

Wokingham Borough Council

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- family learning
- community learning

Description of the provider

1. WBC offers a range of programmes in basic education, non-vocational and vocational adult education. The lifelong learning service manages the learning and is based within the knowledge development department of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC). WBC is a unitary authority and is a very affluent region of the UK with low unemployment.
2. Learning is provided through the local college, two learning centres, three libraries, seven primary schools and in church halls and community centres. In 2005-06, there were 1586 learners enrolled on 294 part time courses. In 2006-07, the target number of learners is 1500, with 2235 enrolments, divided into first steps, personal and community development learning (PCDL), and family learning. At the time of inspection there were 239 learners on programme. Overall, PCDL makes up approximately three quarters of WBC's adult and community learning provision.
3. The council works in partnership with other learning providers through the Wokingham Learning Partnership to avoid duplication of service being offered. In the last year, the Learning Partnership has been re-structured and re-positioned as a key constituent body of the local strategic partnership. The manager of lifelong learning has overall responsibility for the learning partnership and the direct management of council learning.
4. At the previous inspection, WBC subcontracted all provision to other providers. Since then, Berkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC), now contracts with Bracknell and Wokingham College for provision of traditional vocational adult and community learning and WBC for community learning projects and family learning. The community learning projects are targeted at either specific geographical areas, excluded or deprived community groups.
5. WBC continues to subcontract some of its direct LSC funded provision to Bracknell and Wokingham College. The quality of provision for these programmes were not included in the scope of the inspection. The inspection team looked at PCDL and family learning.
6. The lifelong learning mission is to "support and promote imagination, knowledge and culture for all who live, work or study in the Wokingham district by encouraging and facilitating formal and informal learning for pleasure, personal development and personal advancement."

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject area

Community learning	Good: Grade 2
Family learning	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

7. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Achievement and standards are good as is the provision of PCDL. The quality of provision, leadership and management, equality of opportunity and family learning is satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

8. Since it was last inspected, learners retention has improved further and is particularly good in all areas, including subcontracted provision. Teaching and learning and support for learners are good. Partnership arrangements are good, well established and planned to use subcontractor staff where appropriate and avoid duplication of provision. Management are responsive to continuous improvement. Some key areas for improvement stated in the inspection report are in the process of being further developed and implemented. These include: observation of teaching and learning, increased provision to under-represented groups and the recognising and recording of performance and achievements.
9. The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive. The views of all stakeholders are used to inform and regularly review development plans. There are good monitoring arrangements to assess the provider's progress. The grade awarded by inspectors for PCDL agreed with the inspection grade. However, all other self-assessment grades were over estimated.

Key strengths

- Particularly good retention
- Good teaching and learning
- good resources and accommodation
- Strong partnership working
- Good management and monitoring of providers performance
- Effective action-planning

Key areas for improvement

- Arrangements to assess and record learners' progress and achievements
- Development and implementation of a skills for life strategy
- The planning of provision to meet needs of under-represented groups
- Observation of teaching and learning
- Information on how learners can progress their learning

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

10. Retention rates have steadily improved since the previous inspection and are particularly good. Retention rates for the current year are 99%. Most of the provision offered is short course and non-accredited. Learners speak highly of their achievements in class and how much they enjoy attending. Learners work well towards meeting course objectives and attendance is good.
11. Learners develop a wide range of personal and practical skills, particularly in 'my family matters' and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities programmes (ALDD). In many cases programme objectives are challenging and learners are successful in meeting these. In all areas the standard of learners work is at least satisfactory and in many cases better. Some learners have progressed for example, into employment, higher level courses at the local college or running a support group. However, there is insufficient information to confirm the level of learner progression.
12. In the self-assessment report, the provider stated as a key strength 'good achievement of learner goals'. However, most achievement data is currently related to attendance and not the recognising and recording progression and achievement (RARPA).

