

INSPECTION REPORT

West Berkshire Council

26 January 2007



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
- **learnirect** 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*

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West Berkshire Council

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. West Berkshire Council (the council) provides adult and community learning, which is funded by Thames Valley Learning and Skills Council, through subcontracts and partnership arrangements. The one course the council manages directly is a community learning programme in using computers. Approximately 85 per cent of the provision is subcontracted to Newbury College. This provision provides learning opportunities in 14 areas of learning and covers all the council's personal and community development learning programmes and some of its community learning and family learning provision. In addition, the council delivers short community learning programmes, including family learning, in partnership with schools, charitable organisations and other partners from the community and voluntary sector. In 2005-06, 3,799 learners participated in the council's programmes and made a total of 6,995 enrolments on 688 courses. Most enrolments were on the personal and community development learning courses in arts, media and publishing, languages, literature and culture, and leisure, travel and tourism. The council's children and young people directorate has overall responsibility for adult and community learning provision, which is part of the education service. The adult and community learning team is led by a development manager and consists of a principal adult and community learning officer, and five additional members of staff.

2. The council became a unitary authority in April 1998. Although primarily a rural and comparatively prosperous district, it also has pockets of deprivation, notably in some urban areas and some of the isolated rural communities. In November 2006, unemployment rates are low at just over 1 per cent, compared with the national average of 2.5 per cent. The 2001 census shows that the proportion of people in West Berkshire who define themselves as coming from a black or minority ethnic background is 2.6 per cent, compared with 10 per cent of people in England and Wales.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, the provider's leadership and management and its arrangements for quality improvement are good. The arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Provision in community learning is good.

4. **Achievement and standards in community learning are good.** Learners make substantial gains in confidence and learn useful and relevant skills. **Retention rates are very good at 95 per cent.** The quality of provision is also good. The council is very successful in using its community learning projects to recruit and develop learners who are new to adult learning. The projects provide a very good range of interesting courses to meet learners' needs. Support and guidance are good. In particular, learners receive good personal support and useful guidance to help them identify opportunities for further learning and development. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although tutors use a good range of learning activities and resources, some do not use enough variety of strategies to extend learning.

5. The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process. The council gives a high priority to the self-assessment process in subcontracts and partnership plans, and it provides good training and support for providers to help them provide relevant evidence. The council has identified that the quality and usefulness of the information received from the community learning providers for the 2005-06 report was not always good enough. It has recently made appropriate changes to the forms it uses to collect this evidence. The council is particularly self-critical in its summary of the provision against each of the questions in the Common Inspection Framework, and uses a wide range of evidence, including data on enrolments, learners' profiles, retention and attendance rates, and the views of learners and partners. Some of the judgements in the 2005-06 report were not sufficiently succinct and the report on equality of opportunity was not sufficiently evaluative.

6. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements. At the reinspection in 2003, the council had made significant improvements to resolve the weaknesses identified at the 2002 inspection. It has continued to build on these improvements. In particular, the adult and community learning team now implements the council's quality improvement framework effectively and uses data well to manage and monitor all aspects of its provision. The council continues to review and improve its procedures for managing and monitoring its subcontracted provision. Managers have identified the need to measure and record learners' achievements, and although this has been slow in development, recent monitoring has shown that more teaching staff are using the specified system. Action plans are used well to monitor achievement against standards agreed for key processes such as information, advice and guidance, and health and safety, but they do not identify sufficiently how agreed action will improve the quality of provision.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL:

- maintain and further develop the good procedures for monitoring and improving the provision including the teaching and learning
- continue to build on and extend partnership working, notably the capacity building of subcontractors
- be more critical and evaluative of all aspects of equality of opportunity
- ensure that procedures for assessing and recording learners' progress and achievements are implemented consistently and effectively
- increase the extent to which subject-specialist expertise is used for quality improvement

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

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

| Preparation for life and work | | 2 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Contributory areas: | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
| <i>Community learning</i> | | 2 |
| Adult and community learning | 116 | 2 |

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The council was first inspected by the ALI in October 2002, and was reinspected in December 2003. In January 2007, the ALI inspected and graded the community learning provision that was subcontracted to providers who were not inspected in their own right. Inspectors also reported on the leadership and management of the council's adult and community learning provision, including the council's procedures for managing and monitoring all the subcontracted provision.

