

Inspection of Skills to Group Limited

Inspection dates: 17 to 20 September 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Skills to Group Limited, known as Skills Group (SG), is an independent learning provider located in Plympton, Devon. It provides training programmes for apprentices and study programmes for learners aged 16 to 18.

At the time of the inspection, 93 learners aged 16 to 18 were studying employability programmes with various vocational pathways, such as construction, hairdressing, and automotive. Around 280 apprentices study 12 apprenticeships; 117 study construction-related programmes, mostly at level 2, including 51 in carpentry and 44 in bricklaying. In addition, 40 apprentices were studying the early years practitioner at level 2, and 36 were studying the early years educator at level 3. The remaining apprentices study automotive, hairdressing, and business administration. Just under half of apprentices were aged 16 to 18.

Thirty learners with high needs were studying at SG. Ten were studying on courses specifically designed for them (the hub), and the others were studying vocational programmes. Around 140 apprentices and learners have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

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

Apprentices and learners, including those with high needs, are taught in inclusive, calm learning environments. Staff have high expectations of apprentices and learners. They challenge any unruly behaviour, and foul language is never tolerated. This contributes positively to apprentices' and learners' motivation to complete their training tasks to the best of their ability.

Apprentices and learners maintain interest throughout classroom and workshop sessions. Staff use classroom and workshop time effectively, so apprentices and learners develop new skills and learn important knowledge quickly.

Learners with high needs studying on the hub course work in a welcoming and well-resourced learning environment. Each learner has an information board that helps them to know what tasks they are completing and the targets they are working towards. This helps to reinforce the link between the tasks being completed and the targets to be achieved.

The small number of female learners and apprentices are treated with respect by their peers. Staff serve as strong role models and use their knowledge and experience of their industries well to help learners and apprentices develop into polite, articulate, and respectful community members.

Apprentices and learners feel safe in training and at work. They know who to contact and how to report any concerns, and are comfortable doing so. Staff teach them to stay safe online by not sharing passwords and keeping their social media profiles private.

Apprentices and learners quickly develop essential new knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to the occupation they are studying. Apprentices in carpentry and joinery begin learning how to use hand tools safely and can measure, mark, and cut accurately. Learners on automotive study programmes begin learning how to balance wheels and safely jumpstart an engine. Learners on the hub course learn to work well with their peers and swiftly develop independence.

Apprentices and learners study a personal development programme beyond academic and vocational training. This helps to expand their knowledge and understanding of broader topics, such as how to maintain their physical and mental well-being and recognise coercive or controlling behaviour.

Apprentices and learners arrive on time for learning sessions and return promptly from breaks to continue their learning. Most apprentices and learners have high attendance rates. However, attendance for a few learners on study programmes and the hub course is low. Leaders and managers take appropriate action to help these learners understand that attendance is essential in training and work.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders have significantly improved the quality of provision. This includes introducing a new management structure with clear lines of responsibility for managers. Leaders and trainers have redesigned the apprenticeships and study programmes so that apprentices and learners develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need. For example, learners on the hub course now study individualised programmes that build well on their starting points.

Leaders and trainers have effectively planned and sequenced the curriculum for apprentices and learners. Apprentices and learners gradually develop their knowledge and skills, building upon fundamental concepts to grasp more complex ones over time. Apprentices studying level 2 bricklaying start with single-brick straight walls before moving on to more complex work involving different types of brick bonds. Learners on study programmes learn industry-safe working practices and related hazards and move on to specific employment-related topics.

Trainers are experts in their occupations, and hold appropriate industry and teaching qualifications. They make valuable contextual links between the work which apprentices complete during off-the-job training and the workplace. Trainers help learners on study programmes develop the skills they need to move on to an apprenticeship.

Most teaching is effective and engaging, and various methods are used to teach and present information. For example, trainers use helpful, practical demonstrations to show and explain the techniques that apprentices need to use before giving them time to practise and master skills. Most trainers use assessment well to check apprentices' and learners' understanding of key concepts, identify and correct misunderstandings, and fill gaps in knowledge. However, a few trainers do not set apprentices targets that help them to know what to improve and how to improve their skills further.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have developed a series of effective staff training courses. Weekly informal sessions help trainers familiarise themselves with topics such as autism. These are followed up by more formal training days, where staff develop their teaching skills further, including classroom and behaviour management topics.

Most learners and apprentices receive helpful careers advice. A few trainers and support staff have formal advice and guidance qualifications, which helps them provide practical advice. A few apprentices gain promotions and/or move to higher education. Learners studying vocational study programmes hoping to secure an apprenticeship receive helpful information at the start and throughout their programme, which helps them understand what employers look for in apprentices.

In the previous academic year, just under half of apprentices stayed until the end of their training. This was because they did not receive accurate advice and guidance

before joining the apprenticeship. Leaders have significantly improved the advice that apprentices receive before joining the programme. Consequently, fewer apprentices have left their training early. Most apprentices who complete their training, including those with SEND, achieve the apprenticeship. Approximately two fifths achieve a merit or distinction grade. Around three quarters of apprentices who study functional skills in English and mathematics pass their examinations on their first attempt.

Most study programme learners, including those with SEND, stay on the course and achieve their qualifications. Most learners studying functional skills in English at level 2 achieve the qualifications, and three quarters achieve in mathematics at level 2.

Staff identify quickly learners and apprentices who need extra help, including those with education, health, and care plans. Staff ensure that appropriate help is in place at the beginning of the training. Apprentices and learners receive high-quality support through one-to-ones and extended practical sessions. Staff ensure reasonable adjustments for assessments and examinations are in place.

Learners with high needs who are studying the hub course develop the appropriate life skills to prepare them for adulthood. They learn how to buy their lunch in shops, unaccompanied by staff, talk confidently to different people, and make better decisions about healthy eating and getting more exercise. They also improve their understanding of diversity and can recall different protected characteristics.

Apprentices and learners develop a good understanding of life in modern Britain. Each month, staff teach them hot topics on local, national, and international subjects. For example, during the summer riots, leaders spoke to apprentices and learners about how to stay safe in the community. This helps most apprentices and learners understand the meaning of tolerance, and how to protect themselves from radicalisation.

The directors responsible for governance have a wealth of industry and training experience. They have worked in education for learners with SEND, construction, and finance. Directors are familiar with the provider's strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to challenge and support the leaders. Leaders rightly recognise that board members require more focus on teaching and learning to ensure that the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive continually improves.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the number of apprentices who stay until the end of the programme and achieve their qualification.

- Ensure that apprentices are set targets that help them to know what and how they need to improve.
- Ensure that directors understand the quality of education that apprentices and learners receive and use the knowledge to inform continual improvements.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54014
Address	Horizon Building, Western Wood Way, Plympton Plymouth Devon PL7 5BG
Contact number	01752 332442
Website	www.skillsgroupuk.com
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Mark Boulting (acting)
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	28 June to 1 July 2022
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality 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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