

Inspection of Cambridgeshire County Council

Inspection dates: 29 April to 2 May 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Cambridgeshire County Council is a local authority provider. Leaders offer education and training for adult learners and apprentices, the largest programmes of which are tailored learning, adult skills and family learning. Leaders offer courses online and in around 87 community venues across Cambridgeshire, including community centres, libraries and schools.

At the time of the inspection, there were around 507 adult learners studying a broad range of accredited and non-accredited courses, from pre-entry to level 3. Courses are offered in key areas such as English, mathematics, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), vocational employability, short work-focused courses and family learning. Cambridgeshire County Council works with 10 subcontractors.

At the time of the inspection, there were eight adult apprentices in learning. Apprentices study the level 4 early intervention practitioner and the level 4 lead practitioner in adult care. Most apprentices work for Cambridgeshire County Council.

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

Learners' and apprentices' behaviour and conduct are exemplary. They benefit from a warm, nurturing and inclusive environment where they thrive, gain confidence to make new friends and develop their social networks. Learners feel more connected with and motivated to be part of their communities. Apprentices gain the professional behaviours required in the workplace. Learners and apprentices highly value the care and support they receive from staff and do well in their studies.

Learners and apprentices thrive because of the substantial new knowledge and skills they learn, and the positive impact attending has on their well-being. Learners on ESOL courses develop the speaking skills that empower them to communicate confidently with healthcare professionals. Learners on family learning storytelling courses are better able to support young children with their creative thinking. Apprentices become highly reflective of their practice when working in social care settings.

Most learners and apprentices receive suitable careers guidance to help them plan their next steps. Many learners who complete their courses progress to further study, and apprentices take on additional responsibilities at work. However, in a few cases, learners on accredited courses are not sufficiently aware of the career pathways available to them.

Learners and apprentices feel safe in the places they study, including online, and know who to report safeguarding concerns to. They feel confident that staff will take their concerns seriously and provide appropriate support.

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

Leaders and governors have a strong focus on widening participation and transforming lives. They ensure that their strategy is closely aligned with the county council's ambitions for Cambridgeshire. Leaders carefully select their subcontracted partners so that courses are targeted precisely at communities most in need, such as traveller communities and asylum centres. Many courses provide learners, often with limited access to education, with good opportunities to learn and flourish.

Leaders have ensured that curriculums are well structured, allowing learners and apprentices to build their learning in meaningful steps. Tutors plan logically, allowing learners to build foundation knowledge before tackling more complex topics. For example, ESOL tutors ensure learners understand key vocabulary and grammar before progressing to more advanced reading and writing tasks. On apprenticeships for early intervention practitioners, apprentices learn about the fundamentals of social work practice before they learn about the related theory that underpins professional practice and ethics.

Well-qualified tutors use a range of effective activities to create interesting lessons which help learners and apprentices understand new and difficult concepts. They

provide clear explanations and break learning down, so learners and apprentices can follow, absorb and understand. In functional skills mathematics lessons, tutors use diagrams skilfully to help learners calculate the diameter and area of a circle. Learners then apply their learning to estimate the area of an L-shaped space and a triangle.

Tutors use a range of appropriate assessments and strategies to check learners' and apprentices' understanding and recall of knowledge. They use probing questions, discussions, written tasks and peer assessment effectively. Assessors frequently review apprentices' progress with their workplace managers.

Learners and apprentices produce work of a good and better standard. Tutors mostly provide learners and apprentices with helpful feedback on how they can improve their work and skills further. In practical subjects such as horticulture, tutors are skilled in teaching learners to refine their woodland management skills to improve their coppicing techniques. Tutors' feedback to apprentices helps them improve the standard of their writing. However, in a few cases, tutors' feedback to learners on accredited courses is over congratulatory and does not highlight how spelling, punctuation and grammar could be improved.

Leaders have suitable arrangements to identify and support learners and apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Tutors provide a range of appropriate support mechanisms such as in-class support and individualised learning resources. As a result, learners and apprentices with SEND progress well on their courses.

Achievement rates across most courses are consistently high. Most apprentices complete their studies successfully, and a high proportion gain distinction grades in their end-of-course assessments. However, achievement on functional skills mathematics courses at levels 1 and 2 is low. Leaders have made changes to the initial assessment of learners and provided specialist training for tutors. It is too soon for inspectors to judge the impact.

Leaders and managers use a range of well-considered approaches to evaluate the quality of their provision, including their subcontracted provision. They complete an accurate self-assessment, produce detailed improvement plans and review the quality of teaching. Leaders closely monitor the progress that learners and apprentices make, identify quickly where achievements fall below expectations such as in functional skills mathematics at levels 1 and 2 and take appropriate action resulting in improvement. Leaders and managers manage and monitor the performance of subcontractors very effectively.

Elected members and governors have rich experience, knowledge and appropriate skills to provide leaders with robust support and challenge. They have access to appropriate performance data, which they use to scrutinise and challenge leaders effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the proportion of learners who achieve their functional skills mathematics qualification at levels 1 and 2.
- Help tutors teaching accredited courses to provide learners with useful feedback on how they can improve their work and skills further.
- Provide effective careers information, advice and guidance for all learners on accredited courses.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50971
Address	New Shire Hall Emery Crescent Enterprise Campus Alconbury Weald Cambridge PE28 4YE
Contact number	01353 613013
Website	www.cambsals.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Tom Molloy
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Amplius Living Bottisham Village college Comberton Village College Groundwork East Romsey Mill Trust SPS Training Switch Now Under the Hazels United learning Trust

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

Maggie Fobister, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Care	His Majesty's Inspector
Teresa Kiely	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Winchcombe	Ofsted Inspector
Georgina Ager	His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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