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of inspectors | 3 |
| Number of inspection days | 16 |
| Number of learners interviewed | 31 |
| Number of staff interviewed | 11 |
| Number of subcontractors interviewed | 35 |
| Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited | 10 |
| Number of partners/external agencies interviewed | 15 |
| Number of visits | 2 |

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very clearly focused strategic direction for adult and community learning
- good partnership working to tackle social exclusion
- good management and monitoring of subcontractors
- good analysis and use of data
- good use of quality framework for continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- slow implementation of processes to measure learners' achievements
- insufficiently thorough monitoring of teaching and learning
- insufficient evaluation of equality of opportunity

Preparation for life and work

Community learning

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and skills
- very good retention rates
- successful recruitment and development of learners new to adult and community learning
- good support for learners
- particularly effective and supportive management of community projects

Weaknesses

- insufficient variety of teaching strategies to extend learning
- insufficient sharing of good practice among tutors

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL:

- learning useful skills
- 'sharing experiences with others and not being on your own'
- learning in familiar surroundings
- community learning courses that are free - 'I'm not on benefits but I couldn't afford to pay'
- the opportunity to learn close to home
- the childcare facilities - 'we couldn't come without it and our younger children are learning too'
- tutors who go out of their way to help them
- 'learning that makes me feel part of the community'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of detail in pre-course information
- the size of the rooms used for courses
- the number of courses available
- guides or booklets to help them remember what they have learnt

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- very clearly focused strategic direction for adult and community learning
- good partnership working to tackle social exclusion
- good management and monitoring of subcontractors
- good analysis and use of data
- good use of quality framework for continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- slow implementation of processes to measure learners' achievements
- insufficiently thorough monitoring of teaching and learning
- insufficient evaluation of equality of opportunity

8. The council's adult and community learning provision is clearly based on the very clear set of strategic priorities the council sets for all its work. For example, the community and corporate plans emphasise the need to encourage partnership work and to tackle all forms of social exclusion. The panel of internal and external partners makes good use of these objectives when selecting projects for the community learning provision. Although the projects are short term, the panel also places a strong emphasis on the need to focus on the sustainability of the proposed work. Similarly, the adult and community learning team are good advocates for the plans of the children and young people directorate and the education service. In particular, staff recognise the relevance of the Every Child Matters agenda for families and vulnerable adults, and promotes the outcomes effectively in its adult and community learning provision. The council has also worked well with Newbury College, its main subcontractor, to develop shared strategic vision and aims. The design of the offer of personal and community development programme is increasingly focused on meeting the needs of people living in isolated rural areas, promoting independence for older people and people with disabilities, and developing outreach provision for communities.

9. The council continues to develop effective partnerships to tackle social inclusion. In particular, good links are developed through the children and young people directorate. For example, close liaison with the developing extended schools services and the children's centres are used well to identify and reach groups of learners new to adult and community learning. This work also involves effective sharing of resources and expertise with a wide range of other council services, such as libraries, social services and health professionals. The council also provides community and voluntary organisations with very good support to develop new provision. The bidding process for community learning projects is managed very well. The council is prepared to venture into new areas of work and adopts a flexible approach when agreeing the structure of each programme, but it does not allow this flexibility to compromise the high standards it sets for each project. Although the council has met most of its recruitment targets, it has identified that the partnership work needs to develop further its needs analysis for adult learning and its

marketing strategy.

