

Inspection of Staffordshire County Council

Inspection dates: 31 January to 2 February 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Staffordshire County Council provides adult learning courses across Staffordshire. Four hundred and eleven learners were in learning at the time of the inspection. Adults study at one or more community-based centre. The provider works with 16 subcontractors to deliver this provision. At the time of the visit, 355 learners were completing non-accredited courses at one of the 16 subcontractors. Popular subjects include family learning, employability, supported learning and health and well-being. A further 56 learners were completing courses with the direct delivery unit directly with the provider. Most learners in this area study courses that lead to accredited qualifications in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and digital skills.

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

Learners benefit from teaching and support from well-qualified and experienced tutors, who use their knowledge and experience effectively to teach them the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to progress.

Learners value the flexibility that their courses offer. Many learners who are returning to education after a significant break can access local provision that supports them in returning to learning.

Learners gain significant benefits from their courses. Those studying ESOL, who previously felt isolated, feel more confident to communicate with their children's school or access their local doctor's surgery.

Learners benefit from well-developed links with local community organisations. Staff nurture effective links with a range of partners, including the local refugee action group. They support learners to get quick access to the critical services they need to support their wider lives.

Learners rightly feel safe when they study. They know how to report any concerns they may have. Learners are confident to discuss with tutors any challenges they are facing in their wider lives. Leaders and tutors know their communities very well. They use this knowledge to direct learners to further local services, such as accessing 'bounce and rhyme' classes for new parents to support their well-being.

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

Leaders successfully work with a range of subcontractors to shape their curriculum. They ensure that curriculum planning takes account of relevant local council priorities. Leaders prioritise their provision to take place in areas of high deprivation. As a result, leaders positively support the focus for economic prosperity across the communities in which they work.

Leaders work closely with key stakeholders to select the content of their curriculum. On simply play for babies courses, leaders work closely with the early help team within the local authority to identify those learners who would most benefit from accessing this provision. Consequently, learners access meaningful content to support their understanding of child development, which improves their confidence as new parents.

Leaders and tutors plan the curriculum carefully so that it builds on learners' knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. In ESOL, tutors support learners effectively to write simple sentences that are grammatically correct. Learners develop their understanding of writing more complex sentences with the use of conjunctives or prepositions.

In most cases, tutors clearly identify what learners already know and can do when they start their course. On confidence through creativity courses, learners undertake a useful skills scan to help tutors identify their existing knowledge, skills and experience. Most tutors use this information to plan learning diligently so that learners can access an ambitious and challenging curriculum. However, in a few cases, where learners already have existing knowledge, skills and experience in their area of study, tutors do not explore this thoroughly enough. Where this is the case, tutors do not encourage learners to develop learning goals to support them to make the progress of which they are capable.

Tutors share new content with learners clearly. Tutors on simply play for babies courses use practical demonstrations well when sharing content on the crude palmer grasp, pincer grip and tripod grip of babies. This supports learners to develop new knowledge and be able to identify these development stages in their own children.

Tutors provide helpful opportunities for learners to recap and revisit their learning. Tutors in ESOL use beneficial questioning at the beginning of sessions to support learners to recall previous learning. This helps learners to secure new learning. Learners develop fluency in their writing skills.

Tutors provide regular opportunities for learners to apply theory to practice. On simply play for babies courses, tutors provide creative activities for learners to undertake at home to help apply theory to practice. This supports learners to make progress over time.

In most cases, tutors use assessment well to check learning. Tutors use quizzes effectively, such as 'spot the hazard', to check learners' understanding of content linked to providing a safe environment for babies. This information is used effectively by most tutors to help close any gaps in learners' knowledge and skills. However, in a few cases, the processes for the recognising and recording of progress and achievement are not rigorous enough. Where this is the case, the progress that learners make throughout their course is not clear.

Tutors do not always support learners to develop their English and mathematics skills. On confidence through creativity courses, not all tutors reinforce the correct use of written English in learners' work. Where this is the case, learners continue to make the same errors in their work.

Most learners develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. Learners on ESOL programmes improve their written and spoken English. Learners on confidence through creativity courses rapidly improve their confidence. Learners are well prepared for their next steps in employment, education or further training.

Tutors support learners to develop positive attitudes to their learning. Tutors on confidence through creativity courses support learners to recognise the benefits of learning to improve their wider lives. Most learners attend their courses, which supports them to learn.

Tutors create a positive environment for learning that harnesses respect. On simply play for babies courses, learners quickly feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings with their peers. This supports them to share new ideas, which helps them to develop new knowledge further.

Managers and tutors evaluate the quality of individual courses effectively through a well-designed quality review process. The use of learners' feedback enables managers to routinely monitor the impact of programmes in meeting identified needs and, where necessary, to take swift action to improve provision where it is not in line with the high expectations set by leaders.

Leaders set realistic and challenging key performance indicators for the teaching of community learning programmes. This includes effective oversight and contract monitoring of all provision, including that delivered by subcontractors. Managers hold termly meetings with subcontractors that provide a consistent approach to course oversight, quality assurance and quality improvement. A few actions set to support quality improvement are not sufficiently clear and effective. Where this is the case, the pace of improvement is slow.

Managers ensure that tutors receive helpful advice on how to improve their teaching. Leaders have recently introduced a mentoring programme, including communities of practice, to help support the sharing of best practice. This enables tutors to reflect on and improve their teaching practice for the benefit of their learners.

Governors are ambitious for the service. They have a wide range of knowledge and expertise, which they use well to hold senior leaders to account. This supports leaders to continually reflect on their provision and to take further steps to improve it.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have high regard for the safety of learners. All staff receive regular and useful safeguarding training. Clear policies and procedures are in place for the reporting of any safeguarding concerns. Where concerns are raised, designated safeguarding leads respond quickly and appropriately, including within subcontractors. Leaders undertake appropriate safer recruitment checks on staff. Leaders work closely with organisations to help inform their understanding of local risks. They help learners to improve their understanding of risks. Managers rightly risk assess all community venues they use to ensure the safety of learners.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that where learners already have existing knowledge, skills and experience in their areas of study, tutors encourage these learners to set challenging learning goals so that they can make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders should ensure that the process for recognising and recording progress and achievement is rigorous across all curriculum areas so that it is always clear as to the progress that learners make.
- Leaders should ensure that all learners are routinely supported to develop their English and mathematics skills, enabling them to use these skills to support their wider lives and prepare them well for their next steps.
- Leaders should ensure that all improvement actions are clear and precise, supporting rapid improvement in the few areas that require it.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54584
Address	Staffordshire Place, 1 Tipping St Stafford Staffordshire ST16 2DH
Contact number	01785 895984
Website	www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Amanda Darlington
Provider type	Community learning and skills - Local authority
Date of previous inspection	19 November 2012
Main subcontractors	Acorn Training Chase Aqua Rural Enterprise CIC Communities Forest Services Ltd Growing Rural Enterprise Ltd Staffordshire Care Farming Upper Moreton Rural Activities CIC Dyslexia Association Gartmore Riding School Liberty Jamboree Pulse for Music Staffordshire Venture Chase Terrance Academy Two Gates School Victoria Community School Families First

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of adult learning and skills, 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

Ian Higgins, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jaswant Mann	Ofsted Inspector
Victor Reid	His Majesty's Inspector
Joel Dalhouse	His Majesty's Inspector

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