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

13. The quality of the provision is satisfactory. Learners receive good teaching and learning. Learning sessions are well planned, with a wide range of activities and topics. Teachers make good use of information and learning technology (ILT) and good quality learning resources in learning sessions.
14. WBC has very welcoming, well-designed and professional neighbourhood learning centres, which are widely used by local organisations and individuals. Neighbourhood learning centres have an appropriate, and sometimes good, range of adaptive technology and equipment.
15. Arrangements for the initial and ongoing assessment of learners' goals are inadequate. WBC has no formal arrangements for diagnosing learners' level or specific learning needs, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Learners tend to have group rather than individual learning outcomes. On non-accredited learning programmes, assessment is insufficiently thorough with learners self-assessing their own progress. Although learners receive helpful and supportive tutor feedback, this is rarely used to measure achievement. The provider has not recognised this weakness in the self-assessment report.

16. WBC offers a satisfactory range of taster, short courses to meet the needs of PCDL learners. A task group is making some effective links with employers to establish suitable courses for businesses. There has been good development of a "my family matters" course in family learning, which is cross-referenced to Every Child Matters (ECM), and is widening participation amongst hard to reach learners. The range of targeting of, family learning programmes, to under-represented groups, is however, insufficient. Specifically, family learning programmes are not attracting sufficient learners with below level 2 qualifications.
17. The quality of support is good. Learners receive effective pastoral and subject specific support from their tutors, volunteers and learning centre staff. WBC has appropriate referral arrangements with organisations providing additional literacy, numeracy and language support, which are well-signposted for learners.
18. Learners receive appropriate and useful advice at the start of their courses. Most learning centres have qualified advice and guidance staff on site. However, learners have insufficient information about further progression opportunities, including those to the partner college or other local providers. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

19. There is good partnership working between WBC, Bracknell and Wokingham college, a number of voluntary sector and external agencies, and the area's information, advice and guidance provider (IAG). All aspects of the provision are monitored, refined and developed using a good range of provider task, strategy and quality groups, each of which involves most partners and provides clear focus and planning around specific issues.
20. WBC has primary responsibility for the borough's strategic direction that is set out well in a regularly updated development plan. Partnership groups have a significant role in shaping and monitoring strategy and impact
21. Additional funding to support learning programmes has been secured by WBC from a number of sources and used well. Resources from other borough departments and external agencies have sometimes augmented the provision. There are good links with relevant borough wide strategic groups and a good match between the wider objectives of the council and WBC's strategy for adult and community learning.

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22. The management and monitoring of providers' performance by WBC to bring about quality improvement is good. WBC has a close and productive management relationship with its providers based around good use of data, communication and regular reviews. The data includes provider performance against criteria including attendance, retention, schemes of work, tutor qualifications and relevant equality of opportunity-related themes. WBC's achievement data in most programmes is however, unreliable. Pilot projects using initial assessment and subsequent, progress monitoring, of learners' progress as the basis for producing meaningful achievement data is in place, but these are at an early stage.
 23. Thorough and well-structured quality improvement reviews of providers are conducted quarterly using consistent and extensive data-based criteria. Reviews are used to produce useful action plans. At the previous inspection a key weakness was the weak monitoring of subcontracted learning provision, this is now much improved and there is generally good use of action-planning by WBC providers. Particularly the college, to inform and monitor subsequent development and progress.
 24. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Opportunities for staff development and sharing of good practice are satisfactory. The management of accommodation and resources is effective to meet the needs of learners. A greater range of locations in the north, south and west of the borough are being secured, but not all are as yet in place.
 25. There is insufficient observation of teaching and learning (OTL). OTL arrangements are not yet fully in place, and the full implementation of the scheme is delayed until the Autumn. WBC clearly recognises this weakness. Some interim observations have taken place to date, but these do not represent a coherent approach.
 26. There has been insufficient management action to develop and implement effective systems to assess learners' progression and achievements. WBC recognises that its arrangements to assess individual learners'; starting point, progress and achievement are only now being put in place. They have some way to go before they are an effective means of gauging learners' achievement. WBC does not have a skills for life strategy, nor does it have an underpinning assessment process by which such a strategy could be delivered. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.
 27. There is insufficient targeting of provision for some under-represented groups. Much of the provision is characterised by numerous, small scale, niche learning projects. These sometimes involve attendance by very low numbers of learners, not all of whom are from the government's target groups. Strategies for attracting broad under-represented groups into learning, such as the over 30% of people in the borough without level 2 qualifications, have not been successful. Although the provider has recognised this and has new strategies and plans that are being developed.

28. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Equality of opportunity policies and procedures are clear. Learning centres are inclusive and the staff are welcoming. Learners feel actively included and respected. Access is good and specialist resources to meet the needs of individual learners are appropriate, for example, the availability of adaptive IT technologies.
29. The use of data to monitor learners by ethnicity, age and gender is good. WBC uses a range of strategies to increase participation of ethnic, male and learners with a disability and/or learning difficulties. The participation rate of learners from ethnic minorities has much improved over the past three years. There is good representation of minority ethnic learners on family learning programmes. Participation rates for ethnic learners on PCDL programmes have increased and are equal to the local ethnic population rate.
30. Provider staff have a clear understanding of equality of opportunity. WBC has organised annual equality of opportunity refresher training for staff, in addition to any training provided by the learning centres. Many learners recall being advised of equality policies and most understood the complaints procedure. However, there is insufficient promotion or celebration of cultural diversity.

What learners like:

- the welcoming atmosphere at all centres
- the teachers, volunteers and staff who give a great amount of help and support
- the way that the courses are very well organised and still meet individual needs
- the teaching and being able to discuss issues and do things
- the benefits from the family learning courses
- being able to learn close to home
- learning with friends

What learners think could improve:

- the amount of paperwork that needs to be completed, which takes up too much time
- the guidance about what learners could do next
- more tutor or experienced volunteer availability at the Karten Centre in some afternoon sessions
- offering more courses that lead to a recognised qualification
- the availability of childcare provision

Sector subject areas

Community learning

Good: Grade 2

Context

31. Community learning represents some 75% of WBC's adult and community learning provision. The provision is delivered through community learning projects with Bracknell and Wokingham College, two learning centres and the council's libraries and information service. From September 2006 to March 2007, 591 learners were enrolled. At the time of the inspection, 183 learners were enrolled. Most of the provision is delivered by the college and the Crescent Centre, with 35% and 31%, respectively. Most learning takes place in ICT and preparation for life and work. Almost one third of courses are of one day's duration or less. Most courses concentrate on computing applications and there is some modern foreign language, craft, food hygiene and first aid provision.

Strengths

- Particularly good retention
- Good teaching and learning
- Good accommodation and learning resources

Areas for improvement

- Inadequate arrangements to assess learner progress and achievement

Achievement and standards

32. The retention of learners on their courses is particularly good. In 2003-04, 97% were retained and the average retention between 2004 and 2006 was 99%. Attendance rates are good at 92% for 2006-07.

33. Learners achieve well in their classes. Coursework from ALDD learners shows good development of personal skills and community awareness. Learners on first steps computer courses, demonstrate growing skills and knowledge in their use of computers. Learners comment on the increased confidence they develop from the classes, and enthusiastically explain the personal benefits they are gaining. Learners at the Karten Centre make good use of photography to support descriptive writing and to increase their self-awareness.

Quality of provision

34. Teaching and learning are good. Tutors are very well prepared with comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans, which are effectively used to deliver the provision. For example, during the inspection week an IT tutor

stepped in at very short notice to replace a colleague. The planning documentation available enabled the tutor to provide effective continuity and structure to the class. Appropriately high levels of support are provided for ALDD learners and good use is made of volunteer learning assistants throughout the provision. One learner commented, "there is always help near at hand, especially when we are working individually". Tutors are very experienced and suitably qualified. Most hold appropriate teaching qualifications. Teaching is often well differentiated, with an appropriate balance of pace and varied learning methods. Learning is good in most classes with clear progress being demonstrated by those taking part. Learners develop appropriate practical skills and often comment on the increase in their self-confidence. In many cases learners are returning to learning after a significant break. At the Karten Centre tutors set clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour, which help learners to develop their social skills.

