

INSPECTION REPORT

St Helens LEA

25 November 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learn**direct provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**)

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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

St Helens LEA

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. St Helens Adult and Community Learning Service (the service) is part of the children and young people's services department of the local education authority (LEA) of St Helens Borough Council (the borough council). Since April 2001, core funding for the service has come from the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In 2004-05, this amounted to £287,629 and represented 46 per cent of its total funding. In 2004-05, the service obtained £142,156 in grants from external sources. A further £196,637 was received from the LSC from additional funding streams. The service offers about 300 vocational and non-vocational courses annually in over 70 venues including schools, libraries and community centres. In 2004-05, the service had almost 3,000 enrolments. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups was 2.4 per cent, 84 per cent of learners were women, and approximately 5 per cent declared a learning difficulty and/or disability. The service charges no course fees. It offers programmes in family and community learning, information and communications technology (ICT), first aid, and parenting skills. Some of the programmes are aimed at learners who have not been involved in learning for many years. The provision complements that of other providers in the borough. Most of the courses are accredited through the Open College Network (OCN). Courses are mostly short, lasting one term and run for two hours a week. There are some three-hour tasters and whole-day courses.

2. The head of adult and community learning is responsible for the overall management of the service, and is supported by an adult and community development manager and a finance, monitoring and administration officer. The areas of learning are managed through five teams. The service employs 26 staff, some of whom work part time. Some part-time tutors have lead responsibility for an area of learning. A further 15 tutors teach in partner organisations including St Helens College and Sure Start.

3. The borough of St Helens has a population of 178,985, of whom 140,246 are aged 19 or over. It has the lowest representation of black and minority ethnic groups in Merseyside with 1.2 per cent, compared with 2.9 per cent for the region. A recent report suggests that 26.4 per cent of the population aged between 16-60 have poor literacy skills and 31.3 per cent have poor numeracy skills. St Helens remains a deprived community with high levels of poverty. In the most recent Index of Multiple Deprivation, St Helens ranks as the 36th most deprived authority of 355 in England. The percentage of lone parent households with children aged between 0-15 years of age is 7.9 per cent. In 2003-04, the proportion of school leavers achieving at least five general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above was 6 per cent lower than the national average of 53.7 per cent.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** The service's leadership and management and its arrangement for equality of opportunity are good. Quality improvement is satisfactory. The provision in health, public services and care, ICT, and family learning is good.

5. The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process. The process includes feedback from learners, staff and most of the service's partners. The self-assessment report contains sufficient detail. Inspectors' findings matched many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report did not identify the overall high quality of the teaching and learning, or include sufficient evaluation in health, public services and care. The grades inspectors awarded for the areas of learning matched two out of three of those of the self-assessment report. Inspectors judged the service's leadership and management to be better than the grade given in the self-assessment report.

6. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements. The service has implemented many improvement measures. It has clear arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning both by the service's staff and those of its partners. Managers receive and carefully analyse feedback from learners and partner organisations. They regularly review action and development plans. The service monitors the performance of its learners termly and has action plans in place to improve the retention and achievement rates of under-performing groups. The service has a culture of sharing good practice.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ST HELENS LEA:

- maintain the high quality of teaching and learning
- improve the recording of learners' progress
- improve the setting of targets
- improve the use of the management information system to support the service's objectives
- continue to implement the information learning technology (ILT) strategy
- maintain and develop the partnership arrangements further
- monitor closely the content of learning materials to further promote equality and diversity

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

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

Health, public services and care		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Early years</i> Adult and community learning	217	2 2

Information and communications technology		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>ICT for users</i> Adult and community learning	192	2 2

Family learning		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i> Adult and community learning	123	2 2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The inspection took place between November 21 and November 25 2005. One pre-inspection visit was made on 18 November 2005 to observe teaching and learning in ICT. The inspection judged the effectiveness of the service's leadership and management, and graded the three areas of learning where there were enough courses running to give a firm evidence base. These were health, public services and care, ICT and family learning.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	26
Number of learners interviewed	67
Number of staff interviewed	62
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	29
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	16
Number of visits	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Achievement rates are high in all areas of learning.** In 2004-05, according to the service's data, the overall achievement rate on accredited courses was 88 per cent, and in three out of the five years to 2004-05, the achievement rate was 80 per cent or higher. On

courses in early years parenting and family first aid, the achievement rate was 91 per cent in 2003-04, and 93 per cent in 2004-05.

9. Learners' achievements and standards of work are good in ICT. In 2004-05, the achievement rate was 87 per cent. All learners demonstrate a thorough understanding of how to use a range of software, and they apply themselves well in sessions. Many make good use of their new skills in their personal lives.

10. **Retention and achievement rates are high on all courses in family learning.** The overall retention rate for 2004-05 was 92 per cent, and the pass rate for national tests in literacy and numeracy is significantly higher than the national average.

11. **In all areas of learning, learners make good progress** towards their personal learning goals and demonstrate the positive effect that their learning has had on their lives and those of their children. The average attendance of learners during the week of the inspection was high at 82 per cent.

12. **Learners in health, public services and care improve and develop their personal and social skills.** Many identify increased levels of confidence and have improved their communication skills.

13. **Learners on early years parenting courses apply their skills well to promoting the well-being of their families.** Those taking parenting classes use the techniques they have learnt to improve how they manage their children's behaviour. Learners on first aid courses have applied their skills in real life situations.

