

Inspection of Paragon Education & Skills Limited

Inspection dates: 4 to 7 July 2023

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

Information about this provider

Paragon Education and Skills Limited (Paragon) was established in 1998. It is a large independent learning provider with a head office and training centre in Bournemouth. The provider has approximately 6,468 apprentices and teaches 47 different apprenticeship standards. Many apprentices work in Greater London, the southeast, the West Midlands and the northwest of England. Nearly all apprentices are adults. There are around 213 apprentices under the age of 18. The majority of apprentices study care and education apprenticeships. Around 350 apprentices study the level 4 lead practitioner in care apprenticeship, 1,200 the level 3 lead adult care worker apprenticeship and 800 the level 2 adult care worker. Around 300 apprentices study the level 2 early years practitioner apprenticeship and 600 the level 3 early years educator apprenticeship. Around 470 apprentices study the level 4 children, young people and family's practitioner apprenticeship and 200 the level 5 children, young people and family's manager apprenticeship. Around one in ten apprentices have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Apprentices are taught online or at the premises of employers. Paragon has offices and a training centre for vehicle and maintenance technician apprenticeships in Bournemouth.

The provider has 35 learners studying adult learning programmes at a training centre in Manchester. The significant majority of these learners are on level 3 media makeup and nail services courses.

The provider works with one subcontractor to provide the professionally qualified accountants needed to assess the level 7 accountancy taxation professional apprenticeship for 13 apprentices.

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

Apprentices' behaviours and attitudes are good. They understand and emulate well the professional standards and expectations set by their tutors and staff at their employer. Apprentices studying adult care are careful to respect the dignity of their clients when providing personal care. Apprentices learn about data protection and know how to keep the details of clients safe.

Apprentices are helped by tutors to quickly develop their confidence at work. Apprentices deepen their knowledge of their workplace by shadowing colleagues in different parts of their organisation. Apprentices studying team leading spend time with the finance team of their employer before working independently on how to budget for, and accurately cost, work projects.

Learners studying adult education programmes in media makeup and advanced nail services enjoy their studies. They value the way the teaching of theory is quickly followed up by practical work and the opportunity to work with clients. They appreciate the guest speakers they have. These include social media influencers and business owners, who share their knowledge and experience of stocktaking and marketing. As a result, learners gain an understanding of how to start their own business and are confident about achieving success in their future careers. However, learners studying media make up are frustrated that they do not receive training about how to apply treatments to the full diversity of skin tones. They are also frustrated about how the poor attendance of a minority of their peers disrupts their learning.

Apprentices value their tutors' subject expertise and how this gives them a better understanding of their job roles and the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be successful. This helps them to make well-informed decisions about their future careers.

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

Tutors use their experience effectively to advise and help apprentices to develop the skills they need to manage workplace challenges. For example, they teach early years apprentices about how to structure feedback to parents of the children they are looking after. As a result, apprentices are more confident when speaking with parents and use techniques such as sequencing and 'sandwiching' positive and negative feedback.

Tutors use assessment techniques well to check what apprentices know. For example, in lessons, they skilfully create safe and collaborative communities so that apprentices are made to feel at ease and are confident to ask questions. They use observations of apprentices' practice well to provide them with feedback on how to successfully apply their knowledge and skills at work. Tutors make good use of topical issues to improve apprentices' knowledge and skills. For example, early years

educator tutors and employers collaborated swiftly to put in place training on the risks to sleeping babies after the media reported a tragic death caused by incorrect swaddling.

Tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced in the subjects they teach. They know their apprentices well because they build positive relationships with them. Tutors use their vocational experience skilfully to encourage apprentices to link what they are taught to their own workplace. Tutors are adept at using workplace scenarios to help apprentices studying the team leading apprenticeship to analyse and dissect difficult workplace conversations about poor performance and breaking bad news to colleagues. As a result, apprentices acquire useful strategies, behaviours and vocabulary to use in these situations.

