

# REINSPECTION REPORT

## **Milton Keynes LEA Reinspection**

**23 March 2006**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Grading

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

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

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas. 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.*

## 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 over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** 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.

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### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Milton Keynes Local Education Authority (the LEA) contracts with the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council for the provision of accredited and non-accredited adult and community learning in the area. Provision is delivered directly by Milton Keynes Council's (the council's) adult continuing education (ACE) service, working in close partnership with a wide range of local community organisations. ACE is managed within the council's learning and development directorate and is part of its learning and skills division, which also includes libraries.

2. ACE offers courses in 14 areas of learning at around 60 locations, but some have very few enrolments. The areas of learning covered by the remit of the previous inspection in March 2005 were information and communications technology (ICT), sport and leisure, visual and performing arts, English and languages, foundation programmes, and family learning. In 2003-04, there were 11,500 enrolments by around 6,600 learners on approximately 1,100 separate courses. Foundation programmes received an unsatisfactory grade and were reinspected in March 2006.

3. The learning and skills officer (ACE) has overall operational responsibility for the service. The learning and skills officer (strategy) has responsibility for strategic development. Both posts report to the learning and skills manager. Day-to-day activities are directed by 11 curriculum and functional co-ordinators, including curriculum development organisers, who co-ordinate areas of learning and manage tutors, and curriculum team leaders who are subject specialists. At the time of the previous inspection, ACE employed 27 full-time permanent staff and 13 part-time permanent staff, together with 340 part-time tutors. Prior to reinspection, the foundation programme area was reorganised and a review of the structure of the skills for life team has resulted in the quality improvement co-ordinator supervising all skills for life programmes. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. The quality improvement manager works closely with the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) development organiser. Skills for life part-time tutors have reduced to enable the appointment of more full-time and fractional staff. ACE has issued new contracts to tutors outlining their roles and responsibilities and staff development requirements. In addition, it has drafted a new skills for life strategy linked to the national agenda and qualification outcomes. The strategy focuses on teaching and learning. Its objectives are linked to widening the participation of learners from under-represented groups, and their progress to further learning opportunities.

4. Milton Keynes, and its environs, has one of the fastest growing populations in the country. Between 1991 and 1998 its population grew by 14 per cent, compared with 2.7 per cent nationally, and currently it is approximately 207,000. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is 9 per cent and it is growing. Local businesses are predominantly in the service sector, including high-technology businesses and major bases of international companies. The area is one of low unemployment, significant

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inward investment and relatively high wages. However, overall low unemployment, at 1.7 per cent, masks the significant economic and social deprivation in some of the local authority's wards. There are significant skills shortages for developing businesses that are well below national averages within the context of educational participation rates for 16 and 17 year olds.

## SCOPE OF PROVISION

### Foundation programmes

5. The council's ACE service runs 23 literacy and numeracy classes at six venues across the borough. Classes are in the mornings, afternoons and evenings from Monday to Saturday. The provision is currently managed by the quality improvement co-ordinator, who also supervises the ESOL and literacy and numeracy provision. Literacy and numeracy has three curriculum staff, including the literacy and numeracy curriculum development organiser, a full-time literacy tutor and one half-time numeracy tutor. There are six sessional tutors, seven learning support assistants and eight volunteers. Administrative staff are shared between the literacy, numeracy and ESOL teams. Nine classes currently have a learning support assistant. Initial and diagnostic assessments take place twice a week at Milton Keynes Central Library. All literacy and numeracy learners work towards national tests. There are no learners on non-accredited courses. Currently, there are 207 learners, 136 on literacy and 69 on numeracy courses.

6. There are 408 ESOL learners on 38 courses at the four main ACE centres and five other community venues. Of these, 272 are working towards the full ESOL skills for life national tests at entry level, 85 learners are preparing for the entry level speaking and listening qualifications, 48 are on level 1 courses and three are working towards level 2 qualifications. There are no learners on non-accredited courses.

7. In the ESOL team there are three curriculum staff, comprising the ESOL curriculum development organiser and two full-time ESOL tutors. There are nine sessional tutors and six volunteers. Initial assessments are offered at three of the main sites where ESOL learners are predominantly based. Diagnostic assessments are carried out in lessons with guidance from tutors. The council's ACE service currently holds a waiting list for potential ESOL learners.

## ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	30
Number of staff interviewed	18
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	8
Number of visits	5

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

8. At the previous inspection in March 2005, foundation programmes were very weak. All other areas of learning were satisfactory or good and leadership and management were satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

## GRADES

*grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak*

*Grades awarded at previous inspection*

<b>Information &amp; communications technology</b>		<b>3</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Using IT</b> - Adult and community learning	637	3

<b>Hospitality, sport, leisure &amp; travel</b>		<b>2</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Leisure, sport and recreation</b> - Adult and community learning	258	2

<b>Visual &amp; performing arts &amp; media</b>		<b>3</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Arts</b> - Adult and community learning	900	3
<b>Crafts</b> - Adult and community learning	200	3
<b>Other contributory areas</b> - Adult and community learning	180	3

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<b>English, languages &amp; communications</b>		<b>3</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>English</b> - Adult and community learning	152	None
<b>Languages</b> - Adult and community learning	900	3

<b>Foundation programmes</b>		<b>5</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>ESOL</b> - Adult and community learning	653	5
<b>Literacy and numeracy</b> - Adult and community learning	435	4

<b>Family learning</b>		<b>3</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Adult and community learning</b> - Adult and community learning	673	3

*Grades awarded at reinspection*

<b>Foundation programmes</b>		<b>3</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>ESOL</b> - Adult and community learning	408	3
<b>Literacy and numeracy</b> - Adult and community learning	207	2



## 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	
<b>Provider</b>	<b>Provider</b>	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
<b>Learner</b>	<b>Learner</b>	Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.
<b>Teacher / trainer</b>	<b>Tutor</b>	Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning.
	<b>Mentor</b>	Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them achieve their learning goals.
<b>Learning goals</b>	<b>Main learning goals</b>	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.
	<b>Secondary learning goals</b>	These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate.
<b>Personal and learning skills</b>	<b>Personal and learning skills</b>	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 and Community Learning
<b>Unanticipated, or unintended learning outcome</b>	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.
<b>Subject-based programme</b>	A programme organised around a 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.
<b>Issue-based programme</b>	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.
<b>Outreach provision</b>	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.
<b>Neighbourhood-based work</b>	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.
<b>Community regeneration</b>	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.

<b>Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning</b>	
<b>Community capacity building</b>	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 selfmanaging, sustainable communities.
<b>Active citizenship</b>	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make a 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.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Foundation programmes

Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b><i>ESOL</i></b>		
- Adult and community learning	408	3
<b><i>Literacy and numeracy</i></b>		
- Adult and community learning	207	2

### ***ESOL***

#### *Strengths*

- good retention rates
- very effective development of independent learning skills
- good range of learning activities and resources
- successful recruitment to a wide range of courses

#### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient correction of learners' spoken language
- too few course hours to maximise language learning
- some ineffective use of individual learning plans and review records
- ineffective quality improvement arrangements at course level

### ***Literacy and numeracy***

#### *Strengths*

- good retention rates and improvements in achievement rates
- good personal and social gains
- very effective individual support
- significant improvements in curriculum management

#### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient time allocated for individual work
- ineffective monitoring of learners' progress

### **Achievement and standards**

9. Retention rates are good and achievement in literacy and numeracy is improving. Of the 200 learners in 2004-05, on literacy courses, 90 per cent were retained and, of these, 75 per cent passed their examinations. Of the 108 learners who started numeracy

courses, 90 per cent were retained in training, of whom 73 per cent successfully passed their examinations. To date, 83 per cent of learners have passed numeracy tests and 100 per cent have passed literacy tests. Total achievement to date for 2005-06 is 87 per cent. However, learners are not always entered for the national tests when they are ready to take them. Most learners are still entered for tests in the summer term. The standard of work in classes is satisfactory. Attendance in classes is good.

10. On literacy and numeracy courses, learners make significant social and personal gains. They speak readily of their increased confidence, their greater independence and how they are more prepared to tackle reading and writing tasks in front of other people. Many can face up to their difficulties and talk about what they need to do to improve. For example, one learner, having improved literacy skills and gained in confidence, decided to move from a cleaning job to becoming an auxiliary nurse. Another learner, now confident in reading, has travelled abroad for the first time.

11. Achievement and standards are now satisfactory in ESOL programmes, a significant improvement on the previous inspection. In 2004-05, 39 per cent of learners were enrolled on accredited provision. At the time of the reinspection, all learners are working towards national tests. In 2004-05, 909 learners started ESOL courses, 89 per cent were retained and, of these, 88 per cent passed examinations and/or completed their individual learning plans. In 2005-06, to date, of the 103 learners who sat national tests, 73 per cent passed the reading tests and 81 per cent passed the writing tests.

