

Reading Borough Council, New Directions

Reinspection date

23 January 2009

Reinspection number

330811

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Background information

Reinspection 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 reinspection 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 reinspection

In deciding the scope of the reinspection, inspectors consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorate's reinspection monitoring visits, and data and learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection. Inspectors also 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.

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 reinspection focused on:

- Arts, media and publishing
- Languages, literature and culture
- ESOL
- Literacy and numeracy

Description of the provider

1. New Directions, is part of the Extended Services Portfolio within Reading Borough Council's (RBC) Directorate for Education and Children's Services. The Lifelong Learning Board provides governance. New Directions was formed in July 2007, merging the employment and adult learning services for the Borough. New Directions is funded by Berkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). RBC is also a member of the Berkshire Train to Gain consortium. The restructuring of the service was completed in April 2008. The current head of the service started in July 2008, and most of the subject sector areas have newly appointed managers.
2. New Directions provides adult education in three RBC owned centres, one leased centre and a number of outreach centres in the Borough. In 2007/08, 816 learners enrolled on FE courses and 2,926 on non-accredited courses, with 17 learners on Train to Gain. The main provision includes: ICT for users, arts, media and publishing, languages, literature and culture, preparation for life and work and family learning. Train to Gain is offered at Level 2 for teaching assistants and IT practitioners.
3. At the inspection in 2007, New Directions was found inadequate. The reinspection did not include ICT, which was previously found to be good. Too few courses were running to reinspect family learning, and numbers in Train to Gain continue to be low. Other areas were reinspected. Two grades were agreed for preparation for life and work, ESOL and literacy and numeracy, as these areas are separately managed.
4. Reading is one of the principal regional and commercial centres of the Thames Valley. It is characterised by fewer people over the age of 65 than the national average for England, and a rapidly growing population. Minority ethnic groups account for over 13% of the population, which is above the national average. Unemployment is relatively low. While the town has an image of relative prosperity, one ward is among the 5% most deprived in the country. Learner achievement at key stage 4 is at the national average of 46%.

Summary of grades awarded at previous inspection

Effectiveness of provision	Inadequate: Grade 4
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Inadequate: Grade 4
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Inadequate: Grade 4
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject areas

ICT for users	Good: Grade 2
Arts, media and publishing	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Language, literature and culture	Satisfactory: Grade 3
ESOL	Inadequate: Grade 4
Family learning	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Summary of grades awarded at reinspection

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Inadequate: Grade 4
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

Sector subject areas

Arts, media and publishing	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Languages, literature and culture	Satisfactory: Grade 3
ESOL	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Success rates are satisfactory overall. On accredited courses they have improved significantly at Level 1, although still slightly below national averages. At Level 2 they are around the national average, and on short courses, which includes many of the harder to engage learners, they have improved significantly and are above the national average. Retention rates are high on non-accredited courses. Standards of work are particularly good on visual arts courses.
6. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with examples of innovative project work in visual arts courses, including family learning. Initial assessment has improved in all areas, but the use of individual learning plans (ILPs) continues to be variable, and is weak in ESOL. The use of integrated learning technology (ILT) has improved and resources for teaching are satisfactory overall. Teachers are mostly appropriately qualified. The provision satisfactorily meets the needs of learners. Partnership working to increase social inclusion is good, as New Directions continues to consult with learners to shape its provision and engage non-traditional learners. Support and guidance are satisfactory. New Directions has increased the training for its advice and guidance workers, and offers a range of support services for learners, including crèche provision. A small, but increasing number of learners with disabilities is receiving additional support, with improved arrangements to monitor progress.
7. Leadership and management are inadequate. Many management appointments, including the head of service, are very new, and although the new head is clear what needs doing, not all improvements have had time to impact fully on the provision. Work with local partnerships continues to develop, outcomes are improving and enrolments for the first half of the year have increased. Despite these early improvements, curriculum management is unsatisfactory in literacy and numeracy and ESOL.. The use of management information is not fully effective in any of the areas inspected, and the mechanisms to measure success rates in non-accredited provision are not consistent or thorough.

