

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Wiltshire County Council
Date of visit: 25 September 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in May 2007 of Wiltshire County Council's (WCC) adult and community learning service at which the overall effectiveness of the provision was satisfactory and the provider's capacity to improve was good. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. Leadership and management were good. The provision in family learning was satisfactory.

WCC receives funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide adult and community learning programmes through family learning. WCC offers family literacy, language and numeracy courses and wider family learning programmes. On some courses, parents or carers work alongside children for part of the session. On others, adults work on their own, developing their knowledge and skills. Potential learners are attracted to these programmes through short tasters and family learning workshops. Courses are run across the county in a variety of locations including primary and secondary schools and community centres. Approximately 25% of learners enrol on family learning literacy and numeracy courses.

WCC subcontracts some of its specialist parenting, play and language provision to the Library Service, U-too, the Rural Needs Initiative and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). It also has Train to Gain provision subcontracted from Wiltshire College to train teaching assistants. In August 2008, WCC secured a three-year Train to Gain contract from the LSC to deliver training to over 600 learners in health and social care, education and training, skills for life and business administration.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in raising learners' achievement?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, success rates on national tests for literacy and numeracy were satisfactory and learners on the Train to Gain teaching assistants' course had just started their training. Since then, WCC has made significant progress in raising the achievement of learners on literacy and numeracy and on the teaching assistants' courses. The retention rate for the 23 learners who started the teaching

assistants' course is 100%. At the monitoring visit, almost 80% had achieved the Level 2 qualification. The five learners remaining on programme are making satisfactory progress and are due to complete within the next six months. On family learning literacy and numeracy courses, WCC has continued to set and meet increasingly challenging targets for the proportion of learners from target groups taking national tests in literacy and numeracy. Success rates are now high. In 2007/08, the overall success rate was 83%. The success rate for literacy was 89%. For numeracy, it was 82%. Overall progression to further learning is good. In 2007/08, about 66% of learners on first steps courses took further courses. Almost half the learners on family learning literacy and numeracy courses had attended other courses at WCC. Retention on most family learning programmes remains high.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in the use of individual learning plans and learners' journals to plan learning and to record progress against targets?	Insufficient progress
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At the previous inspection, the use of individual learning plans to plan learning was insufficient with insufficiently clear or challenging learning targets. Learners recorded learning activities and monitored their progress through the use of learner journals. Many journals contained insufficient focus on learning in relation to learners' personal learning goals. Since then, WCC has made insufficient progress. It has reviewed how learning targets are agreed and how tutors monitor learners' progress. It has held training sessions to improve the use of individual learning plans. However, WCC acknowledges that inconsistencies remain in the quality of feedback in learners' journals. WCC has recently introduced new documentation for planning and recording learning that will replace the learners' journals. It has designed the individual learning plans to help learners produce more measurable learning goals with clearer links to initial assessment and appropriate to the length of the course. The individual learning plan enables learners to record learning goals in the form of skills to be acquired and the learning that has taken place. However, the link between the acquisition of the skill and knowledge is unclear. These new individual learning plans do not show how planned learning will meet learners' goals. WCC has yet to use the new individual learning plans with learners.

How much progress has been made in improving the information, advice and guidance arrangements for learners progressing from longer family literacy and numeracy courses?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, specialist information, advice and guidance (IAG) was insufficient for learners who wished to progress from longer family literacy, language and numeracy courses. Since then, WCC has made significant progress. It has appointed an experienced and qualified IAG consultant to raise the profile of IAG

with learners and tutors. All learners now receive a clear and helpful leaflet that identifies potential progression opportunities and the services available. WCC has consulted with learners about IAG in terms of the style and content of arrangements. WCC has organised highly effective training for tutors to raise their awareness of IAG. Courses now include regular input from the IAG consultant. Learners benefit from the availability of individual IAG appointments. IAG resources have increased And now include a good range of computer and paper-based materials to use with learners individually or in groups. The proportion of learners who express higher levels of satisfaction with pre-course information has increased substantially since the previous inspection.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in the development of arrangements to recognise and record progress and achievement (RARPA)?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, although WCC had a policy for RARPA, it was not used sufficiently to record and generate data about learning outcomes on non-accredited provision. Since then, WCC has produced detailed procedures to support its policy and has trained its tutors in the use of RARPA. WCC monitors tutors' use of RARPA through its observation of teaching and learning and through the moderation and validation of learners' achievement at the end of each course. Tutors now regularly record learners' learning goals and their achievements. However, these learning goals are not always measurable or provide sufficient challenge. The links between learners' learning goals and tutors' individual session plans are unclear. Tutors do not routinely change their session plans following the assessment of learners' progress. WCC continues to improve the documentation to support RARPA in response to feedback from learners and tutors. It has developed new documents for the recording of learning goals and progress but, at the time of the visit, WCC had not fully implemented or evaluated these.

How much progress has been made in forging links between the family learning literacy and numeracy provision and the council's community strategy for adult basic skills?	Reasonable progress
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Although the council had recognised the need to improve adult basic skills within its community strategy, at the previous inspection the council's response had been inadequate. It had not produced a skills for life strategy and operational plan. Although the family learning programme provided satisfactory provision in language, literacy and numeracy, it operated in isolation with no wider council strategy. Since then, the council has established a detailed action plan to develop a skills for life strategy for the county that will be implemented fully in September 2009. The action plan takes into account planned local government changes. The plan contains a clear

focus on developing the skills for life of residents and council employees and builds on successful workforce development and community projects already completed by the council. The action plan makes very good use of the skills of the family learning team to develop the key actions for the strategy.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How well do the self-assessment process and post-inspection action or improvement plan contribute to progress in quality improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The well-established self-assessment process remains inclusive and makes good use of feedback from its learners, partners and local schools to identify areas for improvement. The SAR contains much detail derived from observations of teaching and learning, learners' achievement and management data. It provides a largely accurate assessment of the quality of provision. However, the SAR lacks sufficient evaluative judgement especially in the strengths and areas for improvement. The combined self-assessment and post-inspection action plan includes clear and measurable targets to raise the quality of provision. WCC monitors the progress of its own and partners' action plans closely and regularly. Progress against targets is satisfactory overall. WCC correctly recognises that the promotion of equality and diversity through learning activities is insufficient.