

Inspection of Medway 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	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Medway Council's learning and community skills provision, Medway Adult Education (MAE), has provided adult and community learning courses qualifications in Medway for more than 20 years. At the time of the inspection, approximately 1,000 adult learners were studying English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), mathematics, English and work skills. The provider works with Job Centre Plus to support older learners who have been away from education and work for a long period back into the workplace. Approximately 450 adult learners were enrolled in community learning programmes including crafts, creative arts and design courses. Approximately 35 apprentices were studying level 3 business administration and a few were studying other level 2 and 3 programmes. A small number of apprentices are under 19 years. MAE have two main hubs in Rochester and Gillingham. They also run programmes in community centres, church halls and employer premises across Medway.

They have one subcontractor, Learning Curve Group, that teaches online learning programmes which support unemployed learners to progress.

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

Nearly all learners and apprentices thrive in an environment of support and care. They develop positive relationships with their tutors and peers quickly, which helps motivate them in their learning.

Learners and apprentices gain valuable, new skills rapidly as a result of their training. For example, ESOL learners talk competently and confidently to customers at work. They can visit their general practitioner independently and make themselves understood clearly. Apprentices learn to be competent in the skills needed by their employer such as planning events, managing contractors and corresponding with a member of parliament. As a result, they benefit from using these skills at work and in their personal lives. Apprentices become increasingly valued members of their teams and are well prepared for their future careers.

Learners' confidence and resilience develop and grow significantly over time. For example, learners in creative crafts, who face loneliness due to issues such as physical disabilities or mental health, have access to courses in their local community centres. These learners rightly value the opportunities to better integrate into the community while they learn and socialise. Apprentices develop exceptional professional behaviours which help them to build relationships with colleagues and clients confidently.

Most learners and apprentices benefit from opportunities to develop their understanding of life in modern Britain. For example, ESOL staff promote equality and inclusion. They use pictures of people from diverse backgrounds as resources, such as female doctors and male carers. Mathematics learners complete tasks related to current events, such as attending a Pride event while budgeting for the cost of living crisis. As a result, learners and apprentices are learning how to adopt these values successfully and how to apply them in their wider lives well.

Most learners and apprentices regularly attend classes, and tutors help them catch up on missed learning. However, a small minority of adult learners do not attend consistently well and, in these instances, tutors do not help them to catch up successfully.

Learners and apprentices know how to keep themselves safe while learning or in the workplace. For example, apprentices learn about proper internet etiquette to help them keep safe online. Learners and apprentices know who to speak to if they have a concern. They are confident that staff will address any issues in a timely manner. However, too many learners and apprentices do not have a secure understanding of the local risks of radicalisation and extremism. As a result, they do not know how to keep themselves safe from them.

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

Leaders and managers collaborate very well with the local authority, employers and the

community to address the skills, well-being and social needs of Medway residents. Leaders strive to continually meet the needs of the local economy. For example, they work very closely with Medway Council to design and teach an apprenticeship programme that very accurately meets the employer's needs and supports its community aims. These programmes provide excellent opportunities for residents to start and develop their careers locally. Leaders inspire learners and apprentices to engage, or reengage, positively with learning. For example, leaders work in partnership with a local church and other centres providing community-based learning programmes, such as arts, health and gardening. Leaders provide access to programmes which reduce residents' social isolation and improve mental health. As a result, leaders manage an effective adult education centre which meets the needs of its community, its employers and partners.

Staff organise learners' and apprentices' learning carefully to build effectively on what they know and can do. For example, glass-making learners initially learn about glass properties before learning how to cut panes. Before looking at the mission statement of their own employer, apprentices research and understand generally how mission statements align with values and ethics. Mathematics learners now understand, and can explain, concepts they found challenging at the start of the course. As a result, learners build on fundamental knowledge to master more complex topics. Apprentices very rapidly and effectively link what they do in their training to their tasks at work.

Leaders and staff assess learners' and apprentices' starting points accurately and track their progress carefully to tailor learning. Nearly all tutors and assessors use questioning, feedback and other activities expertly to check what learners and apprentices understand. ESOL tutors use questioning well to check most learners' comprehension of spoken English. They respond to the knowledge shown by repeating material and asking follow-up questions. As a result, most tutors respond swiftly to what learners know and can do and adapt their teaching accordingly. Learners and apprentices improve the standard of their work.

Tutors use a variety of creative and effective resources to support learners and apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, tutors give ESOL learners with visual impairments enlarged worksheets. Tutors provide helpful support to apprentices with additional needs for assignments and their work. As a result, learners and apprentices access learning successfully as well as their peers.

Staff work very closely with apprenticeship employers. They work initially with managers very thoroughly to ensure the programme meets apprentices' needs. They support apprentices' development consistently well through regular reviews with managers and well-organised training and practical work. They prepare apprentices for their final assessment exceptionally by using assessment effectively to provide useful feedback. They organise thorough practice professional discussions and portfolio interviews. This prepares apprentices very successfully for their final tests. Apprentices achieve exceptionally well, and most apprentices secure employment.

Staff ensure learners and apprentices receive helpful advice and guidance about their future learning or work options. For example, tutors prepare ESOL learners well to

maximise their sessions with the National Careers Service. Older learners preparing to return to work receive tailored ongoing employability support. Apprentices receive useful advice from their employer. This prepares them to progress to other roles. As a result, learners and apprentices make well-informed choices for their next steps. Most returners to work have secured a job or interview.

Leaders provide relevant development opportunities for all staff. For example, they provide teaching qualifications for those who need them. Most ESOL staff benefit from additional training in dyslexia and pronunciation. As a result, staff develop their subject expertise and teaching knowledge appropriately.

Leaders plan staff workload considerately and are mindful of staff well-being. Staff have access to well-being training and resources. Most staff have manageable workloads and enjoy working at the provider.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of training and education because of effective quality processes. They check the quality of subcontracted provision well. Leaders plan improvements sensibly. However, leaders' plans to develop some areas, such as attendance for adult learners, have not yet had sufficient time to have an impact.

Leaders ensure that the experienced and knowledgeable governing board is well informed about the quality of training. As a result, governors actively support the provider's strategic goals. For example, governors successfully challenged senior leaders to improve the systems which monitor attendance and quality. They also reviewed and supported new plans to improve online teaching for learners and apprentices who cannot attend classes in person.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders use appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures to help keep learners and apprentices safe. Staff understand and follow these policies and procedures well. Leaders ensure staff receive sufficient annual training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty so they have the knowledge to keep learners and apprentices safe.

Members of the safeguarding team are experienced and trained to complete their roles effectively.

Leaders use an appropriate process for the referral, tracking and monitoring of safeguarding concerns. Once they have taken the appropriate actions, they track them closely. Leaders use appropriate recruitment processes so that staff are safe to work with learners and apprentices.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that all adult learners attend well and so are able to make

rapid progress.

- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices have a secure understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism so that they are aware of local risks and know how to keep themselves safe from them.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53295
Address	Adult Education Centre & Rochester Library High Street Rochester ME1 1EW
Contact number	01634 338 435
Website	www.medway.gov.uk/adultlearning
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Daniel Ratcliff
Provider type	Community learning and skills
Date of previous inspection	3 February 2014
Main subcontractors	Learning Curve

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality and curriculum manager, 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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