Capacity to improve
Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. New Directions has demonstrated satisfactory capacity to improve. Overall success rates on accredited provision have improved over the past 3 years to a satisfactory level. Rates of retention across the provision are high. A period of significant re-organisation has led to an organisation that is better structured to identify and implement strategic and routine improvements.
9. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. The self-assessment (SAR) report is insufficiently informative, but the work that leads to this report is more detailed

and helpful. The lower level evaluations have insufficient use of management information, but otherwise have a reasonable range of evidence and good involvement of staff. The process leads to a detailed quality improvement plan that is used well to drive improvements. Learner feedback is used effectively to identify necessary changes, and significant effort is put into using market research to guide adjustments in provision.

10. The effectiveness of steps taken to improve provision since the previous inspection is satisfactory. At the previous inspection, leadership and management, achievement and standards and one area of learning were judged inadequate; at this reinspection only leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. Around two thirds of the key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been satisfactorily dealt with. However, although progress has been made from the previous inspection, aspects of curriculum management remain as areas for improvement.

Key strengths

- Flexible strategic planning
- Effective partnerships to engage non-traditional learners
- Good communication between learners and staff
- Good standards of work in arts, media and publishing courses
- Good development of language and social skills in ESOL and literacy and numeracy

Key areas for improvement

- Attendance and punctuality
- Ineffective use of management information at all levels
- Assessment, monitoring and recording of learners' progress
- Updating on equality of opportunity and safeguarding
- Curriculum management

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

11. Achievement and standards are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection. Overall success rates for accredited provision have increased over three years to a satisfactory level in 2007/08. In that year ICT success rates for around 170 learners were good, but the rates for some 50 literacy and numeracy learners were unsatisfactory. Satisfactory improvements have been made to long and short courses that were previously areas of concern. Train to Gain success rates, for a relatively small number of learners, have been good for the last two years. Timely rates have improved, but remain unsatisfactory. The management of the programme has been revised and the progress of current learners is satisfactory. Information on the achievements of learners by race, gender, age and disability has not been collected to identify trends. Achievement on non-accredited courses is satisfactory, but the processes for formal recognition of success rates are not yet thorough. This is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Rates of retention are high in most areas, but are satisfactory in modern foreign languages.
12. The standard of learners' work is generally satisfactory, with some examples of good development of language skills development in ESOL courses, and high levels of specialist skills and creativity in visual arts.
13. Rates of attendance are low in ESOL. In literacy and numeracy, rates of attendance and punctuality are low.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

14. The quality of provision continues to be satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and grades are broadly in line with the self-assessment, although inspectors found a wider spread across the grades than New Directions. In the teaching of modern foreign languages, tutors use the target language consistently and effectively. In the best teaching of visual arts, tutors encourage learners to use the arts and crafts of other cultures as inspiration for their work. In ESOL and in literacy and numeracy, the tutors' emphasis on the development of speaking and listening helps learners to develop confidence in other aspects of their lives. Common areas for improvement involved the lack of planning and extension activities for the diverse needs of learners in classes where there are wide variations of ability. In ESOL provision, teachers were over-dependent on worksheets that did not match the needs of learners.
15. The planning and assessment of learning remains a key area for development. The use of ILPs is not fully understood by learners in ESOL provision. In modern

foreign languages and arts provision, the processes to plan, assess, record and evaluate non-accredited learning are not yet fully implemented.