10. The council manages its subcontracted provision very effectively. This is a significant part of the work of the adult and community learning team and has continued to improve since the previous inspection. The main management tools, a service level agreement for the more established providers and a partnership plan and letter for providers of projects, provide clear and appropriate guidance without being too imposing. The council implements its strategy for inducting providers, planning delivery and reviewing progress effectively. Providers have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as well as the support they can expect from the council. Targets for recruitment and retention are realistic. Progress against the agreements is reviewed thoroughly. The council has developed a good working relationship with Newbury College and provides good leadership in agreeing the curriculum and the detail in the service level agreement. Communications have also improved, with shared clarity and acceptance of roles and responsibilities. For example, an appropriate approach has been agreed to maintain and improve health and safety procedures for classes in community venues, as well as on the college's main sites. The council and the college are also working well to resolve some of the remaining concerns, such as the proportion of class closures, the use of systems for recording achievement, the layout of classrooms, and attendance rates on some courses.

11. The council uses data well to manage and monitor its provision. Staff have developed good expertise in developing and managing its management information systems. The council collects comprehensive data from its subcontractors and follows thorough procedures for checking the validity of this information. Staff use this information very well to monitor progress against agreed targets. Financial management is sound. The payment of subcontractors is managed well. The staged process is fair and takes into account the needs of individual providers. For example, the system provides appropriate advance payment for some new providers that need initial financial support to help them set up new provision. Records of all financial transactions are recorded meticulously and meet the requirements of external audits.

12. The council provides good support for the professional development of its staff. The adult and community learning team receive good training and support. The procedures for monitoring the performance of staff are thorough and are used well to identify further development needs. Staff training is managed well and involves a wide range of approaches that include job shadowing and mentoring schemes in addition to formal courses. Although the council offers a good range of training and support for its subcontractors' staff, it has identified that attendance at such training is poor, with as few as one in five tutors attending some events in 2005-06. However, the managers have agreed new contracts for 2006-07 which include a commitment for tutors to attend training. The council does not have a written strategy for providing literacy, numeracy and language support, but staff are currently working with the college to agree guidelines and a policy to reinforce training already provided to tutors.

13. The council has identified the slow implementation of processes to measure learners' achievements. In 2005-06, staff carried out extensive training with managers and tutors on agreed procedures for identifying and recording learning goals and measuring learners' progress towards achieving them, but the systems were not used effectively. The adult and community learning team is continuing its training programme this year. A recent audit of programmes subcontracted to the college has shown that 91 per cent of the

sampled records included either individual or group learning goals. This is a significant improvement on the previous audits, but it is too early to tell the appropriateness of these learning goals or the effectiveness of procedures to identify and record learners' progress.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

14. The council is successful in its work to promote social inclusion. It continues to develop its provision well to meet the needs of specific target groups, as well as those of learners who are socially and economically disadvantaged and are new to adult learning. The adult and community learning team provides constructive advice and works well with partners and providers to gain a good understanding of the diverse needs of learners. The broad range of specific groups of learners includes gypsy and traveller communities, learners with mental health difficulties, and families living in isolated rural areas. The council's staff has effective arrangements for providing learners with a good range of additional support. They liaise well with the subcontractors' staff to provide crèche facilities, transport, a vast range of adaptive equipment, as well as specialist advice from external agencies when appropriate. Much of the work on many community and family learning programmes involves innovative use of technology to motivate learners, increase their confidence and develop their skills.

15. Access to learning facilities is good. The council has made good use of capital funding and other grants to improve access to its adult and community learning provision, especially for people with restricted mobility. Work on providers' premises includes inserting ramps, widening doorways, installing lighting, and improving the flooring. The council has also installed a moving platform to enable easy access to the adapted bus it uses to provide advice, guidance and learning sessions throughout the district.

16. The council has appropriate equal opportunities policies, with a particularly good focus on supporting people with disabilities. The range of action plans and support groups to implement council policy are satisfactory and include appropriate plans to meet the council's requirements against the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. However, the council has identified a need for better management of the implementation of its council-wide policies for equal opportunities and is currently assessing the equal opportunities practices in each of its unit services. The council-wide equal opportunities policy has been adapted appropriately for adult and community learning and is available to providers and learners. The council uses the equal opportunities data well to gain an overview of learners' profiles and backgrounds and to monitor progress against targets for recruiting learners from identified target groups. Many of these targets were met or exceeded in 2005-06.