35. Accommodation and learning resources are good. The Crescent Centre provides a modern, well designed and well maintained learning environment. At the Karten Centre, a spacious main learning room is well adapted to the wide range of learners' needs. Sessions held in public libraries use the easily accessible locations and accommodation well. A good range of well maintained IT facilities are in place throughout the provision and they are used effectively to promote learning. Inspectors observed ICT courses where the tutor used an on-screen keyboard to efficiently demonstrate the use of key stroke combinations to a group of learners. Tutors at the Karten Centre make effective use of interactive whiteboards and adaptive technology to support learners with additional needs.
36. PCDL courses meet the interests and needs of learners. The provision sufficiently targets some under-represented and vulnerable learners, for example ALDD learners. Generally, WBC provides courses at appropriate locations and times to meet the needs of learners.
37. Arrangements to assess learner progress and achievement are inadequate. Achievement data for 2005-06 is derived solely from the number of learners attending for more than 50% of the course. Arrangements for the recognition and recording of prior achievement are insufficient. The service appropriately recognises the importance of, individual learning plans, (ILP) in recording learner's progress and has ILP's in place. However, these are inadequate. In most cases the learning objectives identified are too general to guide individual development. There is effective initial assessment for ALDD learners. For most learners the ILP's rely on self-assessment at the start and end of each course. These self-assessments are not always accurate. WBC recognises these weaknesses and is working to address them. New ILP's are being piloted, although these require further improvement to be effective. No systematic arrangements are in place to monitor learner progression.

Leadership and management

38. Leadership and management of the community learning are satisfactory. Communication between WBC and its partner organisations is good with regular formal and informal contact to support operational management. WBC managers have recently been particularly proactive in supporting the operational management of the Karten Centre. Clear course recruitment targets are set and well monitored throughout the provision. WBC has appropriately introduced fees for some of its community learning, while continuing to provide free courses to targeted groups. Learners benefit from a wide range of additional support from a volunteer group organised within the council. WBC effectively uses management information to manage the process of setting targets, recruitment and retention, but insufficient information is available to accurately monitor learner achievement and progression.
39. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Centres place the good support of all learners at the heart of their provision and WBC's clear policy of directing particular attention to disadvantaged learners is well implemented at all levels. The support of vulnerable adults is good. All centres provide good access and support for learners with limited mobility.
40. The management of quality improvement is satisfactory. There has been good improvement in the learners experience since the previous inspection. Community learning, as part of foundation programmes, was judged satisfactory at the previous inspection. It is now good. Although those weaknesses identified at the previous inspection relating to individual learning plans and the recording of learners progress still remain. There is insufficient observation of teaching and learning to inform improvement. Self-assessment is inclusive and satisfactorily informed by staff and learner feedback. End of course questionnaires are appropriately analysed with the results suitably informing the ongoing self-assessment process. A clearly presented complaints and compliments procedure is in place.

Family learning

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

41. Between September 2006 and April 2007, 232 learners enrolled on family learning courses. Just over 60% enrolled on a discover mathematics or literacy course, based on keeping up with the children. Wider family learning courses in languages or craft have 73 enrolled learners and 15 learners are enrolled on the 'my family matters' course, which is linked to the themes of Every Child Matters.
42. Family learning provision is delivered through seven local schools and two learning centres. The discover mathematics and literacy courses, and 'my family matters' courses, run for 10 hours over five weeks and the wider family learning courses for four hours. Most courses run in the evening, although wider family learning also runs on a Saturday and after school. In the current year, 19% of family learners are men and 16% are from minority ethnic groups.

