

Swindon Borough Council

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Community learning
- Family learning

Description of the provider

1. Swindon Borough Council (SBC) is a unitary authority in the South West of England. Adult and community learning is mainly organised and managed through a learning and engagement team (LET) located in the community directorate, which is part of adult social care and housing group directorate of SBC. Community learning is mostly offered through subcontracts with the voluntary sector, independent providers and New College and Swindon College of Further Education. Currently 125 learners are on courses in wider family learning managed within the LET and teaching staff are mostly employed directly. Currently 48 learners are taking family learning courses managed by the children's services directorate and only offered through subcontracting arrangements with New College and Swindon College of Further Education.
2. SBC received an allocation from Wiltshire and Swindon LSC for adult and community provision as well as additional funding for neighbourhood learning in deprived communities (NLDC).
3. Currently, most learners are female and nearly 30% are aged between 45-65. In 2006/07, 54.3% pupils in Swindon achieved 5+ GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C compared with 62% for England as a whole. At 4.8%, Swindon had the third highest minority ethnic population of unitary and district councils in the region in 2008.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject areas

Community learning	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Family learning	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. Overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Achievements and standards are good. Learners achieve good skills and increased confidence. The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. Provision is good in family learning and satisfactory in community learning. The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory. Some aspects of assessment are unsatisfactory. For example, assessment for literacy language and numeracy needs for learners on First Steps provision and the use of recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) on community learning provision. The provision is good at meeting the needs and interests of learners. Overall support is satisfactory. Leadership and management and equality of opportunity are also satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. SBC has demonstrated that it has satisfactory capacity to make further improvements. It has made satisfactory progress to rectify most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. SBC has strengthened its partnership arrangements and increased its subcontracting activity. It has improved the use of management information systems and now receives regular reports from subcontractors on recruitment and enrolment trends. SBC has improved arrangements for the monitoring of subcontractors, through clearer contracting requirements, and has implemented new systems for the observation of teaching and learning. However, SBC acknowledges that further progress in these areas has been slow with staff changes and unfilled vacancies.
6. The self-assessment process is insufficiently thorough and evaluative. The process does not sufficiently include the views of partners and learners. The self-assessment report does not evaluate the quality of provision and is overly descriptive. The plan focuses too much on the volume of activity to be undertaken rather than the quality of the outcomes. The adult learning and business plans contain clearly defined tasks and targets with close links to wider council strategies.

Key strengths

- Good development of learners' skills
- Good strategic direction to promote sustainable learning in the community
- Strong and successful partnerships to promote neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion

Key areas for improvement

- Quality of teaching and learning
- Assessment processes
- Quality improvement arrangements
- Self-assessment process

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good. Although SBC did not specifically grade this aspect this broadly matches the information in the self-assessment report. Overall success rates on accredited courses are satisfactory. Retention rates on all non-accredited provision are at least satisfactory. Most learners, and particularly those who have not gained qualifications or engaged in learning beyond school, have acquired good skills and increased confidence. They use these skills well to help their families and children. Many learners progress from First Steps provision onto mainstream courses.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Although SBC did not specifically grade this aspect it broadly matches the information in the self-assessment report. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Learners participate well and have a deep appreciation of their learning. Tutors develop good working relationships with learners. In weaker learning sessions, tutors do not always use a sufficient range of activities to challenge more able learners. Some tutors spend too much time talking at learners rather than engaging them in learning activities. Resources are satisfactory overall. However, the way some classes are organised in venues where clubs are held at the same time in the same room is inappropriate.
9. Tutors' use of RARPA processes is not well developed. Staff have received relevant training but few tutors use this well, particularly in community learning. In wider family learning tutors and learners do not record sufficient evaluative comments on learning.
10. SBC is good at developing courses and the curriculum to meet learners' needs. Working partnerships are effective. Good operational strategies are in place to effectively develop the provision. SBC employs staff to work as learning ambassadors. They work very productively with neighbourhood learning groups to identify and encourage local demand for learning.
11. Guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Tutors and staff provide effective support for learners during learning sessions. SBC has an appropriate range of adaptive and specialist equipment. Assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs is not routinely carried out, and not at all on First Steps provision, despite SBC's stated intention to do so.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: satisfactory: Grade 3

12. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Strategic direction to promote sustainable learning in the community is good. The director of community and her managers demonstrate a strong commitment to neighbourhood renewal and regeneration. SBC has restructured the management of its provision and created a learning and engagement team to co-ordinate more closely the commissioning, contracting and delivery of its courses. It has broadened considerably its work with the voluntary and community sectors and has strengthened the role of its community development and support officers to include the identification of learning opportunities. SBC has expanded substantially its subcontracted provision to enable more local providers to propose and provide courses that respond well to local demand and need. The most recent adult learning plan contributes significantly to many wider borough strategies and local area agreement strands.
13. Partnerships to promote neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion are strong and successful. SBC works very closely with many partners and agencies to provide highly effective courses that target specific groups of learners in regeneration areas to raise their aspirations, enhance their lives and build communities. Good collaboration has enabled SBC and its partners to achieve common aims through the regular sharing of information at learning group meetings. Learning ambassadors demonstrate good local knowledge that they use particularly well to identify courses and engage learners. Partners have benefited from many developmental opportunities including risk assessment, writing funding proposals, RARPA training and the use of integrated learning technologies.
14. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. SBC fulfils its obligations with regards to equalities legislation. It has produced and implemented equality schemes for race, disability and gender. The LET sets targets for the recruitment of learners by specific group and monitors their participation closely. It does not, however, analyse formally learners' achievement by gender, age or ethnicity. It has identified in its self-assessment report the need to increase the participation of males but the quality improvement plan does not contain any actions to raise their recruitment. SBC demonstrates its commitment to equality well through providing assistive and adaptive technology for learners with disabilities and ICT equipment to enhance learning. SBC has successfully removed barriers to learners' participation and attendance in learning through the provision of free facilities such as courses, materials, childcare and transport. SBC has a satisfactory equal opportunities policy statement that it shares with learners through the learner handbook. The promotion of equality of opportunity in learning sessions is satisfactory. Some tutors include wider cultural links in their learning sessions but most have not received sufficient training to develop their understanding and awareness of equality and diversity. The service has not yet reviewed how the content of its courses promotes equality of opportunity.
15. Operational management is satisfactory. Managers, staff and subcontractors clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. SBC has strengthened its management of subcontractors through the introduction of a comprehensive and useful guidance manual for providers. It makes satisfactory use of data to monitor the recruitment of

subcontractors, identify trends and gaps in provision and set targets. SBC acknowledges that data entry is not sufficiently timely, with a slow response to remedy some areas of underperformance.

16. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet government requirements. Satisfactory arrangements are in place for making and monitoring Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks at SBC and with most partners. It has implemented a satisfactory safeguarding policy and procedure. The adult and community learning service has yet to train its staff and partners in the use of this procedure. The promotion of *Every Child Matters* outcomes is satisfactory in family learning.
17. Quality improvement arrangements are insufficiently established. Since the previous inspection, SBC has improved the monitoring of subcontractors. It has implemented clearer quality assurance arrangements and monitors closely each subcontractor's compliance to its quality assurance requirements, but these arrangements do not lead to quality improvement. Subcontractor reviews do not refer sufficiently to the key aspects of the contract. Equality of opportunity, progression and overall quality, for example, are not included in the review. Some reviews lack specific improvement action points and others have action points that remain incomplete. The quality of subcontractors' end of course evaluations varies considerably across the partnership. A few contain much evaluative detail but most contain much data with little analysis or evaluation. The collection and use of learners' evaluations is insufficient to secure quality improvement. Some learners experience difficulty in completing the evaluation questionnaires. Many subcontractors request only learners in attendance at the final learning session complete the evaluation without sufficiently gaining the views of absent learners or those who left early.
18. The procedure for the observation of teaching and learning is insufficiently evaluative and thorough. Since the previous inspection, SBC has implemented a system to observe the quality of learning sessions across the partnership. However, subcontractors' targets for learning session observations concentrate mostly on the quantity of learning sessions to be observed. They do not set targets based on the quality of the learning experience. Observation forms focus mainly on quality assurance and do not provide sufficient evaluation of the impact of teaching on learning. Many subcontractors have not achieved their target for learning session observations. Some subcontractors have included the observation forms of tutors who teach learning sessions that are not adult and community learning classes or the subject that they teach for SBC as part of the quality assurance return. Recent moderation meetings have identified improvements to the current system. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these developments.