17. The council does not evaluate sufficiently its promotion of equality of opportunity. In particular, its appraisal of equal opportunities in the self-assessment report is not sufficiently evaluative. It contains too few judgements on how well the service meets the objectives in the council's equal opportunities policy and the policy adapted for adult and community learning. Integration of equality of opportunity in the curriculum is still not evaluated sufficiently through observations or the monitoring of paperwork and systems. Tutors do not receive sufficient feedback on how well they promote equality and diversity in learning sessions. The effectiveness of equal opportunities training for the council's staff and subcontracted staff is not evaluated sufficiently. Some aspects of the adult and community learning provision still does not incorporate a sufficiently broad approach to creating multicultural learning opportunities and challenging stereotypes. The evaluation

of equal opportunities in the toolkit for providers is used well to raise awareness of their implementation of equal opportunities, but the process does not probe sufficiently into effectiveness of some of the providers' actions to promote equality and diversity.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

18. The council promotes quality improvement effectively in all its work in adult and community learning. Staff make good use of the council's quality improvement framework to set and maintain high standards in all aspects of the provision. The framework includes a realistic and comprehensive cycle of reviews of contracts and overall evaluation of the provision. The council monitors most aspects of the provision thoroughly. Comprehensive and frequent reviews carried out between the council and its subcontractors are used well to monitor the provision against the wide range of clearly defined standards and appropriate criteria. This process includes good use of data to monitor progress towards achieving targets for learner enrolments, retention and completion rates, and widening participation by hard-to-reach or under-represented groups. In addition, the council has thorough procedures for monitoring the quality of all the key documents and learning processes. An external consultant uses an appropriate sample of programme documents completed by Newbury College to carry out an effective review of enrolment forms, schemes of work, lesson plans, individual and group learning plans and progress review records. Staff from the college and the council use the detailed reports and realistic recommendations well to agree appropriate action plans. The adult and community learning team carries out a similar process to monitor the community learning provision. The quality improvement framework also includes a wide range of effective methods for consulting with learners and partners. Staff use the information well to evaluate and improve the provision. Recent improvements include changes to the evaluation forms used for learners and changes to the practical arrangements, such as the times and venues of classes.

19. The council facilitates good opportunities for providers and other partners to share good practice in setting up courses and providing programmes that meet learners' diverse needs. In particular, the council promotes multi-agency projects and networking effectively, and uses meetings, newsletters and information and communications technology (ICT) well to exchange views and share ideas among a wide range of partners. However, systems for sharing good practice among tutors are still not developed sufficiently. For example, too many college tutors have been slow to implement new systems, and tutors teaching on community learning projects do not have sufficient opportunities to share ideas on how to assess and record learners' progress.

20. The self-assessment and reporting process is satisfactory. This cycle for quality improvement provides an effective basis for the council's self-assessment process. The process is appropriately inclusive and draws on a wide range of sources such as subcontractors' self-assessment reports, data, learners' views and external reports. Although the council adopts a self-critical approach to self-assessment, some of the judgements in the 2005-06 report are not sufficiently clear.

21. The council has identified that it does not monitor the quality of teaching and learning thoroughly enough. Action to improve this process has included agreeing protocols for the council's staff to observe subcontracted provision, and the use of external consultants to evaluate the process and provide training for all observers, including subcontracted and council staff. However, it is too early to evaluate the effect of this work. Currently,

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although the system allows new tutors and those needing specific support or development to be observed more frequently, too many tutors are only observed once every two years. Many learning sessions are not observed by subject specialists and tutors do not receive sufficient feedback on the technical aspects of their teaching that relate to their subject area or the context of the programme. Many records of observed learning sessions do not provide an adequate or useful summary of the strengths or weaknesses of the session. Some tutors receive insufficient written feedback on how the sessions could be improved.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Preparation for life and work