Strengths

- Excellent development of parenting and social skills through My Family Matters programme
- Particularly good retention
- Good teaching and learning
- Very effective partnerships to develop local provision

Areas for improvement

- Inadequate arrangements to assess learner progress and achievement
- Poor range and targeting of provision to under-represented groups

Achievement and standards

43. The development of parenting and social skills on the 'my family matters' course is excellent. Learners develop ways to improve and manage their children's behaviour. They gain much confidence to speak in groups and share ideas and feelings with associated professionals to improve the development of their child. Some learners progress into roles that further develop their skills. For example, gaining employment as a support worker for disabled children or enrolling on an access course. Overall the standard of learners work is good and learners' progress is satisfactory.
44. While all courses are of a short nature, retention rates are particularly good and have steadily risen from 95% in 2005-06 to 99% in 2006-07. Current achievement data does not inform WBC of learners' success against learning objectives.

Quality of provision

45. Teaching and learning is good. An interesting range of teaching and learning strategies are used to engage learners who actively participate in their learning. There is a wide range of good quality learning resources, which includes games and videos. Learning outcomes are clearly identified for the learners and learning is effectively reviewed in most lessons. The learners are attaining well and are engaged in challenging activities to support their parenting skills. Accommodation and resources are good.
46. There are very effective partnerships used to develop local provision. The home school liaison officer works in close partnership with the family learning co-ordinator. The partnerships developed with participating primary schools results in a provision that is available throughout the borough. Primary schools are welcoming and friendly in their approach to parents. Any problems are effectively resolved. 'My family matters' programme is an excellent example of partnership working.
47. Support and guidance for learners is satisfactory. Learners on 'my family matters' are given high levels of support including: transport, payment for childminding costs and additional classroom support. There is no childcare provision for other family learning courses. Overall, advice and guidance is satisfactory. Tutors provide leaflets about the advice and guidance service in sessions. The college prospectus is made available. Leaflets about family learning courses are distributed through the primary schools.
48. Assessment and recording of achievement and progression is inadequate. ILPs provide the evidence for recognising and recording achievement. However, the learners' starting point is not sufficiently assessed to monitor progress as initial assessment is based on the learners own self-assessment. Assessment of literacy and numeracy is poor, although the local college provides additional learning support and the tutors are aware of how to access this. Specific, challenging and time related targets are not set. Learners self-assess their achievement. The numbers of learners continuing onto other courses is low at 11% in 2004-05 and 13% in 2006-07. There is no systematic recording of progression to inform planning, targeting, marketing or motivating learners. The programmes are not marketed to show the full range of potential progression routes from family learning. The range and mode of delivery of courses is restricted. Some courses are run after school and on Saturdays, however, most are delivered between 7-9pm.
49. The borough offers a poor range of provision that is specifically targeted to ensure widening participation. Nine per cent of the provision is targeted at vulnerable, low achieving families with multiple disadvantages. 14% is targeted at schools who share a home school liaison officer. The remaining provision is not specifically targeted at communities with the greatest need. The level of most learners' prior achievement is high. For example, a keeping up with your children (numeracy) course, in one of the targeted schools revealed that 25% of learners

had qualifications at level 5, 50% at level 4 and 25% at level 3. Similar results were found in other courses. WBC has recognised this as an area for further development and there are plans to increase this targeted work to 27% next year.

Leadership and management

50. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The management structure is clearly understood by staff. Managers are responsive and flexible. Regular, scheduled meetings take place. Minutes are taken and clear action points are recorded and addressed. Tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced. Quality improvement is satisfactory. The self-assessment report (SAR) process is inclusive of staff and learner views. However, the SAR is not sufficiently evaluative and does not identify key weaknesses and strengths. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. All learners are treated with respect and are welcomed into the centres by friendly and approachable staff. However, there is no evidence of the promotion of a diverse culture in the use of learning materials.

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