

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Nottingham City Council Family
Learning Service
Date of visit: 12 June 2007

Context

The monitoring visit follows the reinspection in June 2006 at which Nottingham City Council Adult and Community Learning Service was graded as satisfactory for leadership and management and its arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity. The family learning provision was judged to be good. Family learning is now managed through Nottingham City Council's Alternative Provision Service within the Children's Service Directorate. All of the provision is subcontracted and much is focused on families whose children are experiencing low levels of educational attainment. In 2005-06 the delivery of provision was subcontracted to 11 organisations. During this period, learning opportunities were provided to 748 individuals through the provision of 96 programmes. Nottingham City Council is responsible for the seventh most deprived area in England with 13 out of the 20 city wards in the top 10% of the most deprived wards in England. Some 34% of the city's adult population have literacy and numeracy skills below level 1 and the wards in the north and west of the city have the third lowest level 2 educational attainment rate in England. Some 19% of the city's population and 35% of its school population are from minority ethnic groups. Domestic violence makes up 25% of reported violent crime.

A family learning manager appointed in July 2005 provides leadership and management to the provision. The recent appointment of a qualified and experienced development worker supports the work of the manager.

Currently 11 organisations are contracted for family learning provision. Since August 2006, 616 enrolments have been recorded on 76 family learning programmes.

Achievement and standards

<p>At the previous inspection, learners' achievement of their goals and aspirations was good. However, many activities learners take part in were not recorded. What improvements have been made to record all achievement?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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At the previous inspection learners' achievement of their goals and aspirations was good. This strength has been maintained. Learners speak highly of how they develop awareness of parenting, increase their confidence and gain work-related skills. They are able to use these skills to support their children's educational needs at home and as classroom helpers in schools. Some learners have been appointed as school governors. Parental involvement co-ordinators have recognised the increasing number of requests for references as learners progress to volunteer or paid employment. Retention and achievement rates for 2005-06 for accredited and non-accredited short courses are 96% and 83% respectively. For 2006-07, in-year retention and achievement rates are 73% and 69% respectively with 20% of learners still in learning and further courses and enrolments to be arranged. Significant progress has been made in the introduction and management of the recording of learners' performance data for all accredited and non-accredited provision. The extensive range of well-presented and appropriately evaluated data provides managers, staff and subcontracting organisations with accurate information on the success of their courses and programmes and identifies issues that are dealt with effectively. It is clearly evident that use of this data is made to develop the provision to meet the needs and aspirations of learners. Clear progression routes are available that build on previous attainment and learners have access to a range of additional qualifications. However, not all learner activity is recognised and recorded. The service has further plans to introduce a standardised document for the collection of learners' achievement of their personal and programme objectives.

The quality of the provision

<p>Are challenging and achievable targets set and performance monitored for individual learners?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The provider has made reasonable progress in its use of target-setting in individual learning plans. Learners are set appropriate and meaningful literacy and numeracy targets which challenge them and help them to achieve. Standardised individual learning plans are now in place but they have only been introduced recently and are not used effectively by all subcontractors across the service. Initial assessment and recording of learners' progress have improved since the reinspection. However, the paperwork for recording learners' progress and achievement is also quite new and not used by all subcontractors across the service. Documents for recognising and recording progress and achievement are not standardised and subcontractors use a range of paperwork to record learners' entry points and their subsequent

achievement of course and personal objectives. The provider has identified this and has made training in recognising and recording progress and achievement mandatory for all tutors. Documents have recently been standardised and are planned to be introduced.

Leadership and management

Does the provider give strong strategic direction and build relationships with external agencies?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in developing the strategic direction of the service, using the previous inspection report as a starting point. The provider recognised that greater staffing capacity was required to implement a clear focus on strategic planning. A suitably qualified and experienced development worker has been appointed who works closely with the family learning service manager. The focus of the provision is now on family and parental learning and on the continual improvement of the quality of the programmes offered. The family learning strategy is linked to the local authority's Community Strategy for Nottingham, the Children and Young People's plan and the Corporate Plan. Learner numbers have reduced, the number of subcontractors delivering the provision is significantly less and longer courses have been introduced. The provider has invested in new staff and recently introduced an information system to record accurately learners' performance. This aids identification, action-planning and capacity to develop the service further. Well-established quality group meetings and curriculum groups provide a forum for discussing the future development of the service. Extensive consultation with parents, carers, women from local refuges and non-English speakers helps form the strategic direction of the service. Strong links have been developed with children's centres, advisory services, a local prison and the extended schools team to provide a greater understanding and awareness of family and parental learning and to develop family learning programmes. The family learning manager provides information to the parenting strategy meetings and there is increased contact with heads of schools and with education improvement partnerships. The service has been successful in acquiring a significant amount of funding to increase the work with targeted priority groups. New partnerships have been developed and are involved in the provision of programmes to hard to reach and traditionally under-represented groups of learners.

