

INSPECTION REPORT

The Family Learning Group

11 June 2001



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

The Family Learning Group is a private partnership based in Stoke-on-Trent. It provides training for young people who are unlikely to participate in mainstream education and training. There are 12 learners, all on the Learning Gateway's Life Skills programme.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Both the training in Life Skills and the leadership and management of The Family Learning Group are satisfactory.

Work-based learning for young people

Most learners complete their training programmes and achieve their training targets. They benefit from good individual support, which is an integral part of their programme. Carefully set individual targets help learners to focus on achievable goals. The accommodation for the training is inadequate, with no social or recreational areas or space for confidential interviews. A significant weakness is an inadequate emphasis on preparation for employment. There are too few structured jobsearch activities and few learners undertake work experience.

Leadership and management

The partners teach on most of the training programme and are closely involved in its development. The organisation has established productive relationships with other agencies, although its relationship with the careers service is not effective. The Family Learning Group promotes equal opportunities well, through its recruitment policy and through its other practices. Quality assurance arrangements do not cover some important aspects of training.

GRADES

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- effective setting of personal targets
- good support for learners
- productive relationships with other agencies and networks
- effective strategies to tackle social exclusion

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor accommodation
- insufficient preparation for employment
- incomplete quality assurance framework

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- greater punctuality
- more appropriate qualifications
- more thorough arrangements for appraising staff
- more regular reviews of policies and procedures

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. The Family Learning Group was founded in November 1999, in response to government initiatives to promote social inclusion and widen participation. It offers learning opportunities for 16 to 19 year olds who do not participate in mainstream education and training. The Family Learning Group recruits from North Staffordshire and the north of the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation. The organisation uses one room at a local football club's premises and a nearby youth and community centre, but it plans to move to larger accommodation in the near future. The two partners, both trained teachers and qualified internal verifiers, manage and teach on most of the programme, helped by two learning support assistants. Twelve learners are currently on the Learning Gateway's Life Skills programme.

2. The Life Skills programme is funded through the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for Staffordshire. The loss of over 50,000 jobs in heavy industry, mining and pottery manufacture has contributed to the economic decline of the county. In April 2001, the rate of unemployment in Staffordshire was 2.9 per cent, compared with an average of 3.3 per cent for England as a whole. The rate of unemployment among young people in Staffordshire is higher than the national average. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Staffordshire is 1.9 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent for England as a whole. In 2000, the proportion of young people gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 48.1 per cent for Staffordshire, compared with 49.2 per cent for England as a whole.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of two inspectors spent a total of six days at The Family Learning Group during June 2001. They interviewed all the learners, all four members of staff, managers from the local LSC for Staffordshire and staff from the careers service. Inspectors observed two training and assessment sessions. They examined learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, the organisation's plans, policies and procedures and other paperwork. Inspectors studied The Family Learning Group's first self-assessment report, which was produced in December 2000.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Foundation programmes	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Total	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation programmes

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	12	3

4. The careers service's advisers refer learners to the Life Skills programme. The advisers arrange interviews, provide guidance and support, and complete an individual training plan for each learner. Learners attend for at least 16 hours each week and remain on the training programme for up to one year. The average time spent on the programme in 2000-01 was 14 weeks. The Family Learning Group's staff teach, assess and support learners. Learners work towards personal milestones and their progress is reviewed each month. The course includes training in literacy, numeracy and computing and personal and social development. Learners work towards wordpower and numberpower awards and an award in citizenship. The Family Learning Group's partners are currently reviewing accreditation for learners on the programme.

The table below shows the achievement and retention rates of trainees available up to the time of inspection.

Foundation Programmes										
Foundation Programmes	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							17		21
Still in training							0	0	12	57
Gained job with training/progressed to further training and/or planned learning completed							14	82	4	19
Left without either							3	18	5	24
Gained job with training							9	53	1	5
Progressed to further training							5	29	3	14
Planned learning completed							14	82	4	19

STRENGTHS

- high retention rates
- good support for learners
- effective setting of personal targets
- wide range of activities

WEAKNESSES

- poor accommodation
- insufficient preparation for employment
- insufficient co-ordination of different elements of the training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- further development of learning support assistants' personal skills
- greater punctuality
- more detailed individual training plans
- more appropriate qualifications

5. Rates of retention and achievement on the Life Skills programme are high, with 90 per cent of learners achieving their target of four milestones. Of the 17 learners who joined in 1999-2000, 14 completed their programme of training, nine gained a job with training and five progressed to further education or training. Twelve of the learners who joined the programme in 2000-01 are still in training and five have left the programme early.

