

Inspection of Essex County Council

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 December 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Information about this provider

Essex County Council commissions Adult Community Learning Essex (ACL Essex) to provide learning across the county, excluding the unitary authorities of Thurrock and Southend. Essex is a large county with a population of around 1.5 million. It has a wide range of communities spanning rural, urban and coastal areas, with areas of significant social deprivation. ACL Essex has eight adult community learning centres across Essex. It also offers courses from a wide range of community venues.

ACL Essex offers accredited and non-accredited adult learning courses and apprenticeships. At the time of the inspection, 2,159 adult learners were studying accredited courses, and 1,030 adult learners were studying community learning courses. This includes courses to develop learners' mathematical, English and digital skills. ACL Essex also offers a range of employability and skills courses and courses in community settings to help parents to support their children.

At the time of the inspection, there were 201 apprentices, of whom 33 were aged 16 to 19. Most of these apprentices studied business administrator, customer service practitioner, operations or departmental manager standards. Just over a third of apprentices were studying adult care worker standards at levels 2 to 4.

ACL Essex does not have any subcontractors. It does not have any learners in receipt of high needs funding.

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

As a result of the caring and supportive environment, learners at ACL Essex rapidly develop increased personal confidence and resilience. Learners on community learning courses know that it is normal to make mistakes while learning. They become more resilient. Learners on supported learning courses develop their confidence. They feel more confident to be able to attend a job interview. As a result, learners are better prepared for their next steps.

Learners and apprentices demonstrate positive attitudes towards their studies. Within the skills hubs, learners from a wide range of backgrounds, ages and experiences mix happily together to share their learning and make new friends. Business administration apprentices are highly motivated to achieve high grades. They respond positively to feedback, producing increasingly more accurate and evaluative work. Attendance of learners and apprentices to teaching and training sessions is high. They arrive ready to learn.

Learners value the respectful and inclusive environment at ACL Essex. Learners on community learning courses show respect for each other and their tutors. Apprentices know the importance of treating people with dignity and respect. Adult care apprentices have a greater understanding of dementia and know how to care for patients appropriately. They understand the stress the relatives of patients are under and the importance of ensuring that their concerns are recognised and discussed.

Apprentices develop the professional behaviours they need to be successful in their apprenticeships. Business administration apprentices learn the importance of behaving professionally at work. They know the value of listening to others and taking on board their views and opinions. Adult care worker apprentices know the importance of changing their language based on the situation and who they are talking to. As a result, most apprentices secure full-time employment on completion of their apprenticeships.

In many areas, leaders, managers and tutors offer a varied range of enrichment opportunities for learners and apprentices. Learners in art community learning courses display work at exhibitions in local community centres, libraries and local cafes. As a result, many learners flourish and go on to develop their talents further. Business administration apprentices study additional units, such as negotiation skills and resilience training. As a result, apprentices broaden their knowledge beyond the requirements of the standards they are studying.

Adult learners and apprentices do not have a good enough awareness of the local safeguarding risks in the areas in which they live and work. Learners and apprentices feel safe when attending college and online sessions. They know where and how they can receive help if they have any concerns.

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

ACL Essex has designed an ambitious, responsive curriculum that meets the needs of the local community. Leaders offer courses that meet employment shortages in sectors such as early years and health and social care. Leaders have developed courses to support adults with learning difficulties to gain employment. Leaders have developed a range of online courses to provide more flexible opportunities to study. Learners can move from non-accredited courses, such as from short 'taster' sessions, to accredited courses and apprenticeships from level 2 to level 5. As a result, most learners and apprentices have a positive destination on completion of their studies. Most learners state that they have improved their skills for life and work because of their courses.

Tutors plan courses effectively to ensure that apprentices and adult learners build new knowledge and skills. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) tutors sequence lessons skilfully. Lessons build knowledge, such as fundamental lexis, over time. ESOL learners build their understanding of the vocabulary related to employment, such as maternity and paternity leave. Business apprentices first learn about the important concepts of business, such as profit and loss, margins and consumer satisfaction. Apprentices then move on to more complex aspects, such as market influences and political and economic variations. As a result, apprentices can consider and understand a wide range of external factors on businesses.

Tutors use a wide range of effective teaching strategies. As a result, apprentices and learners gain a good understanding of concepts studied. Tutors use a good range of activities to manage online teaching effectively. Access to higher education social science courses are taught effectively through a hybrid, face-to-face and online model. Where tutors use group work, learners working in the classroom join online forums and breakout rooms. In functional skills mathematics classes, tutors use practical mapping exercises successfully to check and develop learners' understanding of ratios. Tutors use questioning techniques effectively to further extend learners' knowledge of how ratios can be applied. As a result, learners develop their knowledge about these concepts effectively.