16. Teachers are appropriately qualified in all areas apart from ESOL where a high number of teachers have not had sufficient training to meet the work force requirements. Resources are satisfactory, with improvement in the use of information technology, particularly interactive whiteboards. This was an area for development at the previous inspection. Accessibility access is not satisfactory in all centres and action to address this has been slow. The equal opportunities forum has recognised this and has developed an action plan that focuses on improving accessibility.
17. The range of provision meets the needs and interests of learners satisfactorily. The programme offer has been rationalised, with greater emphasis on market research to identify need. New Directions continues satisfactorily to continue to offer courses at different levels and times across the Borough. Following a significant planned reduction in provision in 2007/08, the first semester in 2008/09 shows an increase in numbers compared with the previous year. The partnership work to respond to social inclusion is good. The outreach and Employment Services in New Directions work very effectively with the adult learning service to identify and provide for under-represented learners, and to develop the services in the wards of greatest need. The percentage of learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds has increased, and is above the benchmark of the local area. The increased provision of short taster courses, particularly in ICT, is starting to be effective in enabling learners to be retained and complete a course. Family learning offers flexible 'one-off' courses to enable potential learners to 'test the water'. In arts courses, the enrichment offered by tutors is stimulating for learners. As identified in the self-assessment report, discrete provision for adults with learning difficulties is still being developed to enable learners to progress.
18. Support and guidance are satisfactory. Reception staff have received advice and guidance training, and in most subject areas this is effective. However, in modern foreign languages changes to provision have not been well communicated to learners. Learners benefit from the links with the Employment Services and the advice and welfare support available, including specialist support such as dyslexia. Creche provision is available at three sites. Induction is satisfactory. Learners on outreach courses and accredited provision are interviewed before starting a course. Support for learners with a disability has become more planned, with arrangements to monitor progress. The outcomes for these learners have been recently evaluated, and show that learners receiving support achieve as well as their peers. At the time of inspection, 15 learners were receiving additional support. A good range of assistive and adaptive technology is available. Effective action has been taken to address low retention by learners receiving financial assistance. Volunteers and support workers are well used in many classes. The documentation for learners has improved, and it is available in a range of alternative formats. The information provided for learners and staff makes insufficient reference to safeguarding. The self-assessment report makes no

reference to safeguarding. The complaints process is satisfactory and is used by learners.

Leadership and management

Inadequate: Grade 4

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

19. Leadership and management are inadequate. The process of re-organisation was completed in April 08, and most managers, including the head of service, have been appointed since that time. The new organisation has a sensible structure, with clear responsibilities for routine work and for development. New Direction's role is well recognised in the RBC planning framework and its work is properly reviewed through that process, and by a board which has strong councillor support. Strategic planning is flexible and responsive to the national and local context for adult learning. New Directions makes good use of its own in-house outreach and employment teams, and its wider links. Partnership working within the Borough and across Berkshire is effective in identifying and working with hard to reach learners. Communication throughout all levels of the organisation is effective. The contribution of learners' views in the higher levels of the service is insufficient. This is recognised by managers and changes are being examined.
20. Professional development for staff and tutors is satisfactory. Performance management has improved and is now satisfactory. A training plan is developed following appraisals, interviews, meetings and teaching observations. Staff training required by the national workforce development strategy is being satisfactorily implemented in most areas, though its introduction is late in the ESOL area. Observations of teaching and learning are carried out routinely, and are satisfactorily used to identify individual training needs and improvements. The observations made in 08/09 show an improving picture. Inspectors broadly agreed, but found that the judgements made put too little emphasis on learning, with some consequent over-grading.
21. Management information is not used sufficiently by managers. This was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. The system for recording data has been improved, and managers were given on-line access to management information in September 2008. Managers have had satisfactory training in interrogating the data base. Some are using the information effectively but others are not yet using it as a routine tool for identifying trends and concerns. The most senior managers receive reports at regular intervals showing performance in key areas, but most other managers only receive class lists as a matter of routine; these are of limited use in quality improvement. The information about success rates for 07/08 was still being finalised during the week of inspection.
22. Value for money is satisfactory. Effective use of other RBC resources, and links with partner organisations, allow better support for learning than direct funding might allow. Financial support through the period of reorganisation was good.

Resources are generally satisfactory, with an investment in ILT assisting some good teaching and learning. A developing virtual learning environment is having some positive impact, particularly in ICT.