14. Progression rates are satisfactory. In ICT almost a third of learners go on to enrol on another course, and half of these enrol on a third course. In family learning in schools, two-fifths of learners take a further course. Generally, almost half the learners who enrol on a second course, take a third one within the same year.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Health, public services and care	4	3	2	0	9
Information and communications technology	3	5	2	0	10
Family learning	3	1	2	0	6
Total	10	9	6	0	25

15. **Teaching and learning are very good.** Three-quarters of the learning sessions observed were graded good or better, and none was unsatisfactory. Tutors plan sessions thoroughly and use resources well. Most tutors are enthusiastic about their subjects and the teaching is often lively and animated. Sessions lead to clear learning objectives that learners understand well. In family first aid sessions, tutors make good use of their personal experience. In ICT, tutors provide learners with relevant and useful homework activities to promote independent learning. In family learning, tutors ensure that activities closely relate to those that learners' children experience through the national curriculum.

16. Learning materials in ICT are of a high standard. Tutors make good use of poetry and

local history as the basis for practising word processing and other ICT skills.

17. The service's approach to widening participation is particularly innovative in family learning. The service has initiated several projects with its partners, and worked closely with them to increase participation by men. It has made good use of external funding to work with minority groups including travellers. It works well with local primary schools to recruit learners from deprived areas on to first step courses.

18. The range of courses in early years parenting and family first aid satisfactorily matches the needs and interests of most learners. Partnership working across the provision enables learners to progress to further courses.

19. Support and guidance for learners are satisfactory. The service makes good use of local support agencies for the wider welfare of its learners. Arrangements to support learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs are satisfactory. Learners receive appropriate information on progression opportunities both within the service and with partner organisations. Childcare facilities are available for all learners.

20. Some ICT learners are insufficiently challenged. There are few opportunities for learners with high levels of competence to apply their ICT skills to new and unfamiliar situations.

21. There is insufficient use of ILT in family learning sessions. Tutors do not make regular use of ILT to support learning. Learners have few opportunities to develop their confidence in using ILT.

22. Tutors do not sufficiently record learners' progress in literacy and numeracy and on health, public services and care courses. Records are not detailed enough, and contain little critical or informative feedback about how well learning outcomes have been met or achieved. In literacy and numeracy, progress records contain little information on how individual learning plans have been updated.

23. The start and end dates of ICT courses are inflexible. There are few ICT workshops offering flexible attendance, and learners have few opportunities to start courses other than at the beginning of terms.

Leadership and management

24. The service's strategic planning is very successful. The LEA has a clear strategy for the development of adult and community learning, and the service has identified specific provision to contribute to the borough council's own mission of raising levels of achievement in deprived communities.

25. The service has **particularly good partnership arrangements.** There are good links with a wide range of partners that prevent duplication of provision and resources and have led to the development of many successful projects.

26. Curriculum management is generally good. Staff are well qualified and bring much relevant experience to the service. They have good opportunities to develop skills and knowledge associated with meeting learners' needs. Communication with staff is good and

all staff are actively involved in planning for future provision and improvements. All staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities and all attend course meetings, appraisals and training. Meetings are well documented and action points are constantly reviewed.

27. The service has implemented **many successful initiatives to widen participation**. It has increased the participation of learners from disadvantaged areas and minority ethnic groups, that of men, and learners with disabilities. It has formed particularly strong strategic partnerships to identify and promote learning opportunities in the community.

28. The management of physical resources is satisfactory. The service supports providers' needs for equipment to improve the adult learning environment. Financial arrangements are efficient. The service makes good use of external funding to support its courses.

29. The service implements its equal opportunities policy satisfactorily. It uses annual staff training and regular updates to maintain staff awareness of equality and diversity. The service communicates its policy clearly to learners, and deals with their complaints promptly and in accordance with its complaints procedures.

30. The service meets its obligations under current race equality and disability legislation. Its response to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is very good.

31. Senior staff monitor and analyse the equality of opportunity data satisfactorily. They consider the retention and achievement rates of different groups of learners, and have taken action when specific groups have under-performed.

32. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The quality assurance framework is sufficiently detailed and structured, and staff demonstrate a good understanding of the quality assurance procedures. Managers analyse learners' feedback termly and take positive action to improve the service.

33. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. It includes the views of learners, staff and subcontractors. The self-assessment report is sufficiently detailed. The self-assessment action plan and development plans link well.

34. Arrangements to improve the quality of the teaching provision are satisfactory. There are clear processes for the observation of teaching and learning. The feedback given to tutors is sufficiently detailed and indicates areas for improvement.

35. The service makes **insufficient use of clear and challenging targets** to plan and monitor progress towards its strategic aims. The targets set are often simplistic and easily attainable, and are too vague to develop and monitor key areas. The performance measures set in development and action plans are not sufficiently specific.

36. **There has been insufficient promotion of some aspects of equality and diversity.** Most promotional material contains images that do not reflect the borough's diversity. The service has not conducted an audit of its curriculum materials. Tutors do not regularly promote and reinforce equality and diversity in learning sessions.