6. Support for individual learners is an integral part of the programme. The high ratio of staff to learners allows staff to give one-to-one support during group activities and workshops. Learners with dyslexia receive regular additional support. The learning support assistants understand the learners' needs and aims and receive assistance from the partners in developing their personal skills. Learners' individual training plans outline how the learning support assistants can help them to achieve their targets. Staff and learners respect and support each other. Staff provide regular, positive feedback and support which enables learners to acknowledge their problems and start to overcome them. Some learners do not attend regularly or punctually. Staff contact parents or carers promptly when learners are late or absent, to ensure that the problem is dealt with immediately. However, lateness continues to be a problem. The good pastoral and learning support enables most learners to continue in training despite having significant personal and learning problems.

7. Learners receive a well-planned induction to the training programme. The Family Learning Group's staff agree individual training plans with learners after an initial assessment of their learning needs. These plans are reviewed and updated each month at learners' progress reviews. Individual training plans have recently been revised and now include up to five specific, short-term targets. The targets relate to attendance, behaviour and punctuality, as well as literacy and numeracy. Learners understand their individual targets. The targets allow them to focus on achievement. However, individual training plans do not clearly identify the broader milestones which learners are working towards or have already achieved. They do not record progress towards qualifications.

THE FAMILY LEARNING GROUP

This is recorded separately. The partners are currently attempting to identify qualifications which learners can achieve within the time they typically spend on the programme.

8. A variety of teaching methods and activities are used to maintain the learners' interest during lessons. Staff select the most appropriate methods of teaching. These can include group discussions, instruction and demonstrations, games and interactive exercises, worksheets and one-to-one coaching. Teachers vary the style of teaching during and between lessons and to maintain learners' motivation. Learners take an active part in lessons and contribute well to discussions. Activities include presentations by external specialists and visits. These activities help learners to develop interpersonal skills and make them more confident about their ability to learn. The partners are experienced in assessment and internal verification, which they carry out satisfactorily.

9. The Family Learning Group's premises are inadequate. There is little space at the two sites and there are few resources. This restricts the activities which learners can undertake. The football club provides a relaxed environment for learning. Learners can use the computers at this site on one day each week. However, learners cannot use the club's kitchen or recreational facilities during the day. The Family Learning Group has only one room at the site. There is insufficient space for displays and nowhere to store resources or learners' files. There is no private room for confidential interviews and one-to-one tutorials. The Family Learning Group is aware of the inadequacy of its current premises and plans to move to new ones.

10. There is insufficient emphasis on preparation for employment. Local newspapers which advertise job vacancies are available but there are few structured jobsearch activities and no regular lessons to help learners develop the skills they need to gain jobs. Few of the learners' personal targets relate to preparing for work, although many learners have identified this as a goal. Groups of learners have visited the army and the offices of a local newspaper but this is not part of a structured programme of visits or contacts with local employers. Few learners have the opportunity to undertake work experience during their training, although this has been identified as an objective on their individual training plans. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. The Family Learning Group has recently started to establish links with other training providers and local employers to provide opportunities for work experience and to arrange for more learners to progress to work-based training.

11. The main elements of the training programme are poorly co-ordinated. For example, learners' group activities and visits do not always result in work for their wordpower portfolios. The Family Learning Group does not analyse learners' work to identify the skills in literacy, numeracy and oral communication which they are developing.

Good Practice

Staff use a simple form to record individual learners' problems on a daily basis. It includes information about attendance, behaviour, learning difficulties and other matters, such as housing difficulties. The forms are available to all staff, who refer to them during monthly progress reviews and weekly staff meetings.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

12. The Family Learning Group is a private partnership. Its two partners teach on most of the training programme, assisted by the two learning support assistants. The organisation has an equal opportunities policy and procedures for some aspects of quality assurance. The Family Learning Group produced its first self-assessment report in December 2000.