23. The process leading to the final self-assessment report engages staff at all levels. Regular feedback from learners is well used, however, the process is not fully effective. Learner data, and information on achievement, are not considered fully at the preliminary stage. Headline data is subsequently included in the overall SAR but are not thoroughly examined by subject area staff. The final self-assessment report is a broad summary of performance; the useful detail is in the build up work. The quality improvement plan has clear targets for action. A revised approach means more targets being achieved in generally shorter timescales. Progress has been made in meeting key targets, but not all areas identified for action have had sufficient time for completion.
24. New Directions has identified the importance of skills for life in its management structure, and much of the work within the service as a whole, including the employment and outreach services, focuses on training for learners requiring training in this area. The national skills for life Strategy has not been used effectively in the management of the literacy and numeracy provision inspected.
25. Equality of opportunity is inadequate. The SAR accurately identifies some key areas for development in this area. However, their significance is not adequately reflected in the grade. RBC is working towards the local government equality standards and New Directions has carried out an audit of its progress in meeting these standards. However, New Directions has not responded effectively to the requirements of the most recent race, gender and disability duties as they apply to post 16 education and training. Progress is being made by the New Directions' equal opportunities forum which, for example, organised a staff training event in December. The respect shown for learners, and the practice in classes are satisfactory. Examples of innovative teaching were found in arts classes, and a well established creative writing class for learners with mental health continues to be very successful. Overall, however, the response to the requirements in relation to equalities duties is late, with insufficient focus on the updating of staff and on the monitoring of trends in achievements by different groups of learners. RBC is in the process of checking all staff to make sure they are vetted appropriately in relation to their criminal records, and has plans to meet the expected deadline for this. It has a planned programme of safeguarding training. However, at the time of inspection, only seven New Directions staff had received adequate training in safeguarding. These did not include all of those working with children and learners with disabilities. The procedures for safeguarding learners do not meet current government requirements.
26. Curriculum management continues to be inadequate. In two of the areas inspected, management was found inadequate and management weaknesses are a significant feature of the other two areas inspected. The areas for improvement are mainly identified, and actions taken, but they have not had time for completion.

What learners like:

- 'I am learning not only about the techniques in drawing and painting but also about the history and styles of artists'
- 'I am a beginner and I know I love knitting after only 3 weeks'
- 'friendly teachers who help and explain'
- 'I like it because it's relaxed and I enjoy meeting other people'
- 'I want to get a better job and I think this class will help me'
- 'This course has changed my life'
- 'We learnt a lot in a short time'

What learners think could improve:

- 'More focus on listening and understanding English'
- 'Practise speaking more in classes'
- 'Would like learners to be all at one level instead of mixed groups'
- 'More days and hours for learning'
- 'Need more feedback'
- 'Our fees are too high'

Sector subject areas

Arts, media and publishing

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

27. New Directions offers a range of non-accredited visual arts and crafts courses and two accredited courses in fashion. Classes take place during the day, evening and weekends in two centres across the Borough. Most non-accredited courses are taught in two-hour classes of fifteen weeks' duration, offered in two semesters per year. Some beginners' courses are five weeks in duration. Accredited provision is provided over 35 weeks per year.

28. At the time of inspection, 360 learners attended 40 courses across the Borough. 31 learners are studying on accredited provision. Around 86% are women, 8% are from minority backgrounds and 17% are over the age of 65. A small number of learners with a disability are integrated with these courses. The area is managed by one manager, who supports 34 part-time tutors, one fractional tutor and a part-time pottery technician.

Strengths

- Good development of practical skills
- Good specialist individual guidance and feedback
- Innovative use of projects to explore cultural diversity
- Good range of enrichment activities

Areas for improvement

- Inadequate recording of learner progress and achievement on non-accredited provision
- Poor quality planning
- Insufficient use of data to influence planning
- Poor access to specialist accommodation

Achievement and standards

29. Achievement and standards overall are satisfactory. Learners develop good specialist skills. They take pride in producing finished work and artefacts. Learners enjoy the challenge of experimenting with new techniques and materials. They display confidence and independence in applying new techniques. Fashion learners demonstrate good making and design skills in producing a collection of garments. Pottery students skilfully use techniques such as slab building, coiling and sculpting. They explore colour through experimenting with various glazes. Learners in a watercolour painting class explore balance in picture composition. Adults and children in a family learning craft session, enjoy experimenting with

clay together. They make brightly coloured ceramic characters to adorn their pencil pots.

30. Retention rates and success rates are satisfactory, but the basis of the data is not yet fully thorough, and outcomes are not analysed by race, gender and disability.

