

# Inspection of The Tess Group

Inspection dates:

14 to 17 February 2023

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Apprenticeships

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

## Information about this provider

The Tess Group provides training to apprentices and adult learners. It became an approved apprenticeship training provider in 2017. Prior to that, it provided apprenticeship courses funded through subcontracting arrangements. Adult learning programmes are funded through advanced learner loans.

The Tess Group currently provides training to around 230 apprentices, with the largest number being L3 team leaders/supervisors, L5 operations/departmental managers, L4 associate project managers and L5 coaching professionals. Apprentices complete almost all of their training online. Although The Tess Group continues to provide adult learning programmes, there were no courses taking place during the inspection.

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

Learners and apprentices are positive about their learning. They rightly value the good relationships that they have with their trainers and skills coaches. They are polite and attentive in lessons and the vast majority complete work on time. Those who fall behind are encouraged and supported, and this means that they usually catch up. Learners are keen to make progress and understand the value of training in helping them to prepare for their future careers.

Learners and apprentices are generally satisfied with the standard of training that they receive even though, in too many cases, it is not planned well enough.

Apprentices benefit from courses that are broadly aligned with the requirements of their employers. Consequently, most remain in their jobs at the end of their studies.

Learners and apprentices grow in confidence as they develop their knowledge and skills. However, they do not participate in well-planned activities that might help them to manage their own mental health and become more resilient to setbacks.

Learners feel safe when attending online lessons and in the workplace. They are aware of the process for reporting any concerns and feel confident that staff would deal with them appropriately.

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

Leaders and managers have selected suitable courses that, in broad terms, provide apprentices with the knowledge and skills that they need for their roles. However, the curriculum for a small number of apprentices is less well matched to their job roles.

Managers and trainers do not always plan apprenticeship courses well enough. In the weaker subjects, such as apprenticeships for team leaders, cultural learning and participation officers, and business administrators, staff do not define in enough detail what it is that apprentices should learn or how topics should be taught. Although trainers who teach adult courses organise material appropriately, their expectations of what learners should achieve are not always high enough.

Leaders and managers have not implemented suitable processes for identifying and supporting learners who have additional needs. Staff do not develop useful support plans for them. Trainers and skills coaches do not receive training on how to support learners who have special educational needs, and this limits their ability to give learners the help that they require.

Trainers and skills coaches have good subject knowledge and suitable occupational experience. They use their expertise well to engage apprentices' interest and enliven lessons. They have good teaching skills, including those needed to teach via videoconferencing. In lessons, they present information clearly, answer questions

effectively and explain how theories can be applied in the workplace. However, they rely too much on apprentices completing their own independent research and, because of this, a few apprentices do not develop the depth of knowledge that they should.

Within lessons, trainers make suitable use of questioning and small work-related tasks to ensure that learners understand topics. However, they do not make enough use of assessment to help learners and apprentices to practise what they are taught, either in lessons or in the workplace. A small number of trainers do not relate assessment activities closely enough to course content or apprentices' work roles and occasionally provide activities that are too simplistic to be of value.

Managers have not made satisfactory arrangements to teach apprentices who need to take functional skills qualifications. As a result, a few apprentices do not make enough progress in learning these essential skills. For a minority of apprentices, this means that they struggle to complete their apprenticeship.

Most apprentices develop new vocational skills, knowledge and behaviours that help them in their job roles. However, this is often because of the learning they complete in the workplace, rather than as the result of a carefully constructed and taught curriculum.

Apprenticeship achievement rates have risen steadily but continue to vary considerably between courses. A minority of current apprentices are making slower than expected progress.

Apprentices usually produce work of the standard expected. However, a small number of apprentices do not demonstrate the depth of understanding that they ought. A minority of apprentices write poorly and although trainers highlight errors, this often does not lead to improvements.

At the beginning of courses, trainers and skills coaches establish clear expectations regarding learners' conduct, attendance and punctuality. They reinforce these during lessons and coaching sessions. Consequently, learners' attendance and punctuality are good and learning sessions are calm and productive. On the very rare occasions when learners' conduct does not meet expectations, staff take immediate and effective action to resolve the problem.

Staff introduce learners and apprentices to the principles of British values at the beginning of courses. However, they have not developed a curriculum that helps learners to develop a deeper understanding of the values that underpin liberal democracy. Consequently, apprentices and learners do not develop a secure understanding of these themes.

Most staff have completed mental health first-aid training, and provide support for learners and apprentices who need it. Skills coaches discuss mental well-being during meetings with apprentices. However, while staff have undergone training in

topics like sexual consent, domestic violence and forced marriage, they rarely discuss these themes with learners.

Too many apprentices do not receive well-planned, impartial careers guidance. As a result, apprentices are not always aware of the opportunities available to them and do not feel confident about securing career progression at the end of their studies. However, a few apprentices receive detailed advice and guidance, particularly in relation to gaining promotion with their current employer.

Leaders and managers review the quality of provision through lesson observations, sampling of learners' work and standardisation meetings. However, they do not act systematically to resolve any weaknesses that they identify. While managers have access to a range of performance data, they do not use it well when making decisions.

Governors do not receive enough of the right information that they need to provide effective challenge to leaders. They are not fully aware of areas of weakness. For example, governors have little idea of how well apprentices perform in functional skills examinations.

Leaders and managers carefully consider the well-being of staff. They take account of the whole range of responsibilities staff members have and balance workloads accordingly. They ensure that staff receive time to attend important events with family members, such as school sports days.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have implemented a range of suitable procedures to help to keep learners and apprentices safe. They have appointed a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and a deputy, both of whom are appropriately trained. All other staff undertake a range of safeguarding training that extends beyond the basics. The DSL supplements this training with frequent updates. Managers undertake safer recruitment training and carry out appropriate pre-employment checks for all new members of staff. The DSL and deputy DSL take appropriate actions to deal with safeguarding incidents and disclosures, and maintain accurate safeguarding records. Where necessary, they involve external agencies.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders and managers should review the planning of all courses so that they identify, in detail, the topics to be learned and the means by which they will be taught. Plans should include frequent, appropriate and demanding assessment activities that allow apprentices to practise what they learn and master new skills and knowledge.

- Leaders and managers should strengthen arrangements for identifying learners' and apprentices' additional needs and providing them with support.
- Leaders and managers should review arrangements for teaching English and mathematics functional skills so that a greater proportion of apprentices develop the skills they need and pass their examinations. Leaders and managers should consider how they can further support those apprentices who need to improve their writing skills.
- Leaders and managers should develop an appropriate curriculum for teaching personal development topics to learners and apprentices.
- Leaders and managers should make suitable arrangements for providing learners and, in particular, young apprentices, with good impartial careers advice and guidance.
- Leaders and managers should develop appropriate tools for presenting and using management information so that they make better plans to improve quality and provide governors with the information that they need to support and challenge leaders.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Lisa O'Reilly
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	1 to 3 February 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Not applicable

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the CEO, 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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