37. The management information system for quality improvement is incomplete. Reports provide course-level information but not summaries on which managers can make

immediate decisions. The service does not use the management information system to monitor learners' individual progress, progression or destinations.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very successful strategic planning
- particularly good partnership arrangements
- good curriculum management
- successful initiatives to widen participation

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of clear and challenging targets
- incomplete management information system that does not fully support quality improvement
- insufficient promotion of aspects of equality and diversity

Health, public services and care

Early years

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- good development of learners' personal and social skills
- good application of learners' skills in promoting the well-being of families
- very good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of learners' progress

Information and communications technology

ICT for users

Grade 2

Strengths

- good achievement of qualifications
- very good teaching and learning
- high standard of learning materials
- strong curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient challenge for some learners
- inflexible course start and end dates

Family learning

Adult and community learning

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- very good teaching and learning
- innovative approaches to widening participation
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of learners' progress in some discrete literacy and numeracy sessions
- insufficient use of ILT in sessions

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ST HELENS LEA:

- 'very welcoming and friendly centres'
- the quality of the teaching
- 'my confidence has grown and I can see my daughter is much happier at school'
- 'I have learnt to praise my child more than criticise her'
- feeling valued as an individual
- the opportunity to meet other parents
- 'using the skills I have learnt to influence local decision makers'
- the help from the volunteers
- 'the opportunity to learn more than I have in the past'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ST HELENS LEA COULD IMPROVE:

- 'I wish I'd found out about the courses sooner'
- the number of courses available
- the amount of time that we have to wait to join courses at the next level

Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

Terminology varies across the range of education and training settings covered by the *Common Inspection Framework*. The table below indicates the terms appropriate to Adult and Community Learning.

Single term used in the framework			Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
Provider	Provider		Any organisation providing opportunities for adults to meet personal or collective goals through the experience of learning. Providers include local authorities, specialist designated institutions, voluntary and community sector organisations, regeneration partnerships and further education colleges.
Learner	Learner		Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.
Teacher/ Trainer	Tutor Mentor		Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them
Learning goals	Main learning goals Secondary		Intended gains in skills, knowledge or understanding. Gains may be reflected in the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. Or they may be reflected in the ability of learners to apply learning in contexts outside the learning situation, e.g. in the family, community, or workplace. Learners' main goal/s should be recorded on an individual or, in some cases, group learning plan. Plans should be revised as progress is made and new goals emerge. These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate.
Personal and learning skills	Personal and learning skills		These include being able to study independently, willingness to collaborate with others, and readiness to take up another opportunity for education or training.

Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

Relating the term to Adult Community Learning	
Unanticipated or unintended learning outcome	Adults often experience unanticipated gains as a result of being involved in learning. These include improved self-esteem, greater self-confidence and a growing sense of belonging to a community. Gains of this kind should be acknowledged and recorded in any record of achievement.
Subject-based programme	A programme organised around body of knowledge, e.g. the structure and usage of the French language or ceramic glazing techniques. Students could be expected to progress from one aspect of the subject to another, to grasp increasingly complex concepts or analyses or to develop greater levels of skill or to apply skills to a new area of work.
Issue-based programme	A programme that is based on the concerns, interests and aspirations of particular groups, for example members of a Sikh Gurdwara wanting to address inter-faith relations in their town, or parents worried about the incidence of drug abuse in their locality. Issue-based learning tends to be associated with geographically defined communities, but the increasing use of electronic means of communication means that this need no longer be the case. Progress is defined in terms of the group's increasing ability to analyse its situation, to access new information and skills which will help it resolve its difficulties and generate solutions and its growing confidence in dealing with others to implement those solutions.
Outreach provision	Provision established in a community setting in addition to provision made at an organisation's main site(s). Outreach programmes may be similar to courses at the main site(s) or be designed to meet the specific requirements of that community.
Neighbourhood-based work	The provider's staff have a long-term presence in a local community with a specific remit to understand the concerns of the local residents and develop learning activities to meet local needs and interests.
Community regeneration	The process of improving the quality of life in communities by investing in their infrastructure and facilities, creating opportunities for training and employment and tackling poor health and educational under-achievement. Community regeneration requires the active participation of local residents in decision-making. Changes and improvements are often achieved either directly or indirectly as a result of the adult learning activities which arise from this.
Community capacity building	The process of enabling local people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to take advantage of opportunities for employment, training and further education and to become self managing, sustainable communities.

Active citizenship	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make conscious effort to do so: the process whereby people recognise the power of organisations and institutions to act in the interests of the common good and exercise their influence to ensure that they do so. Adult learning contributes to active citizenship.
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DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- very successful strategic planning
- particularly good partnership arrangements
- good curriculum management
- successful initiatives to widen participation

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of clear and challenging targets
- incomplete management information system that does not fully support quality improvement
- insufficient promotion of aspects of equality and diversity

38. The service's strategic planning is very successful and this is recognised in the self-assessment report. The LEA has a clear strategy for the development of adult and community learning, and the service has identified specific provision to contribute to the borough council's mission of raising achievement in deprived communities. This is well understood and supported by the borough council's committee members. The service has developed its own strategies to maximise its provision for learners through co-operative multi-agency working. The head of the service attends a wide range of local authority committees, partnerships and community forums, and is seconded onto the local learning partnership. She provides strong and focused leadership that gives clear direction and successfully promotes the service's aims and objectives. Planning is based upon developing the strengths of adult and community learning and responding positively to improving recognised weaknesses in the community.