Quality of provision

31. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Innovative projects are used to encourage learners to explore cultural diversity. Learners on the creative machine embroidery course produce a range of exquisite pieces showing influence from a range of cultures and historical designs. Learners use African themes and symbolism to inspire their ceramic plate designs. In a watercolour class, learners draw from their own cultural heritage and explore works from both male and female artists from around the world.

32. Lesson planning is poor and does not always reflect the activities and good practice in the classroom or workshop. Schemes of work and lesson plans focus on whole group activities or themes. They do not plan what learners will learn. Learning outcomes are not consistently specific, measurable or challenging. Some classes are not evaluated. Planned assessment methods are insufficiently timed or varied.

33. The recognition and recording of learner progress and achievement on non-accredited provision is inadequate. Regular evaluation and recording of progress against learners' goals is inconsistent. Skills or activities completed are recorded in some classes. On some accredited provision, written feedback to learners is insufficiently constructive. Some tutors encourage learners to record their achievements using digital photographs. However, the recording and monitoring of learners' progress by some tutors is insufficiently detailed. A few tutors do not fully understand how to plan and record individual learning and progress.

34. The range of courses offered is satisfactory. The tutors offer a good range of enrichment opportunities. Learners on non-accredited arts courses exhibit their work in the local community. They have produced work for a local charity event. All fashion learners regularly visit the Victoria & Albert museum in London and Knitting and Stitching show. Fashion learners exhibit their work annually. Some learners re-enroll year-on-year, although the percentage of new learners in the area is increasing. Most non-accredited classes are a mixture of beginners and repeat learners. Some course outlines contain information about progression. Some learners on accredited provision have progressed on to further and higher education. There is no data on numbers of learners who progress externally in art and craft.

35. Support for learners is satisfactory. Information and guidance is satisfactory. Learners are offered good initial guidance about their course. They receive information about what activities and skills they will learn. Technical support is

available in pottery for some classes. Access to some practical areas for learners with restricted mobility continues to be limited.

Leadership and management

36. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new manager recognises the major challenges faced by the service. She works hard with the staff team to maintain standards, has a good overview of the provision and responds quickly to tutor and learner enquiries.
37. Management information is not used consistently or effectively to improve planning and the quality of the provision. Data on retention, achievement and success rate is not thorough or reliable, and managers have not been trained to identify trends in relation to different groups of learners. Equality of opportunity is promoted well through the curriculum, but managers are not using equalities information as a management tool.
38. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Observation of teaching and learning grades are broadly in line with those given in inspection, although the paperwork does not always provide sufficient evidence of the higher grades. The self-assessment report is correct in the identification of priorities for improvement, but lacks clear judgements against key questions. It fails to identify headline data in attendance, retention, achievement and success rates and customer demographics. It provides a good overview of progress made in 07/08 in relation to the service quality plan, with particular focus on learners, the standard of their work, the skills they develop and the support they receive.

Languages, literature and culture

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

39. RBC offers 27 courses in seven languages: Arabic, British Sign Language, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. Classes are held at three main centres. Classes are two hours long and the majority take place in the evening. Courses range from beginner to Level 3. At the time of inspection, 244 learners were enrolled, of whom 20 were on externally accredited British Sign Language (BSL) courses. The academic year is divided into two semesters. The language provision is managed by one manager and delivered by 16 hourly paid language tutors.

Strengths

- Very effective use of the target language
- Good use of resources

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient monitoring of learner progress
- Insufficient use of data over time

Achievement and standards

40. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The retention and success rates for (BSL) Level 2 in 07/08 were high. Rates of retention on non-accredited provision are satisfactory. Attendance during the week of the inspection was satisfactory. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory in most classes. In the good and better classes, learners make good progress over time. Learners enjoy their classes and are motivated by their achievements. For example, learners who had little or no knowledge of German on entry to the course are able to hold a short conversation six months later. Achievement data on non-externally accredited learning show major fluctuations between 2006/07 and 2007/08. The quality of data collection is insufficiently thorough to make a judgement on this aspect. No analysis is undertaken trends of in relation to the outcomes for different groups of learners.

