

Westcountry Schools Trust

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	2497161
Name of lead inspector:	Lowenna Bradley, His Majesty's Inspector
Inspection dates:	21 and 22 June 2023
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	Morley Meadow 51 Encombe Street Plymouth PL9 7GN

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Westcountry Schools Trust was inspected in July 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Westcountry Schools Trust provides apprenticeships to apprentices working in schools in the trust and other multi-academy trusts. No further apprentices have been recruited since the previous inspection.

At the time of inspection, there were seven apprentices enrolled, all aged over 19. Five apprentices were studying the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship. Two apprentices studying level 3 apprenticeships were taking a break in learning.

Themes

What progress have leaders made to improve the information that apprentices receive, both before and during their apprenticeship, so they are fully aware of what to expect and know the opportunities available to them at the end of their apprenticeship? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have improved their communication with apprentices and employers, so they are better informed. Leaders have put new procedures in place, such as a headteacher endorsement. They provide information about what to expect and about the responsibilities of the employer and the apprentices. However, no new apprentices have been recruited since new procedures have been in place because leaders and trustees have decided to pause recruitment.

Leaders ensure that apprentices and employers are aware of the expectations of the apprenticeship through shared training plans. For example, apprentices have a yearly plan to show what is taught and when, with key assessment dates. This enables apprentices and their employers to manage their workloads and plan ahead.

Leaders do not ensure that apprentices receive timely, impartial careers advice and guidance. They plan for apprentices to meet with suitably qualified staff, but this has not yet happened. Tutors provide apprentices with informal careers guidance through discussion. As a result, apprentices are aware of career pathways in the trust. Tutors take level 7 apprentices to a conference for headteachers. This helps apprentices to network with other professionals and to learn about the work of other schools.

Tutors direct apprentices to research other opportunities available to them at the end of their apprenticeship. As a result, most apprentices have an improved understanding of different roles, including those outside of education, that their apprenticeship prepares them for.

What progress have leaders made in involving employers in the planning and sequencing of the curriculum, both on and off the job, and ensuring apprentices follow a full curriculum that includes wider, relevant topics?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have improved the involvement of employers in planning a well-coordinated and full curriculum. Leaders ensure that apprentices and employers agree the topics to study that are most relevant to the setting and the interests of apprentices. Together, they decide the order of the content so that it fits together logically.

Leaders ensure that employers are involved in discussions at meetings to review the progress that apprentices make. Tutors discuss the knowledge and skills apprentices need to develop so that employers can provide suitable opportunities at work to support this. For example, level 7 senior leader apprentices apply their knowledge of root cause analysis to identify and implement appropriate strategies for improvement in their own schools.

Leaders have improved the planning of the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship curriculum that is taught alongside a Master’s degree, ensuring that the content of these two qualifications is better connected. For example, apprentices learn about change theory in their apprenticeship alongside learning about change for social justice in their Master’s degree. Tutors then assess apprentices on their evaluation of how they use theory to implement change in their workplaces.

Tutors teach wider curriculum topics, such as British values and broader values, and topics specific to school settings, such as social justice and integrity. Tutors promote stimulating discussions with apprentices, such as on how to recognise and respect differing values to resolve conflict. As a result, apprentices understand the relevance of these values in their work.

What progress has been made in encouraging apprentices to practise, improve and master their skills, including improvement of their knowledge and use of English and mathematics?

Reasonable progress

Tutors and employers encourage apprentices to apply their knowledge and develop mastery of their skills in the workplace. For example, tutors teach the theoretical approaches to people development and management and then encourage apprentices to discuss these with human resources professionals. This helps apprentices to develop their professionalism and understand the impact of different approaches.

Tutors and employers give apprentices opportunities to practise and master their presentation skills. For example, apprentices present reports to governors at board meetings, speak to headteachers at conferences, implement staff training and present projects to their peers. Tutors encourage apprentices to reflect on their presentation skills and provide feedback to their peers. As a result, apprentices build confidence and competence at presenting in different situations, and this prepares them well for assessments at the end of their apprenticeship.

Tutors use assessment well to inform the training that apprentices need to improve their academic writing skills. For example, they teach senior leader apprentices the different requirements of academic writing for different purposes. Apprentices learn how to use evidence to present their arguments strategically. As a result, apprentices improve the accuracy and coherence of their writing and write with confidence for specific audiences and purposes.

Tutors teach apprentices useful mathematical skills that are relevant to their workplaces. For example, senior leader apprentices learn techniques for data analysis, enabling them to monitor and report on trends in safeguarding. They also measure the impact of strategies to improve attendance and behaviour.

Managers have been slow to check that apprentices' English and mathematics qualifications meet the requirements for their apprenticeship. As a result, a very small minority of apprentices need extra help to complete these qualifications, which is not planned for from the start.

What progress have leaders made to ensure that apprentices receive prompt, clear and concise feedback, which helps them to understand what progress they are making in following the curriculum and what they need to do to improve further? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices meet with their tutors and employers each half term to review the progress they are making and discuss their next steps. Employers and tutors support senior leader apprentices well to evaluate the progress they are making in following the curriculum. Tutors set appropriate and challenging targets for apprentices to work on next.

Tutors provide timely, thorough and useful feedback to senior leader apprentices to support improvement. For example, tutors encourage apprentices to reflect on their learning in leading and developing people and how they apply this to different situations at work. Professional discussions about the impact of bias on the perceptions of different people enable apprentices to think more deeply about real life situations.

Tutors provide useful and specific feedback on senior leader apprentices' written work, with concise areas for development, such as relating theory to their own

experiences and personal practices. As a result, apprentices know what they are learning and how this is improving their practice at work, as well as what they need to improve on further.

What progress have leaders and managers made to improve the arrangements for evaluating the quality of apprenticeships and sharing this information with trustees to help them to provide challenge and ensure improvements are swift? Reasonable progress

Leaders have produced suitable quality assurance plans to enable them to evaluate the quality of apprenticeships. Staff conduct a number of useful internal quality assurance checks, such as moderation of marking and the monitoring of written feedback and records of apprentices' reviews. However, the full range of quality assurance activities planned does not take place, and therefore quality assurance is not as rigorous as it should be. As a result, leaders have not recognised concerns as swiftly as they might. The very small minority of apprentices who were making slow progress did not receive the feedback and support they needed. Once managers identified this, they worked quickly to put appropriate support in place.

Trustees have worked with leaders to create a more effective governance structure, with clear lines of reporting and accountability. This includes reports to the chief executive officer, the education standards committee, a hub advisory board and the full board for Westcountry Schools Trust. Leaders report on key areas for development and significant challenges, such as recruitment of staff and apprentices. Trustees have a greater understanding of their responsibilities for oversight of safeguarding and the quality of apprenticeship provision.

Trustees have a varied range of backgrounds and a wealth of experience, both outside of and within education. They use their knowledge and experience effectively to provide strategic oversight and appropriate challenge. For example, trustees ensured that rapid improvements were made to the oversight, recording and reporting of safeguarding since the previous inspection. However, trustees currently lack expertise in apprenticeships, and this reduces their ability to provide specific challenge to the quality of the apprenticeship provision.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023