Grade 2

| Contributory areas: | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Community learning | | 2 |
| Adult and community learning | 116 | 2 |

22. The council has direct responsibility for the teaching of one of its community learning projects, which involves taking laptop computers to community venues to develop learners' skills in using computers. All other provision is allocated to subcontractors who are required to bid for funds to run their projects. The projects that come into scope for this inspection account for approximately 92 per cent of the council's current community learning provision, and are primarily delivered by voluntary and community organisations and public sector services. The council's community learning provision is designed to meet the needs of specific groups of learners, such as gypsy and traveller communities, older people attending residential homes and day centres, people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and people who live in remote parts of the district or who have few formal qualifications. Many of the courses are based on the development of specific skills or activities, such as ICT, independent living, anger management and creative arts. The council's community learning provision also includes additional family learning projects intended to complement the council's main family learning provision, which is managed by Newbury College. Community learning courses vary in length from short taster sessions to courses that last for a full year, but most run for between three and 10 weeks. Most provision is run during the daytime. Two members of the council's staff are responsible for managing the community learning provision. Since September 2006, 116 learners have enrolled on 21 community learning courses which are part of 12 different projects. Just over 80 per cent of learners on these courses are women, 20 per cent have a learning difficulty or disability, and 13 are aged over 60. Sixteen per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups. In 2005-06, 608 learners made 796 enrolments on community learning courses. This represented 18 per cent of all the council's adult and community learners that year.

Community learning

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and skills
- very good retention rates
- successful recruitment and development of learners new to adult and community learning
- good support for learners
- particularly effective and supportive management of community projects

Weaknesses

- insufficient variety of teaching strategies to extend learning

- insufficient sharing of good practice among tutors

Achievement and standards

23. Learners on the council's community learning programmes develop their confidence and skills well. In particular, those who have not participated in learning for a considerable time increase their self-esteem and make substantial gains in confidence. They engage effectively in group learning activities and make useful and interesting contributions to discussions. Many learners express their delight at their ability to put their opinions across confidently in formal learning settings. They describe the significant effect on their lives of developing confidence and learning new skills. For example, in family learning, parents and carers learn about the value of play and are more able and confident to support their children's development and deal with difficult behaviour. Some parents adopt healthier diets for their families. Learners who have complex learning disabilities use their knowledge of food hygiene well and achieve good standards of safe working practices in an authentic café setting. Many learners progress to further learning, volunteering and employment.

24. Retention rates are very good and have remained at over 95 per cent in the past three years. This is a significant strength in provision that specifically targets less confident learners who are often reluctant to participate in adult learning. Most of the courses take place over three to nine weeks and some run for 14 weeks. However, attendance is poor on a few courses. The council is aware of this weakness but has not researched sufficiently the reasons for it in order to develop strategies for improvement.

The quality of provision

25. The council is very successful in recruiting and developing learners who are new to adult learning. It uses the bidding process very effectively to select community learning courses that offer a wide range of subjects to attract learners. These courses provide interesting and motivating contexts for learning. Many learners have experienced significant personal, economic and social disadvantage and join in community learning activities for the first time. For example, an arts project that took place earlier this year provided stimulating opportunities for parents and children to learn new skills together including dance, drama, textiles and sculpture. Similarly, a project based at one of the council's day centres provided very good experiences of working with textiles and theatrical costume making for adults with learning disabilities. The council uses its community learning fund very effectively to enable specialist organisations and public service departments to develop relevant courses to meet the needs of specific groups of learners. For example, last year's programme included an anger management course set up in partnership with health services that successfully recruited men who were at risk of committing violent crime. One of the projects currently running is for adults recovering from substance misuse. The council also considers the location of its provision very carefully. Courses take place in a good range of community settings that learners are familiar with or can reach easily. In 2005-06, its community learning provision took place 38 venues, such as travellers' sites, family centres and rural schools and village halls.