Quality of provision

41. The quality of provision is satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Tutors use the target language consistently and effectively not only during language exercises but also for task instructions and explanations of grammatical points. Tutors create a positive environment which encourages the learners to use the target language and in many classes the learners use the target language consistently throughout the class, even when talking informally. The use of resources is good. Tutors use a wide range of games, audiovisual and

print materials and the interactive whiteboard to good effect. In the best classes, they use these resources imaginatively.

42. New Directions does not monitor learner progress sufficiently. A useful policy to record the achievement of learning is in place. This covers the stages of initial, ongoing and final assessment. New Directions has taken good steps to monitor their effectiveness at regular intervals. However, on many courses the principles of assessment are not sufficiently thoroughly applied. The recording of learner skills and needs on entry to the course is poor as is the use of initial assessment to plan for group and individual needs. Many learning goals are not measurable. Tutors carry out ongoing assessment but do not record what the learners have learnt and, if learning needs remain, especially for the skills of speaking and listening. Insufficient feedback is provided to the learners and insufficient advice is given on how they can improve their language skills. The service has recognised this area for improvement in the quality improvement plan. The insufficient analysis of language skills has a negative impact on the planning for the individual needs of the learners. This is especially apparent in classes where the range of needs is wide.
43. The range of languages, and levels of courses offered is satisfactory. The service has developed a good questionnaire, with well targeted questions to collect feedback from the learners on the quality of the learning experience. Taster classes work well. They enable the learners to try a language class before they decide to enrol.
44. Support and guidance for learners are satisfactory. The provider makes appropriate efforts to support learners with sensory impairment, for example, by providing hearing loops. The service has not always communicated effectively with the learners on changes in the offer of languages and the fee structures.
45. The quality of the accommodation ranges from good to satisfactory, with restricted access for people with limited mobility in one centre.

Leadership and management

46. Leadership and management are satisfactory. While New Directions has recently improved the quality of the data collection, this is not sufficiently accurate for analysis over time. The provider makes insufficient use of data to monitor delivery and trends, in particular on the achievement of non-accredited courses.
47. The team of language tutors is suitably qualified and the provider offers appropriate in-house teacher training courses. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The service records participation by minority ethnic, gender ratios and disabilities and the profile of ethnic minorities participating in foreign and sign language learning classes is high. The provider does not establish trend data on success rates for these groups.

48. The quality assurance of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The service has seen many changes recently. The management has taken good steps to manage these, for example, by increasing the sample of joint observations of tutors. The observation reports are satisfactory. They provide sufficient comment on the quality of teaching and learning but the focus is on teaching, procedures and documentation rather than the quality of learning, and in some instances the basis for a high grade is not clear. The self-assessment report for foreign languages contains insufficient analysis of the provision and identification of the strengths and areas for improvement, but the quality improvement plan is effective. It identifies areas for improvement well and the manager monitors the timely impact of actions effectively.

ESOL

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

49. Reading Borough Council Service offers part-time ESOL courses at three centres and at two community venues. At inspection, a total of 223 learners were studying on ESOL courses. Courses are offered from pre-entry to Level 2. All courses are accredited. Course are offered in the day and evening. A total of 33 courses are currently on offer. Courses are organised in two semesters over an academic year. There are five permanent staff and 11 sessional staff. Two members of staff manage the provision in a job share.

Strengths

- Good development of language and additional skills
- Well supported learners
- Good involvement of learners in collecting feedback

Areas for improvement

- Unsatisfactory attendance
- Insufficient focus on the monitoring of progress and achievement in classes
- Slow management action to implement quality improvement

Achievement and standards

50. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Success rates for learners achieving the full ESOL qualification are satisfactory. Most learners successfully achieve either full or partial qualifications and achievement rates have steadily improved.

51. Overall, the standard of learners work is satisfactory. Many learners develop their language and additional skills in classes well. They gain confidence and improve their communication and literacy skills. They learn to successfully apply their newly acquired skills in social, personal and employment situations. Learners are able to highlight skills they have developed and comment favourably on the topics and methods tutors employ in classes to help them develop new skills.