Tutors of early years apprenticeships skilfully narrate the assessment of apprentices' work as they lead the play activities they have designed for children. As a result, apprentices receive useful feedback in real time workplace settings and can make the adjustments necessary to their practice to improve the quality of their work.

Tutors ensure that the training plans for the majority of apprentices are sufficiently ambitious. As a result, apprentices study a curriculum that is challenging and develops new knowledge and skills. A minority of tutors do not use the information they have about apprentices' existing knowledge, experience and skills to plan their training well enough. As a result, a few apprentices repeat what they already know and can do.

Tutors ensure that most of the apprentices with SEND who need extra help receive the timely and effective support they need. For example, tutors provide subtitled video and presentation learning resources for apprentices with hearing impairments. They plan training thoughtfully for those apprentices who find reading difficult by breaking written assignments down into smaller tasks and by working with employers to provide these apprentices with extra time to complete their coursework.

Most tutors provide apprentices with frequent written feedback on their work. This is supported by helpful conversations between tutors and apprentices during reviews and tutorials. However, a few tutors do not provide apprentices with sufficiently detailed and constructive feedback, which helps them to know what to do better next time, so that they continually improve their work over time.

Most tutors use information about apprentices' starting points effectively to plan the functional skills curriculum. This means that apprentices studying for English and mathematics qualifications benefit from frequent lessons with skilled tutors to help them improve their knowledge and skills in these subjects. However, for those apprentices who are not required to gain English and mathematics qualifications, tutors do not always use the information about their prior knowledge, qualifications and experience to ensure that they continually improve their skills.

Tutors ensure that most employers participate in reviews of apprentices' progress. Tutors use the information gained from conversation with the apprentice and their employer well to inform targets for improvement and the additional activities to be completed at work to encourage further improvement. A few tutors and employers work together effectively to plan shadowing opportunities for apprentices. As a result, they learn from more experienced colleagues in the workplace and gain the deeper knowledge and skills they need to take responsibility for leading shifts in care homes and liaising with parents in early years settings. In a minority of instances, the comments of employers on apprentices' progress reviews are too brief and do not consider fully the knowledge, skills and behaviours they are developing at work.

Tutors ensure that most apprentices are given opportunities to discuss and plan their future career and training with their tutor and employer. They receive useful guidance about training they can access to improve their qualifications and job prospects.

Most apprentices have a good understanding of British values and apply what they know in the workplace. For example, early years apprentices show children how to vote to decide on play and learning activities, how to arrange the classroom and what their golden rules are. As a result, the children learn about democratic decision-making, being kind to others and how to take turns. However, although tutors provide information to apprentices about the risks of extremism and radicalisation at the start of their programme, a significant minority of apprentices cannot recall this information.

A minority of apprentices do not have any contact with their tutors for too long at the start of their apprenticeship. This means that apprentices are uncertain about what they need to study and make a slow start to their apprenticeship.

Leaders provide tutors with useful training and development, which helps to improve their teaching skills. Skills tutors provide useful informal support to their tutor colleagues through sharing best practice activities, such as how to use online teaching tools effectively. Leaders ensure that personal tutors complete essential and useful mandatory training on safeguarding, 'Prevent' duty, and how to use systems to manage their caseloads of apprentices effectively. Leaders provide training, which is aligned well to improvement themes identified through quality assurance processes, to develop tutors' teaching skills further. They ensure that tutors who lack teaching qualifications work towards the level 3 award in education and training.

Leaders support all tutors to maintain their industry expertise effectively. Leaders have a strategy to encourage staff participation in professional development and to incentivise staff to undertake a range of training options. The majority of staff undertake activities such as 'back to floor' days, where, for example, early years tutors learn about safe sleeping requirements for children in nursery settings. Leaders use quarterly appraisals to take part in conversations with tutors and to ensure that they routinely keep up to date with industry changes.

Leaders have recently introduced an effective range of reporting metrics that align well with the quality and reporting cycle. They use this information effectively to assess the impact of improvement actions and to monitor the progress that apprentices make in their learning.

