

Inspection of St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

Inspection dates:

24 to 27 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Information about this provider

The Adult and Community Learning Service (the service) is part of St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council, which is located in St Helens, Merseyside. The service provides courses that lead to qualifications and courses that enable learners to achieve personal learning goals. The majority of courses that lead to qualifications include functional skills in English and mathematics, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and teaching assistant courses. At the time of the inspection, 215 learners were attending courses at the provider's 22 venues in St Helens.

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

Learners enjoy their lessons and want to learn to improve their personal circumstances. They are attentive in lessons and listen to teachers and other learners effectively, for example when involved in discussions. Learners work well together and are respectful towards one another and their tutors.

Staff are sensitive to learners' personal circumstances. They recognise that many learners have experienced traumatic events or have not been in education or employment for many years. They reassure learners that learning centres are safe spaces in which to learn. Staff skilfully support learners to develop positive attitudes to learning, which helps learners to complete their courses and, where relevant, achieve their qualifications.

Learners develop their confidence and resilience because of what they learn during their courses. For example, they feel confident to stand up in front of their peers to write their answers to activities on a flip chart. Learners on mathematics courses improve their mathematical skills. They use their new skills in a range of contexts, such as taking accurate measurements for window coverings at home.

Learners receive comprehensive and helpful careers information, advice and guidance to help them plan for their next steps. Visiting speakers from St Helens Council, St Helens Chamber of Commerce and recruitment companies provide useful information and advice about careers in St Helens. Learners benefit from one-to-one sessions with tutors to discuss their next steps, such as moving into jobs, volunteering or further study at the provider, the local college or the chamber of commerce.

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

Leaders and managers work closely with a wide range of partners to provide courses that meet the social and learning needs of the local and regional community. They work with local authority care-leaver teams, households into work teams and job centres to meet the priorities of St Helens Council. Leaders and managers work with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to help them meet targets for supporting women into work by providing targeted childcare and teaching assistant courses alongside English and mathematics courses from pre-entry level to level 2.

Leaders and managers have designed highly effective and flexible curriculums. For example, the level 1 caring for children course prepares learners for employment in the early years sector and helps learners to understand how to bring up and care for their own children. The ESOL curriculum is thoughtfully designed to meet the needs and interests of learners. Learners develop English language skills that they remember. Tutors plan innovative strategies and activities that enable learners to become increasingly fluent and to learn the nuances of the English language to show respect in conversations. As a result, they understand how to live positive lives

and, where appropriate, move into employment or volunteering roles in their communities.

Leaders, managers and tutors identify accurately what learners already know and can do at the start of their courses. They use the results of assessments to identify the most suitable course for each learner. However, on ESOL courses, tutors do not use learners' individual starting points well enough to plan personalised learning programmes to help learners build on their existing knowledge and skills. The planning and recording of learners' individual targets in their individual learning plans, particularly in level 1 caring for children and in mathematics, are not always specific enough to ensure that learners understand the progress they are making.

Tutors skilfully select and teach topics relevant to learners' everyday lives. For example, learners on level 1 caring for children courses learn how to develop their research skills to find out about the local amenities and what activities are available locally for children. Learners use this research to plan outings for their own children during school holidays. In ESOL, learners discuss issues that relate to the communities in which they live. They learn how to access services such as the NHS. ESOL learners often negotiate new topics with their tutors to help them to understand wider concepts such as equality and diversity and how these relate to them now that they are living in the UK.

Most tutors provide consistently effective feedback to learners. On ESOL courses, learners benefit from detailed oral and written feedback that is clear and helps learners to know what they have done well and what they need to practise. The majority of level 1 caring for children learners receive helpful written feedback from their tutors following assessment. However, in a few instances, written feedback mainly consists of 'ticks' acknowledging correct answers. It does not provide learners with clear, constructive and developmental guidance on how they could improve their work. In mathematics, tutors do not always help learners who have submitted incomplete or incorrect work to understand concepts that they have not yet mastered.

Tutors use current news stories to explain and promote fundamental British values. They use topics such as people breaking COVID-19 lockdown restrictions to illustrate the rule of law. ESOL tutors support learners to understand that the rule of law is not the same in all countries. They learn that in some countries, it creates oppression, while in England it demonstrates democracy.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of education. They rigorously challenge leaders to improve the quality of the provision and hold them to account for their actions. Governors recently requested an annual safeguarding report in addition to safeguarding updates at the termly governors' meetings to enable them to identify key safeguarding trends. As a result, leaders and governors have a better understanding of the challenges learners face and the support they need from leaders, managers and external agencies to help them to stay safe.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the specificity of targets set for learners on level 1 caring for children and mathematics courses.
- Improve the detail about learners' progress from their starting points in ESOL learners' individual learning plans.
- Improve the quality of written feedback following assessment for learners on level 1 caring for children and mathematics courses.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54563
Address	Park Road Centre Park Road St Helens Lancashire WA9 1HE
Contact number	01744 677314
Website	www.sthelens.gov.uk/adultlearning
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Diane Ireland
Provider type	Adult learning
Date of previous inspection	5 to 8 December 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the adult and community learning team 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

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Suzanne Wainwright	His Majesty's Inspector
Bob Busby	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