39. The service has particularly good partnership arrangements, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Service level agreements are clear. Communication between the wide range of partners is good and avoids duplication of provision and resources. Partnership arrangements have been used to develop and train staff through the various organisations' training plans and resources. Close working relationships permit an effective response to local needs. The partners and their staff appreciate the level of service and support they receive from the service's managers and staff. They work together to develop local provision that supports key priority groups through children's centres, local schools and community initiatives.

40. Curriculum management is good. Staff are well qualified and bring much relevant experience to the service. They have good opportunities to develop skills and knowledge that will help them meet learners' needs. Over 90 per cent of staff, including those from the partner organisations, have or are working towards professional qualifications. However, there is little clear evaluation of how staff development contributes directly to the learners' experience. Staff regularly share good practice through formal and informal meetings and training. Managers set high standards and staff respond well. Managers are open and approachable, and continue to develop a team culture. Communication with

staff is good and all staff are actively involved in planning for future provision and improvements. Many of the staff work part time, but all fully understand their roles and responsibilities and all attend course meetings, appraisals and training. Meetings are well documented and action points are constantly reviewed.

41. Management of physical resources is satisfactory. The service supports providers' needs for equipment to improve the adult learning environment. However, some classrooms are too small for the number of learners. Tutors do not make enough use of ILT in teaching and learning. The service is aware of this and has a strategy to improve it. Financial arrangements are efficient, and the service makes good use of external funding. It makes timely returns to the LSC, and audit reports are positive.

42. The service has made a satisfactory response to the skills for life agenda, the government's strategy for literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Managers have organised initial training for the whole staff, which was also attended by more than half of the tutors who work in partner organisations. One member of staff has gained a level 4 **qualification in teaching literacy**. In family learning in particular, the service works closely with partner schools to target parents without level 2 qualifications. Tutors include adult literacy and/or numeracy content in their sessions.

43. Arrangements to support learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills are satisfactory. The service uses external literacy and numeracy tests and encourages learners to assess their own level of skill as part of its initial assessment activities. It provides discrete courses in literacy and numeracy for some learners. In addition, it directs learners to the local college of further education where appropriate.

44. The service makes insufficient use of clear and challenging targets when planning and monitoring progress towards its strategic aims. Targets are set for retention and achievement rates over the whole provision, but these are too general to be useful in developing and monitoring key areas. There is too little detailed data to use in setting targets. Targets are often simplistic and easily attainable. For example, the target for the recruitment of learners from deprived communities is only 2 per cent higher than the current level of participation of these learners. Development and action plans set performance measures that are not clear or specific. Managers and staff are unable to interpret data or confirm success easily and consistently. Targets are not sufficiently devolved to course teams or individuals. The targets set for learners vary in quality between tutors. The service's self-assessment report identified this weakness, but the most recent three-year development plan contains few specific and measurable targets.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

45. The service has implemented successful initiatives to widen participation and acknowledges this strength in its self-assessment report. Managers have identified four equality and diversity impact measures which aim to increase the participation of men, learners from disadvantaged areas and minority ethnic groups, and learners with disabilities. It has formed particularly strong strategic partnerships with many local community groups, organisations, libraries, training providers and other government agencies to identify and promote learning opportunities in the community. The number of learners enrolling on first step courses has increased, and many of those who enrol on family learning courses are from disadvantaged areas. The proportion of learners with qualifications at level 1 or below has increased. The service makes good use of the facilities of its partner organisations to

remove barriers to learning for its learners. For example, it uses the crèche and day nursery provision in many of the schools and Sure Start centres where it runs courses. The service does not charge learners fees for their tuition. It has been successful in applying for grants to support the recruitment and achievement of learners from minority ethnic groups, and has worked with travellers and small groups of Bengali women to identify and provide suitable family learning activities. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is about 1 per cent higher than that in the local population. The service has successfully completed a project to increase participation by men. It recently worked closely with a local primary school to provide a series of evening activities over a three-week period for fathers and their children. The service carried out innovative research and marketing for this project, and 30 men attended with their children. The service has shared the initiative with other primary schools and plans to arrange more activities in the summer term. The service has successfully recruited male tutors to courses where men are currently under-represented. This has included family first aid and early years' courses. In partnership with social services, it has increased the participation of adults with learning difficulties by developing self-advocacy groups. Outreach workers facilitate further inclusion by targeting specific communities and working closely with other agencies to identify community learning needs.

46. The service implements its equal opportunities policy satisfactorily. Equality of opportunity and diversity are central to the service's ethos and strategies. The policy closely reflects the overall commitment to equality of opportunity outlined in the borough council's 10-year community plan and equality policy. The three-year development plan encompasses many aspects of equality and diversity, particularly in relation to increasing the participation of specific groups. The service has conducted an equality and diversity audit that identified specific areas for further improvement. These include marketing, use of data and staff training. The service ensures that staff maintain their awareness of equality and diversity, using annual staff training and updating them on changes in legislation when necessary. The service communicates its policy clearly to learners through its learner information leaflet. Learners' complaints are dealt with promptly and in accordance with the complaints procedures. The service has suitable access to translation facilities in the most common community languages.