12. Overall, learners make satisfactory progress in ESOL. They gain confidence in their speaking and listening skills. Tutors support learners very effectively in developing independent learning skills. For example, the internet is used in most classes to introduce learners to specific English language websites, which they can use in the library or at home. Some learners are encouraged to use tape recorders in class to record new vocabulary or spoken English that they need to practise. Most tutors set and mark homework regularly, providing opportunities for learners to practise and consolidate their skills independently. In addition, tutors support learners in developing study skills and organising their portfolios of work. Learners' achievements are celebrated through attractive displays in most of the centres.

13. Attendance on ESOL courses is now satisfactory, although punctuality was an issue in half of the lessons observed. There are no clear guidelines that tutors use consistently across the provision to deal with this.

### **Quality of education and training**

14. In ESOL, teaching and learning are now satisfactory. Teaching was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. ACE has made significant improvements in the quality of its teaching and learning. Thirty-eight per cent of observations at the reinspection were judged to be good or better, with 50 per cent graded as satisfactory. Overall, there is a better focus on developing learners' listening and speaking skills. Many classes are of mixed-ability learners. Learners benefit from and support each other

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effectively. In the main, lessons are well prepared, with clear language learning outcomes and tasks identified to meet individual learners' needs. The range of learning activities is good. Imaginative and interesting activities generate many opportunities for speaking. For example, learners visit the town centre to gather information about the local bookshops and their stock of quick-read books, and the exhibitions at the art gallery. Classroom activities allow the learners to practise their speaking skills by working in pairs, in small groups, as well as in whole-group sessions. In one lesson, activities were broken up to give learners a short break through mind-relaxing techniques. In the weaker lessons, there is a greater emphasis on learners' paper-based work and lessons are largely tutor-centred. Language learning is not always relevant to learners' long-term goals, such as gaining employment or promotion at work.

15. Milton Keynes ACE has invested considerably in resources for ESOL in the past year. Most venues have interactive whiteboards, which tutors use imaginatively, although learners are not sufficiently encouraged to use these. ICT is used effectively in most classes, developing learners' English and word processing skills. A wide range of reference books, audiovisual equipment and resources is also available to enrich the learners' experience. Staff are well qualified, including the volunteers who support learners successfully in six of the classes.

16. Teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy courses are much improved since the previous inspection. Tutors now use a variety of activities and tasks that are relevant to the learners' lives. Lessons are well planned, and more advanced learners are given differentiated tasks. Initial assessment is strong and information on the learners' level and identified areas of need is passed on to the tutors. There is increasing use of this information in developing the individual learning plans. Individual learning plans are accessible, well used and more learner-friendly. Most are quite detailed and reviewed regularly to check progress. In some, learners write positive comments about achievement of their targets. Learners make satisfactory progress in class and are set individual targets. Numeracy teaching is particularly good. There is a balance of group and individual activities. Learners use the internet to research everyday topics like credit cards and interest rates, and tutors then encourage them to pass on this information to the rest of the group as a presentation. Learners are able to test their learning using quizzes on the internet. Many learners set themselves challenging targets, which ACE reviews regularly. Learners are able to ask questions and seek clarification. ACE makes effective use of the learning support staff to work with identified learners.

17. A good range of ESOL programmes, from pre-entry level to level 2, takes place at different times of day, including weekends and evenings. They are promoted well through particularly successful links with community organisations. Learners are in venues such as schools, community centres and places of worship, and they benefit from learning in groups with widely diverse cultures and backgrounds. A new centre attached to the refurbished library in one of the most deprived wards in Milton Keynes will open shortly to widen participation further.

18. Individual learning support in literacy and numeracy courses is very effective. ACE makes good use of volunteers and learning support assistants to support learners in

class. They work with individuals or with small groups of learners. They know what the learners are required to learn and facilitate learning without doing the work for them. Dyslexic learners are well supported. They attend a class to learn strategies for coping with dyslexia. The initial assessment process is supportive and does not make learners feel inadequate. Ongoing tutor support in classes is good. ACE also now makes increasing use of an adult guidance service to provide guidance on progression.

19. Literacy and numeracy resources are satisfactory at all venues. The new system of distributing resources to various centres has made a significant difference. Learners now have good access to dictionaries and other learning materials at their centres. Baskets of subject-based resources, which can be taken around to different venues, are useful for tutors and learners. Tutors are now actively involved in suggesting, purchasing and evaluating all learning materials, including websites and e-learning materials. Tutors and learners are using ICT increasingly, but it is not always working in the rooms that tutors use. Tutors do not always make checks prior to classes to ensure smooth running of the equipment.

20. The range of literacy and numeracy courses, from entry level to level 2 is satisfactory and meets the needs of the learners across the borough. The central library location is good in attracting learners. Classes are run in the mornings, afternoons and evenings, to enable employed learners to attend when it best suits them.

