

Pre-School Learning Alliance

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	50230
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

The Pre-School Learning Alliance was inspected in June 2023. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

The Pre-School Learning Alliance, trading as the 'Early Years Alliance', is a national membership organisation that supports and promotes the work of 14,000 independent voluntary early years settings across the country. In addition, they operate 41 early years childcare settings.

They offer apprenticeships and adult learning programmes for the early years sector. Currently, there are fewer than five apprentices on the level 2 early years practitioner standard and 22 on the level 3 early years educator standard. In addition, 51 adult learners study the level 3 early years educator course, and 9 study the level 5 diploma for the early years senior practitioner funded through advanced learner loans.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in planning and teaching a curriculum so that learners and apprentices are taught the knowledge they need for the assessments they complete?

Significant progress

After the previous inspection, leaders and managers acted swiftly to review and revise how they plan and teach the curriculum. Since then, they have introduced online classes for learners and apprentices so that they have access to sufficient teaching to make good progress. Learners and apprentices attend monthly online group teaching sessions, meet with their assessors, and attend frequent progress reviews that include their employer. Learners and apprentices are taught a well-structured curriculum that deepens their knowledge and understanding of the taught topics.

Leaders and managers make sure that the assignments that learners and apprentices complete align well with what they are taught. For example, level 3 early years educators are taught about observations early on in their training. This provides sufficient time for learners and apprentices to develop and improve their observation

skills before completing their longitudinal study. They begin their longitudinal study halfway through their course. This gives them sufficient time to review, revise, and complete their study to the required standards.

Assessors support learners and apprentices very effectively to learn the essential knowledge and study skills they need to complete their assessments to a suitable standard. Assessors give learners and apprentices effective guidance to help them with their reading, research, and writing. They break down assignments into smaller tasks and provide clear instructions on how to complete them. They share helpful links and reading lists and teach learners and apprentices to reference their work correctly. Learners and apprentices produce work to a good and, in a few cases, a high standard.

Assessors prepare learners and apprentices well for their examinations and final assessments from the start of their training. In sessions, they use multiple-choice questions and hold professional discussions that reflect the final assessment tasks. Apprentices attend monthly preparation sessions to practise for their final assessments. Consequently, apprentices understand well the requirements of their final assessments and most achieve a distinction grade.

What progress have leaders and managers made in putting in place a personal development curriculum so that learners and apprentices have a firm understanding of topics such as healthy relationships and those related to British values, including how these apply to their lives?

Significant progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have created very well a curriculum to support learners' and apprentices' wider personal development. They make sure that personal development is effectively integrated into learners' and apprentices' training. This means that they frequently take part in personal development activities that go beyond the requirements of their training.

Leaders and managers make sure that learners and apprentices have access to a wide range of relevant topics that build on the core curriculum content they study. Topics include yoga for children, healthy eating, effective leadership, and reflective practice.

Leaders and managers make sure that the broader personal development curriculum includes a wide range of content on, for example, safeguarding, mental health, stalking, harassment, and well-being. Learners and apprentices complete personal development tasks each month and learn new knowledge that they share with others at work. For example, they learn about county lines, domestic abuse, harassment, and bullying. Assessors frequently review the progress that learners and apprentices make in developing their knowledge in these areas.

Learners and apprentices have a suitable understanding of the dangers of radicalisation, extremism, and fundamental British values. This is an improvement from their understanding at the previous inspection. For example, apprentices understand how to apply British values at work through, for example, promoting respect and tolerance.

How well do staff use the information they have on the knowledge and skills of apprentices at the start of the course to plan their training and ensure that the programme is suitably demanding for all apprentices? Reasonable progress

Assessors carry out thorough initial assessments of what apprentices know and can do before they begin training, including in the knowledge of English and mathematics. Staff discuss the results of these assessments in detail with apprentices. Subsequently, they provide apprentices with helpful advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about which programme best meets their needs and aspirations.

Assessors use the results of initial assessments to identify gaps in apprentices' knowledge, skills, and behaviours. They plan activities into the training so that any gaps are filled. Assessors review the progress that apprentices make with their line managers effectively. They make sure that, at work, apprentices have adequate opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, and behaviours. This contributes to apprentices making good progress.

Assessors make sure that the programme is suitably demanding for most apprentices. For example, they set extended tasks and additional work for apprentices with prior experience and knowledge of early years. In online sessions, assessors appropriately challenge apprentices through effective questioning. They encourage apprentices to share examples from their own practice. Assessors provide suitable guidance and additional support in lessons and through one-to-one sessions with apprentices who are new to their roles.

In a small minority of instances, apprentices are not sufficiently challenged to achieve highly. They do not benefit from bespoke support to make sure they make good progress. Consequently, a few apprentices are behind in their studies. Leaders and managers are taking suitable action to remedy this.

How effectively do leaders and managers assess the quality of teaching and provide training to tutors that helps them to further improve their teaching skills?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have put appropriate processes in place to check and monitor the quality of teaching across the provision. For example, they carry out frequent observations of teaching, learning, and assessment sessions, including online lessons and progress reviews. They sample learners' and apprentices' marked work. However, leaders and managers have only recently implemented some of their processes and it is too early to judge their impact.

Leaders and managers use information on the quality of teaching and assessment well to put in place training and development activities to help assessors improve their teaching. Assessors receive developmental feedback from lead managers, who meet with assessors frequently to review their performance and identify their development needs. Leaders take appropriate action to manage any underperformance.

Assessors take part in a range of training and development activities to further enhance their practice and keep their subject knowledge current. For example, they attend industry shows, share best practice, and are trained in careers information, advice, and guidance. Some take higher education courses, such as in early years and childhood studies.

Trustees provide effective scrutiny of the provision. Through independent inquiry they have tested out managers' own assessment of the progress they have made since the previous inspection. For example, they have visited online lessons, talked to learners, apprentices, and met with assessors. Consequently, they have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision.

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