

# Inspection of The Northumberland Council

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 January 2025

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Education programmes for young people	<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

The Northumberland Council provides education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and education programmes for learners with high needs under the name of Northumberland Skills.

At the time of this inspection, young people studied courses in construction, engineering and manufacturing. Most adult learners studied courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), functional skills English or mathematics and short engineering and construction courses. A small number of adult learners followed tailored learning programmes that prepare them for employment.

At the time of the inspection, there were 408 adult learners and 102 learners on education programmes for young people. There were 155 apprentices on apprenticeships from levels 2 to 4. Most apprentices were on level 2 early years practitioner, level 3 installation and maintenance electrician, level 3 business administrator and level 3 teaching assistant standards. There were 64 learners with high needs on specialist and vocational programmes and supported internships. The provider works with one subcontractor to teach health and social care courses for

adults. At the time of the inspection, there were no learners on courses with the subcontractor.

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

Teachers create calm and welcoming classroom and workshop environments. They provide a professional and supportive environment for learners and apprentices. Learners and apprentices behave respectfully and professionally in lessons. They enjoy their lessons and work well with their peers and staff.

On tailored learning courses designed to prepare them for employment, adult learners develop good work-related attitudes and behaviours. Employers who have recruited new staff from these courses speak highly of learners' attitudes, behaviour and motivation.

Most apprentices, learners on education programmes for young people and learners who have high needs attend well. Leaders and managers rightly recognise that the overall attendance of adult learners does not reflect the high attendance in other areas. They have put in place a range of interventions to support adult learners, many of whom have barriers to participation, to maximise their attendance.

Staff provide a helpful tutorial programme for young learners, including those with high needs. The programme focuses on learners' development of employability skills, how to stay physically and mentally healthy, how to stay safe in their communities and online, how to volunteer and drug and alcohol awareness. Teachers plan a range of activities to support learners with high needs to become responsible, respectful and active citizens. For example, learners raise money for charities such as Cash for Kids and volunteer as part of Pride Northumberland.

Staff provide effective careers information, advice and guidance to young people, including those with high needs. This includes open days and taster events before learners start their courses. Learners receive helpful ongoing careers support as part of the tutorial programme to help them , apply for college courses and apprenticeships. Staff do not provide structured advice about progression and careers to adult learners and apprentices but offer support when individual learners and apprentices request it.

Learners feel safe and know how to report concerns if they arise. Learners with high needs can explain how to keep themselves safe on public transport and how to travel to the provider safely. Adults, young people and apprentices who study practical subjects know how to work safely and use personal protective equipment correctly.

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

Leaders have a clear strategic intent for the service to meet local skills needs and provide education and training for local residents who live in areas that are most disadvantaged in the county. They provide programmes for the growing number of young people identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and young people who have not engaged successfully in education. Leaders have

responded to current skills needs identified by employers by providing training in sectors with significant gaps, including early years childcare, engineering, construction and manufacturing.

Leaders have established well-resourced training centres, which reflect current working environments. For example, the Energy Central Learning Hub and the Welding and Fabrication Training Centre in Blyth are purpose-built centres where learners and apprentices can use high-quality industry-standard machinery and materials. This helps learners and apprentices develop the skills employers need for the renewable and advanced manufacturing industries.

Leaders have developed good relationships with local and regional employers in the metalworking, fabrication, construction and welding sectors to provide courses for unemployed adults. For example, they provide basic plastering courses with support from leading construction employers who provide access to high-quality materials and send staff to provide trade demonstrations. These employers also assess learners' work to ensure it meets commercial standards. As a result, learners develop good plastering skills to prepare them for employment.

Most teachers plan and teach their subject in a logical way, enabling learners and apprentices to gain, practise, apply and consolidate new knowledge and skills. Learners on plastering courses, for example, initially gain skills in using tools and materials correctly such as hand trowelling techniques. They then develop these techniques further and learn how to apply finishing coat plaster safely and accurately to skim vertical and horizontal plasterboard surfaces. However, in a few instances, teachers do not plan for young learners on multi-skilled construction courses to fully complete training in health and safety theory before they progress onto practical learning tasks.

Most teachers make successful use of a range of teaching strategies to help learners and apprentices understand key concepts and terminology. On level 3 electrical and maintenance apprenticeships, for example, teachers present information clearly and facilitate helpful discussions with apprentices about the importance of electrical installation regulations. Teachers use their extensive sector experience to provide useful practical demonstrations in welding and construction skills to inspire and motivate learners. In ESOL, teachers use topical discussions to enhance adult learners' speaking and listening skills.

Most teachers use assessment well to confirm the progress that learners and apprentices make. They provide helpful feedback on what learners and apprentices have done well and the steps they need to take to improve. Learners respond well to the advice, revise their techniques accordingly and produce work of a higher standard. In a few cases on construction multi-skills courses for young learners, teachers do not provide feedback on assessed work that enables learners to understand what they have done well or how they can improve.

Staff provide specialist support for learners with SEND to enable them to develop the skills they need to make progress. For example, learners on supported

internships at the council with a hearing difficulty receive support through specialist equipment and strategies to aid their communication with others at work. Staff receive training to provide specialist support for learners with epilepsy. This helps staff keep learners safe.

Teachers use the information in education, health and care plans (EHC plan) effectively to set targets for learners with high needs. Support staff monitor learners' progress in lessons and formally review their targets every six weeks. Learners with high needs know their targets and how well they are progressing. They make good progress from the starting points identified in their EHC plans.

The proportion of learners and apprentices who complete their courses and achieve their qualifications has improved over the last four years and is now high. Around a third of apprentices who completed their apprenticeship in the previous academic year achieved a distinction grade.

Managers use appropriate activities to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their provision, including that of their subcontractor. They use the results from these activities to make improvements to the quality of teaching through termly training events and individual support for teachers. Recent training has been in effective use of assessment, supporting learners with additional needs and tracking learners' progress. This has helped teachers to improve their teaching practice.

Leaders and managers track learners' destinations but do not routinely analyse this information to evaluate the impact of their provision. They do not check that learners who leave without a positive destination go on to gain work or progress to other education.

Leaders have put in place an effective governance structure that supports the development and performance of the service. Governors provide considerable support in the development of the courses provided to focus on skills and help to provide resources through access to funding. They have a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and provide effective challenge to leaders and managers to make improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Collect accurate information on learners' destinations and analyse it effectively to measure the impact of the service and to adapt the curriculum offer accordingly.
- Make sure that learners on multi-skills construction courses fully complete relevant health and safety theory elements of their programme before progressing to practical training.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	53644
<b>Address</b>	County Hall Loansdean Morpeth Northumberland NE61 2EF
<b>Contact number</b>	01670 622099
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.northumberlandskills.co.uk">www.northumberlandskills.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Michael Burton
<b>Provider type</b>	Community learning and skills
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	20 June 2018
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Winnovation Ltd

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the senior manager for education development and collaborative projects, 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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