

Inspection of Worcestershire County Council

Inspection dates: 17 to 20 October 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Information about this provider

Learning Services Worcestershire provides 16 to 19 education programmes for young people, adult learning courses and apprenticeships for employees of the council.

Education programmes for young people support young people who are at risk of not being in education, training or employment. At the time of the inspection, 34 learners were enrolled on this course, which includes English, mathematics, digital skills, vocational options and a work placement. Twenty-four learners studied at level 1 or below and 10 learners at level 2. Alongside programmes delivered directly by the provider, leaders work with a subcontractor, Workpays Limited, in Redditch.

Leaders provide accredited and non-accredited courses for adult learners. There were 472 enrolments with 40% on accredited courses. Within accredited provision, leaders provide courses in mathematics, English and digital skills at level 2 and below. Within unaccredited provision, leaders offer community and family learning courses, including art and craft courses, which aim to improve learners' confidence and well-being, to facilitate re-engagement in work and/or communities.

Leaders provide apprenticeships for 31 employees, with nearly all in either business administration, team leader, departmental manager, senior leader or adult social care. Three apprentices studied at level 2, 20 at level 3 and eight at level 4.

The provider did not offer Skills Bootcamp or T levels.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning. Learners appreciate the knowledge and passion of their teachers, which motivates them to achieve their best. Most learners complete extra work at home. They value the new academic, vocational and personal skills and knowledge that they acquire. Apprentices appreciate their on-the-job training. They take pride in what they do and assume more responsibility at work. They feel valued.

Learners benefit from learning in a wide range of high-quality, welcoming and safe teaching facilities, including libraries, schools and the subcontractor's premises.

Staff support learners and apprentices well. Staff deal swiftly and confidently with any concerns they have. Young learners benefit from opportunities to discuss their personal histories and the challenges they faced at school. Unaccompanied asylum seekers receive rapid high-quality support to develop their understanding of English. Line managers encourage apprentices to try out ideas and introduce new ways and approaches at work.

Learners and apprentices benefit from the strong culture of mutual respect and understanding that leaders and managers have created. Staff create a calm and inclusive environment in which most learners and apprentices can study and learn.

Learners and apprentices support each other in the classroom and respond well to the direction of teachers. Learners develop their confidence, and younger learners become more independent and responsible as they progress through their course. They attend activities and sessions that promote well-being and healthy lifestyles.

Leaders have created a strong ethos of high attendance and punctuality. Most learners understand the importance of attendance in preparing them for employment and in supporting their learning. Where young learners do not attend, managers are swift to intervene and work with partners to agree on actions to improve attendance.

Learners and apprentices feel safe in the settings where they learn and at their workplaces. Younger learners attend tutorials where they learn about the risks of drugs and alcohol and how to stay safe online. Apprentices adopt safe working practices at work. Most learners and apprentices understand how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views. Although most learners and apprentices are knowledgeable about extremist groups, they are less aware of local threats.

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

Leaders, managers and governors have a clear strategic vision for the learning and skills provision in Worcestershire. Leaders and managers work well with the local

enterprise partnership and schools to ensure that their curriculums are meeting the needs of the locality and region.

For adult and younger learners, they rightly prioritise engagement with vulnerable learners from the most disadvantaged communities. They provide them with access to courses that develop the knowledge and skills that learners need to improve their personal lives, contribute to their communities and increase their chances of gaining employment.

For apprentices, leaders sensibly focus on the economic sectors and skills that are needed within their workforce. They align closely with the priorities in the local skills improvement plan.

Leaders and managers have addressed all but one of the areas for improvements identified at the previous inspection. Apprenticeship managers have improved initial advice and guidance so that apprentices are on the right course. Managers monitor apprentices' progress closely and intervene effectively if they fall behind. Managers have improved adult learners' attendance. However, learners across all courses do not have a good understanding of the local risks around radicalisation and extremism.

Leaders and managers are ambitious for their learners. They have successfully restructured and redesigned job roles within learning services. They have employed appropriately qualified and experienced teachers. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They recognise that in a small number of courses, they need to review the level and currency of aspects of curriculum content. Within apprenticeships, off-the-job teaching does not prepare apprentices well enough for job roles outside of the council.