47. The service meets its obligations under current race equality and disability legislation. Its response to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is very good. The service audits all its centres thoroughly, carrying out risk assessments for the accessibility and suitability of accommodation. Alternative arrangements are made where there is poor accessibility for learners with restricted mobility. The service has a good range of adaptive and assistive technologies to help learners overcome physical barriers in the use of ICT. The proportion of staff from minority ethnic groups closely matches that in the local population.

48. Senior staff monitor and analyse the equality of opportunity data satisfactorily. The service has recently started to analyse retention and achievement data from different groups of learners. It has identified some actions to be taken where specific groups have been under-performing. At area of learning level, most managers require further training to enable them to analyse and use the data effectively.

49. Some aspects of equality and diversity are insufficiently promoted. The images in most promotional materials do not reflect the borough's diversity. The service has not conducted an audit of its curriculum materials. Tutors do not sufficiently promote and

reinforce equality and diversity in learning sessions. These weaknesses are identified in the service's current self-assessment report and are included in the subsequent development plan.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

50. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The quality assurance framework is well structured and sufficiently detailed, and most of it has been implemented. Staff have a good understanding of the quality assurance procedures. In ICT, quality assurance arrangements work particularly well. The service carries out termly internal moderation of all accredited and non-accredited courses. It uses moderation meetings to standardise and share good practice. The moderation process is effective, and the subsequent action plans contain specific improvement measures. A few tutors do not give learners detailed written feedback on their progress. The service's implementation of systems to recognise and record progress and achievement has been satisfactory.

51. The service's questionnaires are specifically designed to gather information from learners on the programmes offered. Satisfaction levels are very high. Learners feed back after each course and the course tutors summarise the results. Managers analyse learners' feedback termly and take positive action to improve the service. However, learners are not always told about the improvements that the service has made as a result of their feedback. There are formal arrangements for feedback from partner organisations, and managers analyse the results closely. However, in family learning the response rate is low. Staff from the service and its partners provide a satisfactory level of feedback through regular course and team meetings.

52. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and includes the views of learners, staff and subcontractors. The self-assessment report is sufficiently detailed and its findings broadly match those of the inspection team. However, it failed to recognise such key strengths as the quality of teaching and learning, and the management of the curriculum. The self-assessment action plan and development plans link well. Managers review and carry out action plans regularly. There are references in the self-assessment report to the intentions of the service, but these intentions do not all feature in the action plans.

53. Arrangements to improve the quality of the teaching provision are satisfactory. There are clear processes for the observation of teaching and learning. Tutors are observed at least once a year. The feedback they are given is sufficiently detailed and indicates areas to be improved. However, the procedures to monitor subsequent improvements are too informal. The service's arrangements to assure the quality of teaching and learning at its subcontractors are incomplete. The service acknowledges that in 2004-05, its own grade profile for teaching was too generous, with all teaching and learning graded good or better. During the inspection, 76 per cent of teaching sessions were graded good or better and 24 per cent were satisfactory. No teaching was unsatisfactory. Staff have received further training in the observation of teaching and learning, and the service has introduced criteria to standardise grading. It is, however, too soon to evaluate the effect of this improvement.

54. The management information system is incomplete and does not support quality improvement. The service has recently installed a computerised management information system, but there is too little technical support available to maintain it. Staff have little understanding of the capabilities of the system, and the only reports generated at present relate to learner numbers and personal data. Reports provide information at course level,

but no useful summaries on which managers can make decisions. Managers have to calculate this information separately to support their planning. The service does not use the management information system to monitor learners' individual progress or destinations. Staff have insufficient access to the data. The provider has recognised this weakness and refers to it in the self-assessment report.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Early years</i> Adult and community learning	217	2 2

55. This area of learning offers early years courses across three broad categories which are parenting, early years family learning and family first aid. These include courses in parenting leadership which involve learners setting up their own parenting group. There are 217 learners on 26 courses. Almost 10 per cent of the learners are men. Most learners attend during the day, but some evening courses are available. Most learners follow courses leading to qualifications from entry level to level 3. The service uses many community venues for its courses, including schools, Sure Start centres, libraries and a church. There are nine staff, including the co-ordinators who manage family first aid and early years family learning and parenting.

Early years

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- good development of learners' personal and social skills
- good application of learners' skills in promoting the well-being of families
- very good teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of learners' progress

Achievement and standards

56. Retention and achievement rates are good on most courses. According to the service's data, the overall achievement rate was 91 per cent in 2003-04, and rose to 93 per cent in 2004-05.

57. Learners improve and develop their personal and social skills through their learning, and many report that their confidence has increased. Some female learners, who feel isolated at home with their children, benefit from meeting other parents at parenting classes and by sharing their experience of early years child development. Other learners have improved their communication skills through active participation during sessions in group and pair work. Learners also develop their self-awareness and self-expression. They are able to reflect on and evaluate their own practice and behaviour as parents, and identify strategies and actions to improve their own skills.

58. Learners apply their skills well to promote the well-being of their families. Learners on courses in parenting and early years family learning use the techniques learnt in their

classes to manage their children's behaviour. They report an improvement both in their children's behaviour and also in their own relationships with their children. For example, they learn to praise rather than criticise, and they identify improved levels of confidence and behaviour in their children. Learners on first aid for babies courses have applied their new knowledge by dealing appropriately with choking emergencies in real-life situations. Some learners promote the well-being of other families by progressing onto a level 3 parenting leadership skills course which involves setting up their own parenting group. This course is a useful progression route to other learning opportunities in childcare or child development. Attendance during the week of the inspection was high at 81 per cent.