What learners like:

- ‘Developing new skills and becoming more confident’
- ‘Very good tutors who make learning fun’
- ‘Meeting new people and enjoying learning’
- Being able to learn and work at their own pace
- Acquiring new skills and ideas to help families – ‘I can help my children with homework’

What learners think could improve:

- Furniture in some venues – ‘too small to sit on and uncomfortable’
- Organisations of classes – ‘having to learn in a room with other people doing other things’
- Number and length of courses
- Course publicity – ‘more and better information about what is going on elsewhere’

Sector subject areas

Community learning

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

19. At the time of inspection, 171 learners attended 23 courses in Swindon and its surrounding villages. Courses include: information and communications technology (ICT); cookery; art and crafts; DIY; stress management; Pilates; massage, and personal development. Programmes are either First Steps provision or are primarily designed to engage communities in learning. Most programmes are non-accredited and provided by subcontractors, including voluntary and not-for-profit organisations, individual trainers, and colleges. Courses take place in centres near to learners' homes. Provision is co-ordinated by an LET manager within the borough council.

Strengths

- Good development of skills and increased confidence
- Good range of courses

Areas for improvement

- No assessment for skills for life on First Steps provision
- Insufficient quality improvement arrangements

Achievement and standards

20. Achievements and standards are good. Learners gain confidence as well as skills they use in everyday life. Many have not participated in learning before and greatly enjoy their courses finding them non-threatening and very useful. Many learners progress to other courses, jobs or mainstream provision. Some learners attend several different courses, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. However, on some courses attendance and punctuality is often poor with only about half the number of learners on the register turning up.

Quality of provision

21. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most tutors plan learning sessions carefully. They manage the time well, and recap at the beginning to remind learners of what was covered at earlier sessions. In all classes, tutors develop excellent working relationships with learners, and learners encourage each other in a supportive atmosphere. In weaker sessions tutors do not always plan well to challenge more able learners. In many classes, there is too much tutor input without any activity for learners, particularly in the first hour of sessions. Resources are generally good, but some of the venues are unsuitable. For example, an ICT course took place in the same room as a lunch club.

22. Assessment is weak. Initial assessment is superficial. Individual learning plans are too general with stated learning goals frequently not measurable. The exception is the two-day personal development programme. In this case, individual learning plans are excellent and learners found the process of setting meaningful goals and planning their progress toward

them inspirational. The organisation's RARPA process is not adequate. It is used only twice during each programme, at mid-point and at the end, although in the classes seen, the mid-point assessment had not been completed. SBC has no system to assess learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. It has a policy of including skills for life assessment in its First Steps courses, but tutors do not adhere to this.

23. The range of courses meets learners' needs well. Learners follow some imaginative and well designed personal development programmes. The provider uses learning ambassadors who work very productively with neighbourhood learning groups to identify and encourage local demand for learning. Managers provide the courses that learning groups say they want or need, and use requests to plan the curriculum in a very responsive way. The range of courses on offer includes therapeutic activities, as well as more conventional programmes such as art, crafts and genealogy. Support for learners is satisfactory. All courses have free crèche facilities. Learners receive information, advice and guidance usually informally from their tutors.

Leadership and management

24. Leadership and management are satisfactory. SBC has successfully refocused its direct provision to deliver mostly First Steps learning as part of initiatives for neighbourhood learning in deprived communities. Learning ambassadors have worked successfully to increase and widen participation. Despite a period when these posts were suspended recent reappointments have been made. The team now has an important role central to the SBC strategy for developing the provision. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.
25. Quality improvement arrangements are insufficient. Managers rely too much on subcontractors' own systems. The provider does not monitor the venues used by subcontractors. Learners and tutors change the times and duration of courses to suit their own needs, without the provider being aware of the changes. SBC has no system to monitor whether policies, such as including skills for life assessments in First Steps courses, are being adhered to, and no procedure if they are not being followed. The process for observation of teaching and learning is not sufficient to assure or raise the quality of teaching and learning, even though most tutors have been assessed. Meetings to collect feedback from learners, which should take place three times a year, have not been held since December 2006. The self-assessment report did not fully identify the findings of inspectors and was insufficiently evaluative.

