

Inspection of South Gloucestershire Council

Inspection dates:

13 to 16 June 2023

Overall effectiveness**Good**

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

Information about this provider

South Gloucestershire Council provides education and training for adults through the Community Learning and Skills Service (CLaSS). The largest provision is for people wanting to develop confidence and personal skills and those preparing for employment. Other courses are in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), English and mathematics. In 2021/22, 795 adults attended courses provided by CLaSS. Most took place in the 37 community venues across South Gloucestershire, with a small number being taught online.

Since 2020, CLaSS has received funding from West of England Combined Authority to provide courses for adults with few qualifications. Before that, it had provided courses for many years as a subcontractor. Inspectors carried out a monitoring visit in January 2021 to assess progress of this new provider. At this visit, CLaSS was deemed to be making reasonable progress.

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

Learners enjoy their courses because they use the skills and knowledge they acquire to quickly improve their lives. Learners in ESOL develop the language skills needed to communicate with services, such as doctors surgeries, and neighbours. They gain a valuable understanding of Britain's culture and values and develop a vocabulary that will help them in their search for a job. For example, they understand the meaning of phrases such as 'shift patterns' and 'part-time work'. Learners on pre-employment courses improve the confidence and communication skills they need to be able to enter, or return to, work. Staff provide valuable careers advice, which furnishes learners with a good understanding of the opportunities open to them following their course.

Tutors help their learners become less isolated by supporting them to build networks with community groups and other learners they meet. Tutors use their very good knowledge of the local community groups to draw learners into long-term projects and interests. For example, a group of learners on a short course in gardening learn to prepare and maintain allotments, which will produce food for them long after the course has finished.

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

Tutors carefully plan a curriculum that allows learners to master new knowledge and skills before introducing more complex concepts. Tutors get to know their learners well. They use this knowledge to build learners' confidence, provide effective feedback and guide them through the curriculum at an appropriate pace.

Tutors are particularly skilful at choosing resources and teaching strategies that help learners remember what they have been taught. When teaching fractions in mathematics, tutors remind learners of what they were taught about division so that this is fresh in their minds. In several subjects, tutors bring their lessons to life by making the content highly relevant to their learners. For example, in English, a tutor points learners to websites, articles and books based on their knowledge of their learners' interests. Many tutors creatively use an online learning platform to provide activities and resources and to motivate their learners. For example, one tutor set up an online competition, which learners enjoyed completing. Another uploaded photographs of work that learners completed in class so that they could reflect at home on how they could improve it.

Tutors set learners clear targets, which focuses learners well on the steps they need to take to make progress. They frequently include targets for confidence, resilience and personal behaviours, which helps learners make progress towards getting a job or improving their lives.

Tutors create a very inclusive environment among groups containing learners from a wide range of backgrounds. They quickly build an excellent rapport with their

learners. Tutors skilfully promote respect and peer support, and they help learners build the confidence to develop working relationships with people who were previously strangers. This contributes significantly to learners feeling safe and valued.

Leaders use their excellent knowledge of their communities, along with information about their local population, to successfully provide courses for the most disadvantaged groups. They are not so good at using the information they collect about their courses to monitor or make further improvements. For example, they collect information about learners' attendance but do not report it in a way that provides a true picture of attendance or leads, to implement consistently effective actions where attendance is low.

Leaders' attention is focused well on the education they provide and the experience learners have on their courses. In this respect, leaders have made good progress on dealing with areas for improvement identified during the monitoring visit. They have improved the curriculum and the quality of teaching by focusing staff development and middle managers' time on improving learners' experiences. Most learners now complete a learning diary well and value the opportunity it provides for reflection. Tutors now teach learners about radicalisation, extremism and fundamental British values well. Middle managers review the quality of the curriculum thoroughly and have valuable discussions with tutors, in which tutors reflect on the courses they have recently taught and what they could do even better for their learners.

Leaders have not paid the same attention to making sure that the systems they introduce work effectively. Leaders do not monitor closely enough whether tutors complete the actions they are set. They do not check the quality of the risk assessments the tutors complete and do not check that arrangements for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are consistently effective. As a result, leaders cannot be confident that all their systems are working effectively. During the inspection, inspectors identified that a learner had been enrolled on a course in error and that the internal systems put in place had not alerted leaders to this issue. While leaders dealt quickly and competently with this incident, they should have known about it and been able to avoid it arising in the first place.

Members of the advisory board have a good range of skills. These skills have recently been strengthened to include employers, replacing community representative who have left. The board is not yet having the impact it should. Very few actions arise from board meetings, and these meetings are often poorly attended. Reports to the board are informative but are not sufficiently linked to the key performance targets for CLaSS. The board has not held senior leaders sufficiently to account for slow progress on involving employers in developing a pre-employment course or helping learners progress into employment. As a result, the number of learners progressing to a job falls short of the council's own target.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Tutors are vigilant and report any concerns they have about learners. They are supported and advised well by the designated safeguarding lead. Leaders and managers work well with other teams in the council and other local councils to provide support for learners and review the services they provide.

The provider carries out thorough checks on staff during the recruitment process. Because their tutors work in schools and with families, the provider carries out checks on staff suitability to work with children. Staff are trained annually on how to keep children safe.

Learners are kept safe in the many community venues because tutors work closely with the venues and other users to reduce risk. However, leaders do not have sufficient oversight of risk assessments, and too many decisions are made without leaders' knowledge or input.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Use internal information better to analyse provision, determine the actions to take and set clear improvement targets. The advisory board should use internal information and reports to hold to account the council officials running the community learning service.
- Accelerate the pace at which relationships with employers are developed to ensure pre-employment courses are strongly focused on local employment opportunities and to increase the number of learners progressing to employment.
- Make thorough checks that systems work properly. This includes reviewing the monitoring of risk assessments, the support provided for learners' individual needs, and quality assurance.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2635808
Address	South Gloucestershire Council, Civic Centre High Street, Kingswood Bristol BS15 9TR
Contact number	01454864613
Website	www.southglos.gov.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Julie Cathcart
Provider type	Community learning and skills
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the community team leader, 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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