The quality of provision

59. Teaching and learning are very good. Most of the sessions observed were graded good or better, and none was unsatisfactory. Tutors plan their sessions well and make good use of resources. All tutors regularly refer back to previous sessions to check learners' understanding. They reinforce and summarise the key learning points clearly. In the best sessions, the teaching involves the learners and reflects their interests. Tutors are enthusiastic about their subjects and their sessions are lively and animated. For example, one first-aid tutor gave a fast-paced session on treating the loss of blood in emergency situations. He gave a practical demonstration of how to treat a severe blood-loss injury, then divided the class into groups and asked them to practise the skills that had been demonstrated. Learners responded well to the exercise and had fun as they developed and practised their skills. The tutor offered very good guidance and support to the groups during the exercise. In another session, a tutor made very good use of personal experience as a paramedic to keep learners interested. In parenting sessions, tutors share their own experience as parents and encourage learners to share theirs and to learn from each other. On an accredited parenting course, there was excellent team teaching by very experienced tutors, and learners were given many opportunities for peer assessment. Learners are actively involved in sessions and ask thoughtful, analytical questions to promote their own learning. They are also enthusiastic about completing homework tasks and practising the skills they have learnt. In the less effective sessions, tutors rely too much on workbooks and notes and provide few opportunities for learners to participate fully. In these sessions, the teaching fails to respond to learners' different learning styles.

60. The range of courses matches learners' needs and interests, and partnership working enables them to progress to further courses. Staff work well with partners such as Sure Start and the health service to promote courses. Some learners are referred directly to the provision while others respond to advertisements and posters placed in schools. At one centre, link workers have increased the number of men recruited onto courses. Tutors respond well to learners' needs and interests. The service has extended some courses by an extra week to accommodate learners' requests for additional content. Learners are highly satisfied with their courses, and promote them to their friends and family.

61. Support and guidance for learners are satisfactory. Tutors offer good levels of personal support and direct learners to other sources of support when appropriate. Learners are also directed to the parents' information centre. This is a dedicated resource for parents and contains information on a range of topics related to learning, such as the national literacy strategy and family learning. It also provides leaflets and contact details for organisations that can offer support with issues such as bullying, epilepsy and sex education. Parents can borrow books from the centre and access free leaflets and other materials. Learners with literacy or numeracy needs are either supported during sessions or

directed to more appropriate provision, depending on the level of support required. Crèche or day nursery facilities are available to all learners.

62. Learners' progress is not recorded in sufficient detail. Records contain little critical or informative feedback about how well learners have met the expected learning outcomes. Learners complete individual records which are kept in their files but these are not linked explicitly to learning objectives. The records often refer to competences as they are numbered in the scheme of work, but they do not evaluate clearly which skills the learner has developed. Learners' files contain much evidence of learning in the form of handouts and notes but less in the form of assessed work with comprehensive feedback from tutors. Learners also complete a learner assessment record, but this is used as a checklist rather than an informative record of what they have achieved and how they can improve. On some courses which do not lead to a qualification, learners evaluate their skills on entry, at the middle point and at the end of the course. Their comments in the evaluations do not relate sufficiently to specific learning objectives.

Leadership and management

63. Each of the three programme areas in this area of learning is managed separately. All the staff hold appropriate qualifications for their roles. Communication among staff is good. Staff in each area meet regularly to discuss learners' retention and achievement rates and their general progress. In family first aid, the co-ordinator regularly reports to staff on learners' performance and progress. However, the reports do not include detailed evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning. Staff work effectively with partners in the community such as churches, community centres and schools to promote learning opportunities. The self-assessment process involves all staff, learners and partners, but the self-assessment report for each area is insufficiently evaluative. The internal moderation process did not identify the weakness in recording learners' progress. There is a positive culture of improvement across all three areas of the provision with clear lines of accountability. Staff work actively to recruit more men, learners from disadvantaged areas and learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. All centres are accessible to learners with restricted mobility.

Information and communications technology**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ICT for users		2
Adult and community learning	192	2

64. The service offers a range of short courses in ICT such as using a computer, introduction to word processing, and making the most of the internet and e-mail. The courses lead to OCN credits and certificates at entry level and levels 1 and 2. Courses are for two hours a week over 10 or 15 weeks. ICT represents about one-third of the service's provision. In 2004-05, 942 learners were enrolled. At the time of the inspection, there were 192 learners enrolled on 24 ICT courses at nine community venues. About three quarters of the learners were women, and almost two-thirds were aged 45 or over.

ICT for users**Grade 2***Strengths*

- good achievement of qualifications
- very good teaching and learning
- high standard of learning materials
- strong curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient challenge for some learners
- inflexible course start and end dates

Achievement and standards

65. Learners' achievements and standards of work are good. All learners demonstrate a thorough understanding of how to create documents which include text and simple graphics. They can explain the main components of computers and they take part in productive discussions about the benefits and problems they encounter in using computers during sessions or at home. Few learners have previous experience of using computers. Through weekly progress reviews, they readily identify the skills they have developed over short periods of time. Many older learners say that they now feel more confident when talking to younger family members who are used to working with computers. After attending introductory courses, several learners have bought computers or have connected to the internet at home. Most learners attend regularly and complete their studies. Attendance during the week of the inspection was high at 84 per cent. Almost all learners who complete their courses achieve OCN credits and certificates. According to the service's own data, in 2004-05, 87 per cent of learners who started a course gained the credits or certificate as identified on their learning plan. In 2003-04, the rate was 84 per cent.