In most cases, tutors use the existing skills and knowledge of learners to plan learning effectively. Learners on supported learning hospitality courses undertake a thorough initial assessment. As part of this assessment, tutors ask learners to locate equipment from around the kitchen and weigh out ingredients for making scones. Tutors use their findings to help plan the extra help they will need to provide. As a result, tutors ensure that learners are appropriately supported while on their course.

Most learners benefit from timely, detailed feedback. Learners know what they need to do to improve their work. Within community learning art sessions, tutors give ongoing effective feedback and detailed practical advice on aspects such as layering paint colours. As a result, learners' work improves in quality. Most adult learners on community learning courses complete and achieve their learning and personal goals.

Learners and apprentices develop substantial new knowledge while on their courses. Business administration apprentices improve their skills in using information technology software, such as spreadsheets. They can undertake mail merges and create graphs and tables. As a result, apprentices can complete their work quickly and to a professional standard. Beauty learners can articulate fluently contraindications and possible contra-actions to eyebrow shaping and manicure treatments. Learners in digital courses know how to compose formal letters, enabling them to apply for jobs. They can use workplace computerised systems with confidence.

Tutors ensure that learners and apprentices improve their English, mathematical and digital skills while on their courses. Tutors give appropriate feedback to identify and correct mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar, or formatting errors. Apprentices on the adult care worker standard quickly develop their skills in how to dispense medication. They learn the importance of measuring medications accurately and only giving the prescribed doses. They learn the importance of writing clear and detailed notes on the care they have given, as well as documenting any concerns. As a result, learners and apprentices are better prepared for their next steps.

Leaders have ensured that learners and apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the high-quality support they need. Leaders put in place appropriate support and check the effectiveness of this at routine intervals. Leaders work effectively with an external organisation that works with local disability confident employers. Leaders ensure that learners studying supported learning courses who are ready to move into employment receive appropriate support to do so.

On several accredited courses, and on adult care apprenticeships, the proportion of learners and apprentices who remain in learning and achieve is low. Leaders are making improvements in these areas. More learners are completing their learning on accredited courses in accounting, digital and health and social care. It is too early to see the full impact of this quality improvement work.

Apprentices do not receive sufficient impartial advice and guidance. They are not aware of the wider career routes open to them in different sectors on completion of their apprenticeship. Consequently, apprentices are not sufficiently aware of the many career directions and further training opportunities open to them. Tutors support most adult learners effectively to plan for their next steps. Learners wanting to progress on to freelance work learn about how to become self-employed. Learners in supported learning have good opportunities to gain work experience. They work in gardens, at leisure centres or in cafés. As a result, most adult learners know about their possible next steps in education, employment or training.

Leaders and managers have prioritised appropriately the ongoing professional development of staff at ACL Essex. Leaders plan professional development opportunities for tutors that are closely linked with the areas for development identified from quality improvement activities. Tutors benefit from training to further

develop teaching skills. They improve their skills in online training and their use of questioning and assessment. Tutors keep their technical skills up to date by completing relevant sector training, as well as by continuing to work in the sector. Staff value these professional development opportunities.

Governors have a good oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of ACL Essex. Governors challenge leaders to improve. Governors have encouraged leaders to broaden their digital strategy. As a result, leaders have launched new digital training hubs. Tutors use an effective range of digital technologies when teaching.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the proportion of adult care apprentices and adult learners who complete their learning on accredited courses where this is too low.
- Ensure that adult learners and apprentices are aware of the local safeguarding risks in the areas in which they live and work.
- Ensure that apprentices receive sufficient independent careers advice and guidance so that they are aware of the wider career options available to them.

Provider details

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Unique reference number | 51766 |
| Address | ACL Witham, Spinks Lane Witham Essex CM8 1EP |
| Contact number | 03330 139227 |
| Website | www.aclessex.com |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Lisa Jarentowski |
| Provider type | Community Learning and Skills |
| Date of previous inspection | 20 to 23 February 2018 |
| Main subcontractors | None |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal quality and compliance, 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

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Georgina Ager, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Penny Fawcus | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Alan Winchcombe | Ofsted Inspector |
| Alison Davies | Ofsted Inspector |
| Robert Bamford | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Shane Langthorne | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Jules Steele | His Majesty's 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