

# Inspection of Middlesbrough Council

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 November 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Middlesbrough Council provides adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and education programmes for learners with high needs under the name of Middlesbrough Community Learning Service. Most adult learners study courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and functional skills English and mathematics. At the time of the inspection, there were 291 adult learners in learning. Most apprentices are employed by the council and other public sector employers. They study apprenticeships from levels 2 to 5, with a high proportion on level 3 business administration and level 5 operations and departmental manager apprenticeships. There were 46 learners with high needs in learning, including 17 learners enrolled with a subcontractor. The provider also works with seven subcontractors to provide community learning programmes. At the time of the inspection, none of these programmes had started.

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

Tutors create very calm, welcoming and orderly classroom environments which support the development of learners' and apprentices' confidence and willingness to participate. Learners and apprentices are comfortable in expressing themselves and their needs. They engage fully with their learning programmes.

Staff set clear and high expectations for behaviour during training sessions and in the workplace. This supports learners' social integration and reintroduction to education in many cases. Learners and apprentices demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning. They develop professional behaviours that prepare them to succeed in life and to meet the demands of the workplace.

Staff place a strong focus on attendance and punctuality. Attendance for adult learners and apprentices is high. The attendance of a few learners with high needs does not consistently meet expectations. In these instances, staff provide support to help them to catch up with missed learning. This includes conducting home visits and establishing regular contact with parents and carers.

Tutors promote the importance of maintaining physical and mental well-being. They emphasise how this enables learners and apprentices to live healthier lives. Learners with high needs increase their understanding of how to stay emotionally and physically healthy through, for example, getting enough sleep. Learners on ESOL courses explore healthy eating options when shopping. They talk about the importance of a balanced diet.

Staff help learners and apprentices to identify routes for their career progression. They engage the services of external organisations that provide information and guidance about opportunities in sectors such as manufacturing, teaching and working in the NHS. Learners and apprentices know how to plan for their next steps once they have completed their training and education.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They learn in environments that are free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. This enables them to focus fully on their studies while building confidence and resilience. Apprentices are mature and take responsibility for their own health and safety and that of their peers and clients. They know how to report any concerns regarding safeguarding and well-being and are confident that these will be dealt with by staff.

Staff ensure that learners and apprentices understand how to keep themselves safe from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. They arrange useful events that learners attend, with guest speakers from local police forces and 'Prevent' duty leads, who talk to learners about how to help protect themselves in their communities.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear intent for the provision of adult learning, apprenticeships and programmes for learners with high needs in Middlesbrough. They aim to support adults who are economically inactive and those who need to improve their skills to move towards and into employment. Leaders and managers work closely with other council departments to promote apprenticeships, which senior managers value as an integral aspect of their workforce and talent development pipeline. They ensure that the curriculum for learners with high needs meets the requirements of the most disadvantaged young people in the local community, including those who have not engaged in education or training for an extended period of time. Tutors align learning pathways closely to preparation for independence and adult life.

Leaders and managers have in place effective strategic and operational partnerships, including with directorates in Middlesbrough Council and the local further education college. Through their partnership working, leaders ensure that the curriculum provided by the service meets local priorities and aligns closely with the college to complement their offer. Leaders work with partners to design and implement ESOL and English programmes that address the needs of a very diverse local population with a high proportion of residents who speak English as an additional language. This is starting to impact on the council's priorities to raise literacy levels in adults and subsequently school-age children in the town.

Tutors plan their courses carefully so that learners and apprentices build on their knowledge in manageable steps throughout their courses. In functional skills English, learners develop the foundations of grammar and sentence construction through studying reading and comprehension before moving on to speaking and listening skills and then writing. Level 5 operations and departmental manager apprentices learn about the theories of emotional intelligence, project and financial management before putting these into practice in their workplace. Tutors in ESOL focus their teaching on essential English communication skills so that learners can communicate with others early in the programme. This development of speaking skills helps learners to begin to read and write in English later in the programme.

Tutors successfully use a range of teaching strategies to help learners and apprentices to understand key concepts. Tutors in adult learning use paired word matching activities and demonstrate the writing and phonetic blending of key words. Tutors correct verbal pronunciation inaccuracies so that learners know how to use phonics correctly to pronounce words. However, a few teachers in ESOL use resources designed for use with children, which do not reflect adult learners' maturity and life experiences.

Most tutors use effective assessment methods to check learning. Most adult learning tutors make good use of questioning as a teaching strategy to check learners' understanding. For example, in ESOL groups they use whole-class questioning to elicit volunteered responses on topics such as identifying body parts and the correct

use of tenses. However, a few tutors move on to new topics too quickly and do not thoroughly check that learners understand previous content before they do so.

Managers have in place effective arrangements to provide support for learners who require additional help to engage and make progress. Tutors share their lesson plans and intended outcomes for learners who require support with learning support staff. Support staff provide the specific support that learners need, such as scribing and reading for learners where required. These learners make progress in line with their peers.

Leaders and managers provide learners with high needs with relevant personalised support, such as speech and language therapy and specialist signers. This helps learners to make progress against their personal targets and overcome barriers to learning. Tutors use assistive technologies effectively to enable learners to participate fully in all aspects of their learning. Tutors provide learners with visual impairments with portable screens which enable them to view key information including presentations, videos and visual imagery.

Tutors provide learners with high needs with the opportunity to participate in meaningful work-related activity, including, where appropriate, work experience. Learners with complex needs who are not yet ready to take part in placements engage in planning social enterprise events such as organising a cancer charity coffee morning, where they bake cakes and serve tea and coffee to members of the local community.

Most learners and apprentices make good progress in developing the knowledge and skills that they need to progress to their next steps. A high proportion of apprentices successfully complete their programmes, with just over a half achieving distinctions in their final assessments. Learners with high needs successfully achieve their personal goals and overcome many barriers to learning and life. In ESOL, most learners achieve their qualifications and progress to positive destinations, such as the next level of learning or further education, and a few learners progress into employment.

Tutors benefit from helpful support and professional development to keep their vocational knowledge up to date. Most tutors benefit from support to improve their teaching skills. Tutors have completed recent training in using phonics, using technology in lessons, effective use of assessment and planning learning using recognised teaching theories. However, a few tutors do not routinely take part in training that helps them to improve their teaching practice.

Leaders and managers ensure that learners with high needs at subcontracted provision benefit from effective teaching. They conduct rigorous quality assurance activities such as evaluations of the quality of teaching, reviews of learners' work, audits and collecting feedback from learners. Subcontractor managers make improvements to the quality of teaching where required.

Leaders and managers have in place an advisory board which provides effective support and challenge on performance, the quality of education provided by the service and meeting local needs. The chair of the board and other members work in the regeneration, educational achievement and inclusion directorates in the local council. They have a wealth of experience across education and fully understand the needs of the residents of Middlesbrough. The deputy mayor of the council sits on the board and holds overall responsibility for the service. They use their experience effectively to hold leaders and managers to account and to provide advice on improvements and the functionality of the service.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Provide training for staff that focuses on the development of teaching skills, particularly in consolidating learning and in assessment practice.
- Ensure that tutors use resources that are age-appropriate for adults.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	50168
<b>Address</b>	Middlesbrough Community Learning Service Multi-Media Exchange 72–80 Corporation Road Middlesbrough TS1 2RF
<b>Contact number</b>	01642 811403
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.mcls.ac.uk">www.mcls.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Claire Kemp
<b>Provider type</b>	Community Learning and Skills
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	26 to 29 January 2016
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Transitions College

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of service, 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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