Governors are well informed about the council's skills strategy and the quality of education. They receive appropriate performance reports. They offer appropriate scrutiny and challenge to managers which improves the provision.

Curriculum leaders plan and sequence courses well. For example, within family learning, teachers build parenting skills through practical activities and storytelling. In adult art and craft courses, teachers start by explaining the properties of materials and demonstrate simple construction, drawing and mark making, before moving on to finished products or pieces of art. Managers and assessors in level 3 business administrator apprenticeships have rightly identified the importance of communication skills. Apprentices are well prepared for the professional discussion at the end-point assessment.

In most cases, teachers and managers use learners' starting points well. In English courses for adults, teachers use information about what learners already know and can do to target gaps in understanding and choose topics which interest the learners. Learners make swift progress.

Teaching in adult and young learner courses is strong. Teachers explain the key

concepts clearly, introduce technical language at the right time and provide learners with many opportunities to practise and revise what they have been taught. As a result, learners remember the most important ideas and build more complex understanding over time.

Teachers use expert demonstrations to show learners how to develop practical skills. For example, in arts and crafts, teachers show how to crochet round objects, how to take prints from photographs and how to use card to make ink marks.

Teachers for young learners use observations of practical learning activities well to check understanding. Where appropriate, they will intervene to improve learners' techniques. As a result, learners on hair and beauty programmes improve their hair washing, head massage and shampooing practice over time.

Workpays Limited, the subcontractor, provides young learners with good teaching in English and mathematics, based on the learners' starting points and experience of school. They work hard with partners, such as mental health experts, to improve the confidence of learners and use high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance to plan meaningful work placements.

On-the-job training in apprenticeships is highly effective. Line managers participate in reviews with apprentices and their assessors and, therefore, provide the knowledge, support and work opportunities that apprentices need to complete their assignments and assessments. Apprentices make rapid progress at work.

In all courses, teachers and assessors use assessment well to check on learning and to adapt the curriculum and make sure that learners make timely progress. Teachers and assessors provide helpful feedback which addresses any misconceptions and gives clear guidance on what learners and apprentices must do to improve.

Teachers skilfully teach learners and apprentices to give and receive constructive feedback during presentations. They develop trust with their peers and improve their confidence over time and make improvements to their work.

Teachers provide appropriate support for learners with additional learning needs. For example, in English, staff quickly identify learners' needs. Managers and teachers ensure these learners have the support they need to be successful with their studies. For example, they use coloured overlays and modify vocabulary and font size to accommodate learners' needs.

Nearly all those who complete their courses achieve their qualifications. Most apprentices achieve high grades and stay in employment with the council.

Leaders promote positive personal development. Teachers on adult courses teach wider curriculum topics such as healthy eating and developing friendships within the curriculum subjects. For young learners, teachers teach a personal development curriculum including drug awareness, healthy relationships including consent and how to avoid risks to their mental and physical well-being.

Most apprentices and younger learners receive helpful careers education. Staff support younger learners well in preparation for their next steps. Although adult learners on English for speakers of other languages and English courses receive information on other courses offered by the council, they have less information on wider opportunities beyond the council. As a result, they are unsure of the opportunities available to them once they achieve their qualification.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that course content is at the right level for the learners and that teachers explain contested content, such as the status of learning styles, in the light of the most recent academic research.
- Extend the content of off-the-job training for apprentices so that they have the subject knowledge to work outside the council and in wider settings and sectors.
- Provide all learners with the careers education, information, advice and guidance they need to understand the range of opportunities available to them on completion of their courses.
- Provide learners and apprentices with knowledge of local risks of extremism so that they can better protect themselves.

Provider details

Unique reference number	55422
Address	Learning Services Worcestershire Worcestershire County Council County Hall Spetchley Road Worcester Worcestershire WR5 2NP
Contact number	01905843607
Website	www.worcestershire.gov.uk/council-services/learning/learningservices
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Paul Robinson
Provider type	Local authority – community learning and skills and employer provider
Date of previous inspection	12 to 15 February 2019
Main subcontractors	Workpays Limited Redditch

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the learning services manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment position statements 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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