

Inspection of Central Bedfordshire Council

Inspection dates: 9 to 12 July 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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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

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) provides education and training across Bedfordshire through its Employment and Skills Academy. At the time of the inspection, there were 400 adult learners enrolled on a range of community learning and adult education courses, such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), English, mathematics and early years. There were 43 apprentices enrolled on level 3 teaching assistant, level 3 early years educator, level 3 business administration, level 4 children, young people and family practitioner and level 2 early years practitioner. Most apprentices were aged 18 or over. CBC works with six subcontractors to provide courses in the community.

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

Learners and apprentices develop positive relationships with staff and benefit from a culture where the principles of equality and diversity are nurtured. They feel highly valued and supported. Learners and apprentices develop confidence and self-esteem and are not afraid to offer ideas in class and ask questions if they do not understand information. ESOL learners have the confidence to speak to their children's teachers and to speak to other parents when collecting their children from school.

Learners and apprentices are well focused on their learning and are eager to participate in lessons and complete work to an appropriate standard. They recognise the value of learning and gaining skills and knowledge to help them progress in life and work. In ESOL lessons, learners consistently apply themselves to each task set by the tutor, trying hard with their work and asking for help where needed. Learners explain how they embrace the challenge of completing work in lessons and at home, asking for extra work to help them practise their new language further.

Most learners and apprentices have high attendance and are punctual. Tutors recognise that many learners face significant barriers to learning and struggle to balance the demands of attending classes with those of their personal lives. Most learners prioritise learning and strive to attend classes around their work and family commitments. Where learners are unable to attend, tutors ensure that they do not miss out on their learning. Tutors carefully track any non-attendance of apprentices and follow up with apprentices and employers to ensure that apprentices make good progress.

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

Leaders and managers provide an ambitious and accessible curriculum that helps learners to develop the knowledge and skills they need to improve their employment opportunities and to progress in their careers. Leaders and managers work closely with subcontractors in local communities to provide a wide range of courses to motivate learners who are the hardest to reach and who live in the most deprived areas. They work well with large providers and smaller voluntary and community organisations to help employers meet their skills gaps and help residents contribute positively to society.

Tutors provide apprentices with a curriculum that is well planned and offered in a logical order that helps them to develop the knowledge and skills they need to operate effectively in the workplace. Apprentices on level 3 early years educator begin by learning about safeguarding, health and safety and legislation, so that they can function safely in schools and nurseries as soon as possible. Most apprentices achieve their qualifications with a high number achieving distinctions.

Tutors identify effectively what learners and apprentices know and can do at the start of their courses. Tutors use this information appropriately to plan individual

programmes. Apprentices complete skills scans and complete initial assessments in English and mathematics. Tutors use this information to identify where apprentices need to study functional skills English and/or mathematics qualifications and whether they need additional training opportunities in their subject area. However, the small proportion of apprentices who need to achieve an English and/or mathematics functional skills qualification often do not pass their examinations first time.

Tutors are well qualified with significant sector experience and hold relevant qualifications in the subjects they teach and assess. Tutors use their expertise to help learners and apprentices develop new knowledge and skills. Apprentices on level 3 business administration learn about project management and develop the skills to manage their own projects, such as schemes to refurbish play parks.

Tutors use a range of teaching methods to teach learners and apprentices effectively. They clearly explain information through presentations, tutor-led sessions, discussions and related learning activities to reinforce learning. This supports learners and apprentices to develop new knowledge and skills. For example, learners on the introduction to early years course learn how to communicate with young children using appropriate language at the right level.

Tutors use a range of assessment methods effectively to check the understanding of learners and apprentices. Tutors use targeted questioning, quizzes, mock tests and mark written assignments. They provide clear and useful feedback to learners and apprentices, which helps them to improve their work further. Learners and apprentices value this feedback and consider it carefully when resubmitting or completing future assignments.

Tutors continue to update their subject knowledge effectively so that it remains current. They attend training provided by awarding bodies, attend team meetings and complete webinars in their subject areas. However, leaders do not ensure that tutors benefit from attending sufficient training to continually improve their knowledge and craft of teaching.

Tutors on a small proportion of courses do not support apprentices well enough to develop their wider academic skills, such as citations and referencing when completing written assignments. A few apprentices, who aspire to progress to higher education, are not prepared fully for these elements of academic study.

Tutors provide learners and apprentices with useful information to help them plan their next steps. Tutors work effectively with external providers to provide impartial careers advice and guidance. As a result, most learners and apprentices understand their options for next steps upon completion of their course.

Leaders and managers have accurate oversight of the quality of education provided to learners and apprentices, including that of the subcontractors. Leaders complete a range of activities such as observations of teaching and speaking to learners and apprentices to assure themselves of the quality of the learner experience. Leaders

and managers rightly recognise that a small proportion of tutors in one subcontractor do not provide high-quality teaching. Leaders have sensible plans to bring about improvement.

Leaders have effective governance arrangements in place through an employment and skills scrutiny and improvement board. The board has governors with relevant expertise to provide valuable scrutiny and challenge. Governors challenge leaders appropriately.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that apprentices, develop their wider academic skills and are prepared effectively for higher education.
- Ensure that apprentices pass their functional skills English and mathematics examinations at their first attempt.
- Ensure that tutors complete training to continually improve their knowledge and craft of teaching.

Provider details

Unique reference number	59021
Address	Priory House Monks Walk Chicksands Shefford SG17 5TQ
Contact number	0300 300 4105
Website	www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk ,
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Anna Bosworth
Provider type	Community Learning and Skills - Local Authority
Date of previous inspection	10 to 11 March 2020
Main subcontractors	Bedfordshire Training and Assessment Centre Impact, Be Positive SPS Training Solutions SSG Services NOAH STC Training Solutions

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the employment and skills 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

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