66. Progression to the next level of study is satisfactory. Almost a third of learners enrol on another course in the second term. Half of these enrol on a third course in the following

term.

The quality of provision

67. Teaching and learning are very good. Tutors prepare sessions thoroughly, setting clear learning objectives that learners understand well. The tutors' enthusiasm encourages learners to respond positively to the challenges set for them. Learners make good use of their time in class. They participate in, and enjoy, the lively sessions, and respond well to the structured teaching style. They are often reluctant to leave when the session ends. Tutors provide learners with relevant and useful activities for homework, promoting independent study and building their confidence. Learners who do not have access to a computer at home often use the centre or library facilities for further practice.

68. The broad range of materials to support sessions is of a high standard. The service identified this strength in its self-assessment report. Tutors are keen to identify good practice and they share ideas and materials. They select activities carefully to develop learners' skills in the context of topics that are relevant to their everyday lives. For example, they give learners materials about local history and poetry to use as the basis for creating, manipulating and spellchecking text. They word process letters, book holidays on the internet, and debate issues associated with the use of chat rooms. Volunteers attend many sessions to provide good support to less confident learners. Several of the volunteers have recently completed similar courses and they demonstrate a good understanding of learners who are using computers for the first time. Tutors do not cover diversity and equality of opportunity sufficiently in their teaching.

69. Tutors check learners' progress regularly through questioning, written tasks, discussions and observation of learners' computer skills. Tutors give good feedback on how learners can improve their literacy skills, though they seldom highlight their number skills. They encourage learners to identify and write down what they have learnt during each session, and they are adept at building learners' confidence. Each learner who completes a course builds up a well-presented, useful file of information and activities for future reference.

70. Arrangements to support learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs are satisfactory. Learners either receive support during sessions or are directed to more appropriate provision depending on the level of support they require.

71. Some learners are insufficiently challenged. Occasionally, learners who have developed a high level of competence are set tasks that are too easy for them. There are few opportunities for them to apply their ICT skills to new and unfamiliar situations.

72. The start and end dates of courses are inflexible. Learners with shift patterns or family commitments find it difficult to attend at the same time every week. There are no ICT workshops offering flexible attendance, and few opportunities to start courses other than at the beginning of terms. Most courses do not accommodate learners who are studying a range of different qualifications. At the time of the inspection, the service had waiting lists for courses, although several had vacancies because learners had withdrawn. Most learners who achieve a qualification in using a computer at level 1, progress to level 2 or follow internet courses at the same centre. Tutors provide comprehensive information about study opportunities at several local providers, but learners prefer to continue at the centre. Many then lose interest and express disappointment as they have to wait several months for their chosen progression opportunity to become available.

Leadership and management

73. Management of the ICT curriculum is strong, and the number of learners has increased over the past three years. Managers keep up to date with new developments in the ICT curriculum, and the curriculum leader contributes to a strategy group for information learning technology. Managers have high expectations of the quality of both teaching and assessment. Teamwork is productive. Many tutors make very good use of the teaching and training skills they have gained in primary schools, further education or business, sharing them with newer colleagues and contributing to the team ethos. All tutors work for the service part time and receive good support. Their sessions are observed annually and they have regular opportunities for staff development. Regular meetings and good communication among managers, ICT tutors and centre staff ensure that emerging problems with quality are dealt with quickly. Staff carry out thorough risk assessments of venues, prioritising health and safety.

74. Accommodation and ICT facilities are satisfactory overall. Most centres are very welcoming and have very good, up-to-date ICT equipment. In a few centres, rooms are small or do not have digital projection facilities and this restricts teaching methods.

75. The service has good quality assurance arrangements for ICT, with clear and thoroughly documented systems. Regular, careful moderation ensures that course documents and the assessment of learners' work are up to date and of a good standard. Staff produce summary evaluation reports on the ICT provision at the end of each term. These incorporate learners' feedback and result in improvements being made. Managers make good progress in implementing action plans, but the service does not make enough use of targets to improve aspects of learners' retention, achievement and progression. The self-assessment process includes staff, learners and partner organisations. Many of the strengths and weaknesses identified match those found by the inspectors. The report did not identify the high quality of teaching and learning as a strength.

Family learning**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i>		2
Adult and community learning	123	2

76. Family learning provides first step courses for adults with few formal qualifications, often through local partners. The provision is intended to improve the literacy, numeracy and language skills of parents living in the most deprived areas of the borough. Most courses are run for two hours a week over 10 weeks. Learners attend during the day or on Saturday mornings. Most of the courses are accredited by OCN. There are family literacy and numeracy courses, and a programme of courses in schools which include 'help your child learn' and 'keep up with the children'. Family literacy and family numeracy are the only programmes with discrete literacy and numeracy content and accreditation. During 2004-05, 911 learners were enrolled on 101 courses, and almost 90 per cent of them were women. At the time of the inspection, 123 learners were enrolled on nine courses from entry level to level 2. Each area of the curriculum has a lead tutor, and a development manager has overall responsibility for the area of learning.