How well does the provider set targets, monitor and evaluate the work of subcontracting providers?	Reasonable progress
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The service has made reasonable progress in monitoring and verifying the work of subcontracting agencies and in setting them challenging targets. A recently appointed development worker carries out regular visits to subcontractors to monitor the quality of all aspects of provision. Though several visits have been completed, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this monitoring process. Processes for ensuring that subcontractors meet rigorous quality improvement targets are now more robust. However, this process is relatively recent and it is too early to assess its effectiveness. The contract review process makes use of a range of performance

indicators to establish the extent to which subcontractors are meeting the service's expectations. Good use is made of this process to determine whether to renew a subcontractor's contract. The family learning manager provides effective support and guidance for subcontractors' staff, including training events which are well attended by subcontractors' staff. The family learning quality group is now established and effectively monitors the family learning quality improvement cycle. The curriculum group, which consists of managers from each of the subcontractors, meets regularly to co-ordinate the curriculum offer and to avoid duplication of provision. It has been effective in sharing good practice and in dealing with issues raised by Nottingham City Council's family learning quality group. It also considers the three-year development plan and contributes to the self-assessment process.

<p>At the previous inspection, progress was judged to be slow in implementing quality improvement activities. What progress has been made in ensuring all aspects of the provision are quality assured?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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Significant progress has been made in implementing quality improvement activities. Observations of teaching and learning are now better established. Tutors are observed at least once a year and they receive appropriate feedback on how they can improve their performance. The tutor observation group monitors actions arising from the observation of teaching and learning and identifies common themes so that they can be dealt with effectively. Observation reports of tutors delivering family learning classes at the college are shared with the service. The service also uses information from its teaching and learning observations of commonly used subcontractors to provide evidence of the quality of the provision. It has decided not to renew the contract of one subcontractor who had been identified as responsible for particularly poor quality of teaching. Feedback from learners is obtained at the end of each course. The results are summarised and a brief report produced which identifies key themes. There are appropriate action plans to ensure that actions identified as a result of this process are completed to benefit learners. The management information system continues to be very effective in producing regular reports for managers. Data on learner enrolments, retention and achievement is broken down by subcontractor, ward, ethnicity, gender and a range of other criteria. Managers make good use of this information during the contract review process to identify areas of particularly good or poor performance. Subcontractors who do not meet Nottingham City Council's targets are not offered new contracts.

<p>How effective are the self-assessment and development planning processes in bringing about improvement to the provision?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of the self-assessment and development planning process. The self-assessment process benefits from its inclusiveness in the use of information collected from subcontractors. The service provides subcontractors with current data from the management information

system to aid the development of accurate and informative mini self-assessment reports. Additionally, information is discussed through the curriculum and quality group meetings. Subcontractors value the process and find it useful in identifying the progress they are making and clearly recognise their input in the final self-assessment report that is sent to them. Information is also provided from the results of the teaching and learning observations conducted by the provider and also from Nottinghamshire County Council's adult and community learning service. The development plan is integrated with the overall City Council Development Plan and forms part of the collective improvement strategy. However, the strategic connection with other advisory and support services is not fully explored in the self-assessment report. It is planned that, in future, strategic partners will be fully involved in the process. Limited use is made of learners' feedback in developing the self-assessment report and development plan. The service has plans to introduce focus groups to gather learners' perceptions of their programmes and achievements. The post-inspection action plan is a well-presented document that clearly sets out the actions, criteria for success, outcomes, responsibilities, timescales and evaluation. This is a well-used and updated document that clearly indicates the progress made in dealing with the issues identified at the previous inspection and additional actions that the service has identified to develop its provision further.