They evaluate the course offer in relation to these objectives, with a particular focus on fair access for learners regarding where courses are taught.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have suitable policies and procedures in place to safeguard learners. Staff, including the designated safeguarding lead and designated safeguarding officers, are suitably trained. All staff are checked to ensure they are safe to work with learners. Leaders maintain accurate and complete records of staff training.

Leaders, managers and staff are well informed about the specific risks that their learners may face. Where they see new risks, they ensure that staff have appropriate training. For example, staff have had training in domestic and emotional violence. Staff know when and how to raise concerns about learners who they consider to be at risk of harm. Where necessary, staff make appropriate onward referrals to external agencies. Leaders monitor at-risk learners closely.

Leaders use a 'Prevent' risk assessment and action plan that applies suitably to all council services. They have not identified sufficiently the risks and mitigations that apply within their own part of the service.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that tutors on ESOL programmes are more consistent in checking that learners apply correctly what they have been taught during lessons, such as their formation of sentences.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that ESOL, English and mathematics tutors are consistent in setting out clearly the steps learners need to take to achieve their goals and provide learners with the help they need to understand and meet their goals.
- Leaders should continue to adjust the curriculum offer to meet the needs of local residents. They should consider offering more accredited courses to help learners with further job or study options. They should ensure that the visual and creative industries courses more closely meet the needs of male learners and learners from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 53148 |
| Address | Idea Store - Whitechapel 321 Whitechapel Road London E1 1BU |
| Contact number | 02073645096 |
| Website | https://www.ideastore.co.uk/learning |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Faruk Miah |
| Provider type | Community Learning and Skills |
| Date of previous inspection | 18 and 19 November 2020 |
| Main subcontractors | N/A |

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the second short inspection carried out since Tower Hamlets Idea Store Learning was judged to be good in November 2013.

The inspection team was assisted by the programme manager for skills for life, 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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