21. Initial and diagnostic assessments for ESOL learners are satisfactory. Assessment of learners' needs has improved at the beginning of and during the courses. Learners are placed in the appropriate level class as a result of initial assessment. Initial assessment is well managed, with each prospective learner participating in a confidential interview. During class time, the tutor supervises diagnostic assessment. Individual learning plans are then drawn up relating to the learners' long-term goals, such as to write a formal letter or get a job.

22. In some literacy and numeracy classes, tutor-led whole-group teaching leaves little time for learners to focus on their individual needs. For example, in one session, the tutor had listed individual areas of development, such as punctuation and the use of capital letters, but did not allocate time within the lesson for individual learners to do this. In literacy classes, most learners have writing targets but there is little time or opportunity for learners to practise writing in meaningful contexts. The tutor directs most of the activities and targets them to the whole group.

23. Target-setting for literacy and numeracy learners has improved since the previous inspection. However, monitoring of learners' progress is still ineffective. Tutors and learners are not always clear what progress has been made and what the learners need do to meet their long-term targets. In some cases, learners with good reading and writing skills take a long time to gain qualifications. Some learners who have made significant progress in writing do not have an opportunity to get their written work accredited. Learners are not clear when they have achieved the standard required for their level of course.



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24. For ESOL learners, ACE does not use results identified at diagnostic assessment to help develop individual learning plans sufficiently thoroughly. Most tutors do not set targets with learners that are language related, bite-sized and set in a context. Targets are often too general. Some tutors use the learning plans effectively and review learners' progress regularly. Learners' own records of progress only describe the activity they have carried out. Tutors do not encourage them sufficiently to reflect on their learning and evaluate whether they have mastered the grammar or language skill. There is little reference to spoken language.

25. Learners in ESOL do not receive sufficient feedback about their spoken language, in particular producing full sentences, their pronunciation of English words, stress and intonation patterns, and their accurate use of grammar. However, in one class the tutor provides detailed written feedback on learners' spoken language at the beginning of each session. Learners are then clear about what mistakes they need to work on when speaking, such as the pronunciation of specific words and agreeing subject and verb endings.

26. ACE has worked hard to rectify the weakness identified at the previous inspection of slow progress in developing language skills by many learners. However, most learners receive too few hours each week to maximise learning and progress at a faster rate than they currently achieve. Most of them spend two and three-quarter hours in class each week. In some instances, small class sizes affect the speed at which learners make progress. At the time of the reinspection, learners, tutors and managers recognised this as a weakness. ACE has plans in place to deal with this in the near future.

### **Leadership and management**

27. At the previous inspection, poor management of many aspects of programmes was identified as a weakness. Milton Keynes ACE has made significant improvements in the management of ESOL provision.

28. There have been significant improvements in the curriculum management of literacy and numeracy courses since the previous inspection. Senior managers closely monitor performance through quality assurance processes and use information to improve provision. A detailed post-inspection action plan, with a strong focus on improving teaching and learning and other aspects of curriculum, is closely monitored. All staff are observed and a post-observation plan is drawn up to secure improvements in teaching and learning. Targets are set for retention and achievement rates. ACE uses effective strategies to monitor attendance, follow up absences and withdraw long-term absentees to give their place to other learners. A staff development week of practical activities, including use of information and learning technologies (ILT), was useful in providing practical support in teaching and learning to the tutors. There is increased emphasis on staff qualifications and development. New processes, procedures and documents are well used to improve the learners' experience. The monthly newsletter is useful in keeping all staff informed of current issues and forthcoming events.

29. In ESOL, ACE effectively uses a range of quality improvement arrangements. A new



observation of teaching and learning system is now fully developed. It has been particularly successful in driving up the standards in teaching and learning. Tutors are observed regularly and more closely monitored by their managers to identify their development needs and to set targets that are linked to appraisal outcomes. Class size and attendance are both weaknesses identified from observations of teaching and learning that are included in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report. ACE's observation grade profile is in line with the grades given at reinspection. Newly designed lesson plans more appropriately reflect the range of activities that tutors and learners engage in, including activities to meet individual needs, links to individual learning plans, and the use of ILT. However, the content and quality of lesson planning still vary.

30. At ESOL course level there are ineffective quality improvement arrangements. Some staff do not take ownership and accept fully their responsibility in driving improvements. Tutors are not yet using and analysing data effectively to contribute to the end-of-year course reviews. Tutors do not always reflect and evaluate sufficiently on their practice. Sharing of good practice across the provision is not systematic. Peer observation is not used to improve teaching and learning.

31. The self-assessment report for foundation programmes is self-critical and evaluative. It has accurately identified the strengths and weakness found at reinspection.