Adult and community learning**Grade 2***Strengths*

- good retention and achievement rates
- very good teaching and learning
- innovative approaches to widening participation
- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of learners' progress in some discrete literacy and numeracy sessions
- insufficient use of ILT in sessions

Achievement and standards

77. Retention and achievement rates are good on all courses. According to the service's data, the overall retention rate for 2004-05 was 92 per cent. Achievement rates are very high on accredited courses. Ninety-nine per cent of the learners, who completed their course in 2004-05, achieved OCN accreditation. In 2002-03, the rate was 80 per cent. The achievement rate for national tests in literacy and numeracy is significantly higher than the national average. In 2004-05 33 of the 35 learners who took national tests in literacy and numeracy were successful. The service identified this strength in its self-assessment report.

78. Learners make good progress, and many now read regularly to their children. In a session on fractions, learners who had just learnt how to recognise and quantify fractions were able to explain them to their children. Learners make good progress towards their

personal learning goals and can demonstrate how their learning has had a positive effect on their lives and those of their children. They describe how working alongside their children gives them a better understanding of how they are taught and how they can support them. Attendance during the inspection was high in most sessions and was 82 per cent overall.

79. Progression is satisfactory. In family learning in schools, two-fifths of learners take another course. Many learners go on to enrol on courses in ICT.

The quality of provision

80. Teaching and learning are very good. Most of the sessions observed were good or better, and none was unsatisfactory. In the better sessions, tutors plan the learning carefully and meet the needs of individual learners particularly well. They ensure that the activities closely relate to what learners' children experience at primary school under the national curriculum. They adapt materials well for adult learners and use good-quality teaching resources imaginatively. In most sessions, tutors demonstrate much understanding of the barriers facing adults returning to learning.

81. The service's approach to widening participation in family learning is particularly innovative, and was identified as a strength in its self-assessment report. The service has initiated several projects to widen participation with its partners. For example, a 'Dads and Kids' project involved staff from many agencies in developing projects to increase participation by men. One successful project, organised in partnership with a local primary school, recognised that men respond differently than women when talking about education. This project identified that any activities planned had to be of interest to men and that the induction had to be very concise. Some 30 men with children aged between seven and eight attended a range of family learning activities, including pond dipping, cycling, bug hunting, playing board games and learning about healthy eating. Many of the men from this project also volunteer for other projects. The family learning tutors have evaluated and shared this model successfully with other local primary schools. In a further example, the service has worked with Bengali women and supplied parallel texts in Bengali to help Bengali mothers understand the national curriculum. The service also participates successfully in national family learning initiatives such as the 'Share' programme which encourages parents to be more involved in their child's education. Working closely with a range of agencies and primary schools to recruit learners from disadvantaged areas, the family literacy and numeracy team complements this type of programme well. The service ensures that requests from these parents for further courses in literacy, numeracy or ICT are prioritised.

82. The support given to learners is satisfactory. The service makes good use of local support agencies for the wider welfare of its learners. Many learners use the service's parents' information centre to identify specific sources of support. Arrangements to meet learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs are satisfactory. Learners have an initial assessment that clearly identifies the level of literacy and numeracy support they need. Tutors provide most of the literacy and numeracy support during sessions, but where specific needs cannot be met, they refer learners to the service's own literacy and numeracy courses or those of a local college of further education. Learners receive appropriate information on progression opportunities both in the service and with partner organisations. The service has compiled many case studies of learners who have successfully progressed. It does not, however, record all learners' destinations.

83. The records of learners' progress in some of the service's literacy and numeracy sessions are insufficiently detailed. They contain little reference to the actual learning that has taken place. They do not identify clearly which elements learners have found difficult or how their learning plan will be amended.

84. Tutors make too little use of ILT in learning sessions to support learning or extend teaching resources. Many learners have few opportunities to develop confidence in using ILT as a learning tool. Tutors do use ILT in some numeracy sessions.

Leadership and management

85. Curriculum management is good. The service has a very strong commitment to widening participation at the first level of learning. Staff have a good understanding of the key objectives for family learning provision. Partnership working is highly effective and responds closely to the priorities that the service has identified. The family learning team makes very good use of external funding to achieve its objectives. Communication is good between team members and partner organisations. Staff receive clear direction. Roles and responsibilities are clearly allocated. Co-ordinators support part-time staff and those from partner organisations well. Staff do not use data sufficiently to analyse trends and to make further improvements.

86. Resources are satisfactory. Most accommodation at the partner organisations is attractive and suitable for adult learning. In many schools, a dedicated parents' room is available for family learning teaching and social events. Managers conduct a detailed venue assessment for each new centre and review the assessments at the start of each new course. The service purchases furniture for some primary schools where there is not enough appropriate seating for adults.

87. Staff are well qualified and most have good experience of working with learners in a range of ages and abilities. One tutor has already completed the level 4 skills for life qualification. Staff, including those from partner organisations, regularly participate in the many staff development activities. All staff have received recent training in literacy, numeracy and language support.

88. The self-assessment process included the views of staff, tutors, learners and the service's many partners. The self-assessment report matched closely many of the findings of the inspection team, but failed to recognise the quality of the teaching and learning as a strength.

89. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Tutors ensure that teaching resources meet the individual needs of learners. These resources do not actively promote diversity.

