

Inspection of Aspens-Services Limited

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 March 2024

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

Information about this provider

Aspens-Services Limited is an employer provider based in Worcester. It provides catering services in over 1,000 schools across the country. At the time of the visit, 54 apprentices were studying on apprenticeships. Eleven apprentices were on the level 2 production chef and nine on the level 3 senior production chef apprenticeship. Twenty were on the level 5 operations and departmental manager (ODM) apprenticeship. A further nine apprentices were enrolled on level 4 hospitality manager. Aspens-Services Ltd does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Apprentices enjoy their learning and develop positive attitudes and behaviours about themselves and their colleagues. They also develop their vocational knowledge, their confidence and leadership qualities, and as a result progress within the business.

Apprentices have mutual respect between each other, their coaches, and staff. They work harmoniously, adapting their practice to ensure all staff are included. For example, in level 3 production chef, apprentices concerned about their team's well-being and inclusion adapt their written and verbal communications to ensure they understand tasks, and work effectively together.

Apprentices attend all aspects of their training well, including off-the-job remote training sessions. Apprentices prioritise and benefit from their monthly one-to-one coaching sessions with their coach, helping them to stay on track and manage their personal and work life, including their mental health.

Apprentices feel safe. Apprentices receive appropriate information about different safeguarding topics at the start of the apprenticeship, including on and offline safety. Most apprentices know how to keep themselves and others safe. If they have a concern, they know who to contact at the provider, as well as in their workplace.

Apprentices develop the skills they need to study independently, building their confidence to ask questions and not to rely on materials solely provided by their coaches. As a result, most apprentices make at least the progress expected in the development of their written work and their progression towards their end-point assessment. Most apprentices reaching their end-point assessment are well prepared and achieve their qualifications.

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

Leaders have developed an appropriate curriculum to meet the diverse needs of the business. As the company is an employer provider, leaders have ensured that there are routes for staff to move from production chef through to management roles within the company. In addition, they have widened the offer to include areas such as culinary skills for fine dining that would not normally be relevant for the core business. As a result, apprentices have a wide range of options to develop within the business and take advantage of opportunities in catering the sector.

Leaders have ensured that their curriculums are well sequenced to develop apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours. Apprentices on the level 5 ODM apprenticeship start with understanding the business itself and then develop more complex leadership principles. On level 3 production chef, apprentices start with kitchen essentials and nutrition so that they are able to relate these topics in their job roles. Apprentices who require level 2 English and mathematics qualifications receive the appropriate support at the start of their course. As a result, apprentices

become quickly engaged in their learning and apply new knowledge in their workplace.

Coaches check what apprentices know and can do at the start of their apprenticeship effectively. They work with workplace managers to ensure that those apprentices who have additional support needs receive the appropriate support when at work. For example, apprentices with dyslexia use witness statements at work to support evidence of their development, rather than written work. Functional skills coaches provide apprentices with helpful support to ensure that they close gaps in these skills swiftly.

Coaches are highly knowledgeable in their vocational subjects. They teach apprentices effectively through online one-to-one coaching sessions, group learning sessions and face-to-face group training sessions. Coaches teach information clearly to apprentices, and if apprentices do not understand they are able to adapt quickly to teach information differently. For example, functional skills coaches describe symmetry and then address misconceptions by asking apprentices to consider how the shapes would fold. However, they do not link mathematics concepts clearly enough to the workplace for apprentices to apply their learning.

Coaches check apprentices' understanding frequently throughout sessions. They use quizzes, verbal questioning, and group work to ensure apprentices consolidate their understanding. They also assess apprentices' written work, providing them with timely verbal and written feedback – helping apprentices to improve their work over time.

Coaches ensure that apprentices understand how to achieve merit and distinction grades in their final assessments. However, a few apprentices studying a level 5 diploma in management do not receive the guidance, such as appropriate referencing, to achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Most apprentices use subject-specific, professional, and technical vocabulary fluently. However, on the level 4 hospitality management apprenticeship, while coaches use technical language in discussions, they do not systematically encourage apprentices to use it within their work.

Tutors discuss apprentices' next steps and future careers during reviews and provide them with effective advice and resources about further training and jobs at work. Most apprentices have a clear understanding of new opportunities within the organisation.

Leaders ensure that apprentices receive effective teaching and support. They know well the strengths and weaknesses in their curriculums and monitor the quality of teaching effectively. Leaders enable coaches to benefit from a range of professional development, including teaching skills, to continually improve apprentices' experience.

Leaders have reviewed and improved the recruitment of apprentices. They now ensure that candidates have a better understanding of the demands and expectations of the apprenticeship. As a result, only a few apprentices leave their apprenticeship early.

Leaders have an effective governance board. The board consists of senior managers and an external critical friend who provides leaders with effective challenge – holding them to account. They receive helpful information about apprentices' progress. As a result, governors ensure that leaders focus on improving apprentices' experience and outcomes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Support apprentices to relate and apply mathematics topics in the workplace.
- Support apprentices who study level 4 hospitality management to use technical language at work.
- Provide apprentices who study the level 5 diploma in management with the guidance to achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2539290
Address	Teme House Whittington Road Worcester WR5 2RY
Contact number	01905 759613
Website	https://www.aspens-services.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	John Roe
Provider type	Employer provider
Date of previous inspection	9 to 11 February 2022
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of academy, 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

Richard Deane, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Helen Morgan	His Majesty's Inspector
Julia Stevens	Ofsted Inspector

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