Family learning

Good: Grade 2

Context

26. Currently 48 learners attend family language, literacy and numeracy (FLLN) courses and 125 learners attend wider family learning (WFL) courses during the day or evening. WFL provision is managed by an LET co-coordinator and FLLN courses are managed by a co-coordinator in the council's children's services department within the borough council. All FLLN provision is subcontracted to either Swindon College or New College.
27. Courses generally comprise five to ten weekly sessions of two hours. Seven courses in WFL have nationally recognized qualifications and classes include: art and craft; ICT; music; dance; healthy eating and lifestyles; citizenship, and capacity building for black and minority ethnic communities.

Strengths

- Good development of learners' skills
- Good teaching and learning
- Good range of courses
- Well-focused family learning plan

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient joint curriculum planning between wider family learning and family learning
- Insufficient implementation of quality improvement arrangements

Achievement and standards

28. Achievements and standards are good. Learners' personal and practical skills are developed well. Learners gain confidence and a positive attitude to learning and their everyday lives through participation in a range of learning activities. They are more able to support their children effectively with their school work. Learners' communication skills improve well and many enrol on other courses.
29. Learners' work is of a high standard and includes good drawing skills, creative design skills in craftwork, accurate weighing and good skills in cookery. Evidence produced in portfolios for qualifications is well organised. Attendance and punctuality are good although class sizes are often small. Success rates on accredited courses are satisfactory at 61% for 2006/07. However, SBC does not sufficiently set or monitor targets for progression.

Quality of provision

30. Teaching and learning are good. Tutors plan courses carefully and learners enjoy developing their skills. Good resources and well designed varied learning materials are used well to support and inspire learners in arts, crafts and cookery learning sessions. Staff use a bank of shared resources very well. *Every Child Matters* themes are used effectively in learning sessions where parents and carers learn about healthy lifestyles and staying safe. However, in many learning sessions tutors set aims and objectives that emphasise the tasks rather than how learners can apply their skills in engaging and working with their own children.
31. Recording of progress and achievement is satisfactory. Photographs, audio and video are used effectively to record learners work. However, neither tutors nor learners make sufficient evaluative comments on learning.
32. The range of courses provided in WFL is good and meets the needs of communities and individual learners well. A wide range of delivery modes such as daytime, weekend, early evening, pre-course taster sessions and Meet and Greet sessions are planned well to suit the needs of parents, carers and community organisations. New learners are inspired and motivated by good development of course content which captures learners' interests well. Tutors use Open College Network accreditation well to provide structure to courses which meets the needs of individual learners well.
33. Productive partnership meetings discuss the development of successful programmes. The needs of geographical communities and communities of interest are well met through the well thought out course proposal system.
34. Support for learners is effective. All courses are free to learners as are essential materials and childcare. Learner support such as travel costs and specialist resources are available on request. Learners attend an initial meeting before they take a course where they gain useful information, carry out initial assessment and gain confidence to come back next week.

Leadership and management

35. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Overall planning of the provision is good. Social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and *Every Child Matters* provide a strong focus for the strategy for wider family learning and family literacy, language and numeracy. The plan promotes citizenship and builds capacity in all family learning programmes. Strong partnership working at both strategic and operational levels ensures sustainability of programmes that meet the needs of local communities. Teaching staff are well supported. The WFL co-ordinator communicates well with all teaching staff through both formal and informal meetings. All venues are visited before the start of each course ensuring good levels of communication and clarity of service level agreements with head tutors and family learning representatives in each organisation.

36. *Every Child Matters* is managed and promoted well through programme planning and staff development events. However, some tutors do not sufficiently plan this into teaching and learning. Safe working practices are promoted effectively in learning sessions and risk assessments are carried out systematically. Joint curriculum planning between the two separately managed programmes of WFL and FLLN is not sufficiently formalised to ensure consistency of approach and coherence of the whole family learning programme. Quarterly family learning meetings do not focus sufficiently on the whole family learning programme. WFL is a standing agenda item focusing on information exchange. However, although data for FLLN is tabled at these meetings, data for WFL is not. Management information is not used sufficiently by managers/coordinators to monitor participation and plan programmes. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. However, strategies are not in place to target participation from under-represented groups such as male learners. Quality assurance arrangements are not sufficiently implemented to be effective in driving forward improvement. Observations of teaching and learning reports do not always identify key areas for improvement. End of course reports are not sufficiently evaluative nor do they inform action planning. Partner organisations are not sufficiently included in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently evaluative and only partly identifies the key findings of the inspection.