STRENGTHS

- good understanding of training issues by management
- productive relationships with other agencies and networks
- good promotion of anti-discriminatory practice
- effective strategies to tackle social exclusion

WEAKNESSES

- inadequate strategic objectives and targets
- poor accommodation for partners
- insufficient liaison with careers service
- incomplete quality assurance framework

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more thorough arrangements for appraising staff
- more regular reviews of policies and procedures

13. The partners work as tutors on the training programme. There is a small team of staff, which allows the partners to monitor and review the training programme regularly and to make the necessary improvements. The partners are aware of learners' needs and actively promote and develop the organisation. They hold formal management meetings each month, at which they discuss and record action points. The partners routinely discuss the strategic development of the organisation, but there is no overall strategic or business plan showing targets. This makes it difficult to monitor performance. The partners do not review their own performance or that of individual members of staff and there is no system for staff appraisal. Informal staff meetings are held each week to discuss current problems, but they are not minuted and action points are not identified. The organisation recognises the importance of staff development and all members of staff are currently working towards qualifications in teaching basic skills at different levels. The partners value their good relationship with the local LSC. They attend monitoring meetings with the local LSC each month but do not always receive copies of the minutes.

14. The current accommodation does not allow adequate management of the training

programme. There are no areas where the partners can interview staff or learners. There is a lack of storage space. The partners spend time at the beginning and end of each day moving training materials. The Family Learning Group plans to move to alternative accommodation in the near future.

15. The Family Learning Group has quickly established productive relationships with many other agencies and networks. The partners seek opportunities to share ideas and to promote good practice. The Family Learning Group is a member of several local networks and represents other training providers in some forums. It is working with other training providers to improve opportunities for learners to progress.

16. Relationships with the careers service are not effective. The Family Learning Group's partners have expressed concerns about the number of referrals and the quality of support from the careers service's advisers. The partners have raised these concerns with the local LSC and previously the local training and enterprise council. However, the difficulties remain unresolved.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

17. The Family Learning Group promotes equal opportunities through all its key documents and policies. The partners regularly update their own knowledge and pass the information on to other staff. The organisation effectively promotes anti-discriminatory practice to new learners and staff and challenges discriminatory behaviour. The staff challenge racist and sexist attitudes among learners in constructive ways and help them to understand how such attitudes can inhibit learning. This has been an important part of many learners' development. Learners understand the importance placed on equality of opportunity by the organisation. They show respect for each other and are able to explain why this is important to them. The staff work hard to build learners' confidence, aspirations and self-esteem. Through its networking with other agencies, the organisation has established itself as a centre for work with disadvantaged young people and has ensured that the various agencies involved in tackling social exclusion work effectively together.

18. The organisation collects and analyses information on the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of learners and compares it with information about the local community. The local racial equality council has been contacted in order to encourage recruitment from minority ethnic groups. The Family Learning Group promotes screening and support for dyslexia and has contacted other local groups to encourage participation. Access for people with mobility problems is adequate at the football club but not at the youth and community centre. A complaints procedure has recently been prepared but it does not include a process for appeals. The complaints procedure, and some other policy documents, are written in language which is unsuitable for learners. The Family Learning Group covers equal opportunities at learners' induction and throughout their learning. However, the equal opportunities policy also contains some complex language. The partners have identified this problem and are revising the documents.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

19. The introduction of a quality assurance framework is one of the main areas of the organisation's current development plan. It is already applying many quality assurance procedures but the framework is not complete. One of the partners is the nominated quality assurance co-ordinator. The Family Learning Group is committed to continuous improvement but does not yet have an overall quality assurance policy or quality assurance manual. Nor does it regularly review its policies and procedures. The organisation is currently working towards two external standards for quality assurance.

20. The self-assessment report was detailed and provided a useful basis for the inspection. An organisational chart identifies the responsibilities of the partners and of the learning support assistants. The development plan is well organised, with a clear structure and clear details of responsibilities for action. However, it does not clearly identify some outcomes, and subsequent action points. There is an over-reliance on informal methods to obtain the views of learners and partner organisations.