Leaders have a clear and strategic vision: to meet the training needs of the employers they work with. They focus well on establishing curriculums to provide training that meets the workforce needs of the care and education sectors. For example, they carefully select apprenticeship standards that provide clear progression routes through to higher level supervisory and leadership roles. However, they do not take effective action to ensure that the quality of training supports more apprentices to stay and complete their apprenticeship.

Leaders have created a positive and inclusive work environment for staff. Staff are motivated by leaders to take pride in their work. Leaders are considerate of the health and well-being of staff. For example, leaders provide mental health first-aid training, and this enables tutors to understand and support apprentices whose mental health is affecting their work and studies. Staff are proud to work at Paragon.

Those responsible for governance are experienced in the leadership and management of apprenticeships and use their expertise well to shape the provider's vision and strategy. They have supported senior leaders to help them to provide training for local and national training need priorities, such as care and early years education.

Leaders mostly provide governors with the right information to enable them to scrutinise effectively the quality of provision. Governors provide challenge to leaders and track the impact of key quality improvement processes. Where it has been necessary to have further insight into the quality of training, governors have commissioned external scrutiny to further evaluate the information leaders provide to them.

Leaders have not ensured that all apprentices benefit from a broad curriculum, with a wide range of subjects, to help to develop their personal skills. Although leaders provide an additional curriculum for apprentices, which includes topics such as safeguarding, 'Prevent' duty, British values and equality and diversity, they do not plan, teach or promote this well enough. As a result, many apprentices do not know about these additional learning opportunities, and those who do participate recall little about what they have learned. Younger apprentices do not learn or know enough about healthy relationships and, as a result, they have little knowledge about recognising controlling, coercive or abusive behaviours in relationships. Leaders rightly recognise the need to strengthen the wider curriculum for apprentices. They have acted to make improvements, but it is too soon to see the impact of this.

Of those apprentices who remain on programme, almost all achieve their full qualification. Around two-thirds of apprentices gain merit and distinction grades.

Most apprentices move on to positive destinations, gain promotions and are given increased responsibilities at work as a result of their training. However, about half of the apprentices who start their training do not stay until the end and do not, therefore, achieve their qualification. Less than half of level 2 adult care worker and just over a half of level 3 lead adult care worker apprentices complete their qualification. Around a fifth of apprentices on the level 5 leader in adult care apprenticeship complete their qualification. Around three-fifths of apprentices complete the level 3 early years educator apprenticeship.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff responsible for safeguarding are appropriately qualified and experienced. They analyse safeguarding referrals for trends and report this information to governors. The policies to keep apprentices and adult learners safe show clearly who is responsible for safeguarding and how concerns are reported. Staff are recruited safely. Staff responsible for safeguarding provide quarterly updates to tutors on topics such as 'incels', coercive control and peer-on-peer abuse. They work productively with local authorities and external agencies to support apprentices. Apprentices feel safe. Apprentices who are under 18 know who to contact if they have a concern about their safety.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all apprentices remain on programme and achieve their qualification by the planned end date, and use the information about the reasons why apprentices leave early to improve the planning and teaching of the curriculum.
- Ensure that all tutors take account of apprentices' prior experience, knowledge and skills, and use the information to ensure that those who already have English and mathematics qualifications further develop their knowledge and skills.
- Ensure that all apprentices and learners take part in a wider personal development curriculum so that they increase their knowledge of subjects that help to develop their personal skills.
- Ensure that all apprentices receive detailed and constructive written feedback from their tutors so that they know how to improve their work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53792
Address	Station Approach Ashley Road Bournemouth BH1 4NB
Contact number	07887 922687
Website	paragonskills.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Mark Botha
Provider type	Independent Learning Provider
Date of previous inspection	16 to 19 May 2017
Main subcontractors	First Intuition Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief operating officer, 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

Cliff Shaw, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Lowenna Bradley	His Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Alexander	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul James	His Majesty's Inspector
Denise Olander	Senior His Majesty's Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Lyn Bourne	Ofsted Inspector
Jo Hornby	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