26. Learners on community learning programmes receive good support. Project managers, tutors and key workers are very aware of learners' particular needs and respond sensitively to provide very good personal support. Learners particularly value the support they receive from staff to help them increase their confidence. The council's staff

work well with the subcontractors to help reduce any barriers to learning that potential learners may face. Additional support, that is critical in helping learners attend the provision and stay on the programmes, includes childcare facilities and special arrangements for transport. Many courses include additional tutors and support staff who provide good opportunities for individual support during learning sessions. However, the council does not give providers clear enough advice on systems for identifying learners' additional support needs in literacy, numeracy or language skills. Most learners receive good information and advice. Learners on all programmes receive at least one information and advice session from qualified information and advice staff to identify opportunities for further learning. Some learners also make good use of the individual advice sessions that are available to all participants. However, learners on some family learning courses do not receive sufficiently detailed pre-course information.

27. Resources are satisfactory. Most projects provide an appropriate range of learning materials and practical equipment. The laptop computers used for the council's computing course provide particularly good facilities for learners to develop their understanding of ICT, including the use of the internet. Most of the computing equipment on the other projects is satisfactory. Resources for parents and children in most family learning courses are good. However, the classrooms at some centres are cramped and do not provide a suitable space for learning.

28. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most tutors use a good range of learning activities and resources to present and practise new learning. For example, in an introductory ICT class, the tutor used the interactive whiteboard well to demonstrate tasks and introduce learners to computers. Some tutors reinforce learning well through relevant activities, and successfully encourage learners to share their knowledge, skills and ideas. However, in many sessions, tutors do not use sufficient variety of strategies to extend learning. They do not give learners enough help to explore the different approaches and background information involved in completing a task or developing a skill, such as decoding long words or understanding the use of rhyme to develop their children's reading. Many tutors assess learners' preferred learning styles and individual needs when they join a programme, but they do not use this information sufficiently to plan an appropriate range of learning activities.

Leadership and management

29. The management of community projects is particularly effective and supportive. The council sets a very clear strategy for the funding of community learning projects through its community education fund. The panel appointed to scrutinise the bids and allocate funds to selected projects use the council's strategic priorities well to guide its decisions. Providers receive very good information on the rigorous quality standards they are required to meet. The adult and community learning managers use the bidding process very effectively to build the capacity of providers who are not allocated funds. They provide constructive and realistic advice to help them explore the potential of their proposals and identify the most appropriate next step for them to continue their work. Similarly, managers provide good support to the selected providers, particularly to organisations that are new to working in government-funded adult and community learning. They monitor the progress of each project very closely. They use feedback on the funding bids, visits, meetings, training events and a comprehensive and useful toolkit very effectively to help the providers' staff develop their projects so that they meet the stated aims as well as the high standards for quality set by the council. Organisations

value the flexible and responsive support they receive, and develop their skills in managing learning projects well.

30. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The council is particularly successful at targeting provision to create learning opportunities for disadvantaged groups of learners. Some projects, such as the provision for gypsy and traveller communities, are particularly sensitive in identifying and meeting learners' cultural needs. However, some projects do not promote equality and diversity sufficiently in learning sessions. Learning activities are not set in sufficiently diverse cultural contexts and learners are not given enough opportunities to challenge any pre-conceived or stereotypical views they may have.

31. Many of the council's arrangements for quality improvement are good. In particular, staff use the quality improvement framework well to evaluate the community learning provision and make appropriate changes to systems and procedures. For example, staff identified that some of the providers' contributions to the self-assessment process were not sufficiently detailed. They have recently made appropriate revisions to the system they require providers to follow. The self-assessment process used in 2005-06 is satisfactory. Many of the strengths identified in the report match those identified by inspectors, but the report does not include clear judgements about the weaknesses in the service and what improvements are required. The observation of the teaching and learning scheme is not used well enough to identify good practice or tutors' development needs. Arrangements for tutors and other staff working on community learning projects to share good practice are not implemented effectively. Tutors and providers' staff do not have sufficient opportunities to work together to develop their teaching skills and to share ideas.

