

Inspection of Pre-School Learning Alliance

Inspection dates: 20 to 23 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Education programmes for young people	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

The Pre-School Learning Alliance (the Alliance) is a national organisation. The Alliance started in 1961 and has grown as a membership organisation, supporting and promoting the work of 14,000 independent voluntary early years settings across the country. During the last 20 years, the Alliance has also become a provider of early years services in its own right, operating around 42 settings.

Since 2000, the Alliance has been offering early years courses. Currently, there are 6 apprentices on the level 2 early years practitioner standard and 29 on the level 3 early years educator standard.

In addition, the level 3 early years educator course is taught to 42 adults funded through advanced learner loans and a very small number of learners aged 16 to 19.

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

Apprentices and learners enjoy their courses because of the good support they receive from knowledgeable and experienced tutors. They gain good levels of practical insight. Apprentices develop up-to-date skills, which they can then immediately apply in their early years workplaces.

Apprentices do not receive sufficient teaching to develop knowledge that is secure and that they can remember. Too often, tutors do not teach the knowledge apprentices need to complete their assessments. Tutors do not align the topics they teach closely enough with apprentices' work or with the timing of assessments. Apprentices do not get enough guidance to help them with their reading, research and writing.

On the level 3 early years workforce course, learners are left too much to their own devices by tutors to learn theoretical aspects of their course. Prior to completing assignments, tutors provide learners with resources from which to learn, but they do not teach the theoretical knowledge they need. As a result, learners do not provide sufficient critical insight in their assignments.

Apprentices work with employers who are very supportive of them and their studies. They receive their full entitlement of time to complete activities related to their apprenticeship. Employers provide additional opportunities for apprentices to have relevant work experience in settings other than their own, to ensure they are aware of the demands of working with children of different ages.

Tutors provide apprentices and learners with useful feedback on their submitted work. This helps apprentices and learners to make the changes necessary so that their work meets the standards required of the course.

Leaders and managers have ensured that the very few learners aged 16 to 19 who need to achieve qualifications in English and mathematics receive effective support. As a result, learners make good progress in developing these skills.

Apprentices feel safe, as they trust staff to take any concerns they have seriously. They know about safeguarding in the context of their jobs.

The number of learners and apprentices who pass their course is high. As a result of achieving their qualifications, adult learners progress into further education or move from voluntary to paid employment. Most apprentices remain with their employer and take on additional responsibilities.

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

Leaders and managers offer appropriate apprenticeship and adult learner courses that meet the needs of the early years sector. As the representative body for the

early years sector, they are driven by the values of professionalising the sector, and they achieve this through providing training that meets employers' needs. The communication between tutors and employers is good. As a result, employers are well informed about the demands and requirements of the apprenticeship, including the final assessment. They participate in reviews in which tutors work with apprentices to set purposeful targets, which they then monitor. This contributes to satisfaction felt by employers for the service they receive from the Alliance.

Leaders and managers have recruited tutors who are experienced in the early years sector. They are passionate about the sector and want to see their learners and apprentices succeed. Tutors who work part time often continue to work in settings to maintain their expertise. Full-time tutors regularly spend time in early years settings, ensuring that their knowledge and skills are continuously updated. Consequently, learners and apprentices benefit from staff who are knowledgeable about the sector.

Across the programmes, leaders have not planned a sufficiently coherent curriculum to ensure that learners and apprentices build their knowledge, skills and behaviours in a logical order. Leaders leave too much decision-making about curriculum sequencing to individual tutors, resulting in a lack of consistency across the programme. At times, such as in the recently introduced online lessons, tutors do not link the topics taught, such as on theories of play and supporting children who are unwell, with the units learners are studying. Leaders and managers are aware of the need to create a more coherently sequenced curriculum for the apprenticeship and adult learning courses. However, at the time of the inspection, they had only recently started to implement their plans to make improvements.

Tutors do not consider sufficiently the information they have about what apprentices already know and can do at the start of their programme. For example, when apprentices have substantial experience in early years related roles, tutors do not amend the training to reflect this. As a result, a minority of apprentices do not find the course demanding enough.

Staff work effectively to develop apprentices' professional competencies for their roles. However, they have not developed the curriculum to support learners and apprentices in their personal development. For example, staff do not develop well enough learners' and apprentices' knowledge of topics such as how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and how to be an active citizen. Learners and apprentices know the importance of topics such as safeguarding and themes related to British values for the children with whom they work. Their knowledge of how these apply to their own lives is less secure.

In their evaluation of the quality of the courses, leaders and managers do not assess closely enough tutors' pedagogic practice. They do not identify well enough any areas for development in the practice of individual tutors. Tutors benefit from sharing practice with each other but have limited training on how to improve their skills further.

Tutors help learners and apprentices to develop the practical skills they need to become valued members of staff within their settings. They quickly learn how to set up the classroom environment dependent on the age of the children, how to observe children's behaviour and the importance of nutrition and physical activity for maintaining children's health. Employers appreciate the skills learners bring to their setting and are able increasingly to delegate more complex tasks to them. Staff promote professional behaviours well through high expectations within the early years settings. Tutors and workplace mentors help apprentices and learners gain confidence when, for example, talking to parents about their children. Apprentices are polite and articulate in the workplace and in their conversations with provider staff.

Apprentices and learners receive effective information, advice and guidance about careers within the early years sector. However, staff do not provide sufficient guidance or signposting to advice for those who may wish to change careers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers ensure that there is an effective safeguarding culture at the provision. When safeguarding concerns arise, managers and staff respond well. Tutors and apprentices are vigilant and know to whom they should refer any concerns. Where necessary, they liaise effectively with outside agencies to safeguard learners and apprentices.

Leaders and managers have put in place suitable safeguarding policies, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty, that underpin safeguarding practices. For example, they ensure that the staff they recruit are safe to work with their apprentices.

Staff and designated safeguarding leads are suitably experienced and qualified. They provide effective support to apprentices, where needed, offering, for example, counselling and mental health support.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should improve how they plan and teach the curriculum so that learners and apprentices are taught the knowledge they need for the assessments they complete.
- Leaders and managers should develop further the personal development curriculum so that learners and apprentices have a firm understanding of topics such as healthy relationships and those related to British values, including how these apply to their lives.
- Staff should use the information they have on the knowledge and skills of apprentices at the start of the course to plan their training and ensure that the programme is suitably demanding for all apprentices.

- Leaders and managers should improve how they assess the quality of teaching and provide training to tutors that helps them to further improve their teaching skills.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50230
Address	50 Featherstone Street London EC1Y 8RT
Contact number	01732 363070
Website	www.eyalliance.org.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Neil Leitch
Provider type	Independent Learning Provider
Date of previous inspection	20 September 2016
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality and improvement, 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

Steve Lambert, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Hasty

His Majesty's Inspector

Maureen Gilmartin

Ofsted Inspector

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