

Short inspection of Southampton City Council

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 November 2023

Outcome

Southampton City Council continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Southampton City Council (SCC) provides learning programmes for adults living in Southampton and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection, there were 241 learners enrolled, most of whom study non-qualification courses, such as dress making, singing for well-being and cookery. Approximately a third of learners study English, mathematics or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). SCC works with nine subcontractors that teach the significant majority of the provision. For example, Itchen College provides training in functional skills; We Can Train Limited provides online learning courses in areas such as digital skills; and SoCo Music Project provides music programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. SCC was last inspected in June 2017 when inspectors judged the quality of the provision to be good.

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

Learners greatly appreciate the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge, often close to the communities in which they live. Many have previously faced barriers to learning and encountered disadvantage. Consequently, learners often find learning now to be transformational, providing them with renewed self-belief and confidence.

Learners value and rightly appreciate the helpful and supportive staff, who know their needs well. For example, learners facing hardship due to the cost of living appreciate the food and packs to help them keep warm that staff provide. Learners who struggle in class benefit from teachers providing additional time and resources that help them understand. This support enables learners to overcome issues in their personal lives, complete challenging activities in lessons successfully and remain in learning.

Learners enjoy interacting with their peers and teachers during learning activities. They appreciate the opportunity to make new friends, reducing the risk of social isolation and loneliness. Learners acquire substantial new skills and knowledge

quickly that they use in their everyday lives. For example, ESOL learners can communicate more effectively with their children's schools. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities learn valuable social skills, such as taking turns, speaking publicly and leading small teams. As a result, learners lead more fulfilling lives, enhance their employability prospects and make a greater contribution to their community.

Learners benefit from the expertise of well-informed subcontractor staff, who understand the skills needs, careers and volunteering opportunities within local communities. Learners appreciate the help they receive to prepare CVs, arrange interviews with employers and access support from organisations, such as the National Careers Service. Most learners know the opportunities available to them following their current programme and are well prepared for their next steps.

Learners value the positive, nurturing and open relationships they have with staff. Learners feel able to talk to staff about concerns they have and are confident that they will receive the support they require. As a result, learners feel safe.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all learners to develop new skills and knowledge and fulfil their potential. They have a clear vision for how adult education in Southampton can enhance the lives of residents and promote economic development. Leaders take great care to select and manage subcontractors who know the communities they serve well and that help leaders at SCC achieve their aims to widen participation in education successfully. For example, leaders work closely with groups that support refugees and asylum seekers to understand learners' needs and expand the provision to meet the growing requirement. As a result, learners from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups participate in learning well, enhancing community integration and improving many learners' employability prospects.

Leaders use their understanding of local needs to develop programmes in response to emerging requirements swiftly. For example, leaders created an art programme for Ukrainian refugees. This provides an opportunity for those displaced by war to share their common heritage while developing their art skills. It also helps participants settle quickly into the local community. Leaders use the funding allocated to them to contribute positively to the development of more resilient and positive local communities.

Teachers order learning sensibly, allowing learners time to practise and acquire confidence and proficiency in a topic before moving on to more challenging material. For instance, ESOL learners initially learn simple vocabulary before applying this to construct sentences. Consequently, learners acquire a secure understanding of topics and can recall previous learning successfully. However, in a small number of vocational lessons, teachers do not support learners to develop their wider literacy and numeracy skills sufficiently well. As a result, these learners make slower progress developing these essential employability skills.

Teachers are experts in their subjects and skilled teachers. They use their expertise to explain concepts clearly and use interesting real-life examples to promote discussion. For example, teachers support learners to develop their confidence in talking to people they do not know by discussing topics, such as the risks of smoking. Teachers track learners' progress carefully, and provide additional support where learners are at risk of falling behind. As a result, nearly all learners achieve their personal learning goals, and most learners studying qualifications pass their assessments and achieve well.

Most teachers use a range of sensible techniques to check learners' understanding, including careful questioning and diligent observation of learners' progress. For example, English teachers listen to learners practising their use of different tenses and give guidance that helps learners better understand the past, present and future tense. They provide useful feedback that helps many learners to improve their work. As a result, most learners' work is at least to the standard expected and improves over time. However, in a small number of cases teachers do not identify errors in learners' written work, limiting learners' ability to improve the standard of their written English.

Leaders have a clear appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. They use a range of appropriate techniques, such as observations, learner surveys and data analysis, to inform their evaluation successfully. They take decisive steps that address issues rapidly. Leaders have appropriate, purposeful and robust processes that manage the quality of subcontractors' work effectively. Consequently, the quality of provision is consistently high, improves over time and meets learners' needs well. Leaders recognise rightly that they do not currently track where learners move on to after leaving programmes offered by SCC. This limits leaders' ability to fully evaluate the impact of the courses they provide.

Leaders' arrangements for oversight are effective. Senior officers and elected members are well informed by leaders and use their relevant expertise to support and challenge leaders appropriately. For instance, they ask probing questions to check that the provision is reaching under-represented groups identified by the council. As a result, SCC adult education meets its statutory obligations and contributes positively to the social and economic development of the city.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure learners on vocational programmes are supported to develop their literacy and numeracy skills to aid their future employability.
- Provide learners with feedback consistently, especially on their written work, to enable them to improve the standard of their written English.

- Further evaluate the impact of the provision, taking into account what learners move on to after completing their programme at SCC.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54509
Address	Municipal Block, Civic Centre Road Southampton SO14 7LY
Contact number	02380 834402
Website	www.southampton.gov.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	John Connelly
Provider type	Local authority provider
Date of previous inspection	27 and 28 June 2017
Main subcontractors	Bfluent School of English City College Southampton CLEAR (City Life Church) Itchen College Mayflower Theatre SoCo Music Project TWICS We Can Train WEA

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the second short inspection carried out since Southampton City Council was judged to be good in May 2013.

The inspection team was assisted by the adult learning 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

Roland White, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Baz Wren	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector

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