52. Rates of attendance are unsatisfactory and vary considerably, with some as low as 50%. Absence monitoring procedures are starting to establish the reasons for absence, and tutors take action to support learners who have missed work.

Quality of provision

53. Teaching and learning are mostly satisfactory. In the better classes, teaching and learning are well planned and organised. Learners participate well and are encouraged to get involved and to practise their use of language. Tutors make good use of the interactive board and a variety of resources. Activities and tasks are well managed and good attainment is evident. However, in less effective classes tutors spend too much time on whole group activities, using a narrow range of learning materials to promote learning. Even though learners' ability and skill levels vary considerably, learning resources are insufficiently varied and interesting and there is an over reliance on paper-based materials as the main teaching and learning resource.
54. Learners are well supported in classes. Tutors and volunteers help and support learners effectively in classes. Volunteers also provide extra assistance with learning and preparation for examinations.
55. The quality and practice of setting targets in individual learning plans is satisfactory, but there is insufficient focus on monitoring individual learning, progress and achievement. Lesson plans often identify learners' differing needs, though teaching practice rarely includes additional activity to extend the skills of the most able or strategies to offer extra assistance and tasks to those who need to work at a different pace. The current practice of monitoring the progress and achievement of individual targets at tutorials classes outside of class time does not give sufficient time to record and monitor progress on an individual basis. Not all learners fully understand the purpose and use of the ILPs. Individual targets are rarely referred to in class and assessed work is not used effectively to record progress and achievement.
56. The promotion of equality and diversity in classes is satisfactory. Tutors consider and include topics and materials that are culturally sensitive in their teaching practice and encourage students to discuss and compare their differing experiences and background.
57. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Classrooms are well maintained and spacious with good visual displays.
58. The range of ESOL provision is satisfactory and New Directions works effectively with community partners and has established effective strategies to engage non-traditional and diverse learners to both formal and informal learning.
59. Support and guidance are satisfactory. A good range of information, advice and guidance is available to learners who wish to access learning. Initial assessment and placement are mostly accurate. Specialist employment officers work effectively with ESOL staff and visit classes to assist learners with developing their employability skills.

Leadership and management

60. Leadership and management of ESOL is unsatisfactory. Management action to implement quality improvement has been slow. A start has been made, and an evaluation exercise, involving the adaptation of the evaluation form for ESOL learners has been successful in identifying areas for improvement. However, aspects of curriculum management continue to be weak. Management information is not used adequately to monitor learner performance and no trend analysis has been carried out of the achievements of learners by race, disability and gender. Areas identified for improvement such as curriculum planning, the collection and use of performance data, have not had time to impact fully.
61. Useful professional development is provided, but too many tutors are inadequately qualified. Planning to meet the mandatory subject specialist requirements of tutors has been slow.
62. The process of observing teaching and learning is thorough and comprehensive, but the feedback places too little emphasis on what individuals have learnt and grades in observation records tend to overestimate the quality of classes. The self-assessment report is insufficiently detailed, and does not make any judgements on the quality of the ESOL curriculum area. The outcomes of course review have not been sufficiently used to inform judgements. Progress to improve the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection has been slow.

Literacy and numeracy

satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

63. At the time of inspection, 193 learners were enrolled on literacy and 122 learners on numeracy programmes. Thirty-three learners on literacy programmes have learning difficulties. Courses are offered at pre-entry, entry level, Level 1 and Level 2. Courses are taught at a range of venues, including council centres in the north, south and west of the borough. A small number of Family Literacy courses are offered in primary schools and a children's centre. Outreach courses are offered in conjunction with Probation Services and a mental health hospital. The two managers in this area have been in post for nine months.

Strengths

- Good development of social and employability skills
- Very effective use of ILT
- Good communication with staff and learners

Areas for improvement

- Low FE success rates at entry level in literacy and at Level 1 in numeracy
- Erratic attendance and poor punctuality
- Unsatisfactory management

Achievement and standards

64. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Success rates for accredited provision have improved at entry level in numeracy, literacy Level 1 and at Level 2 in both literacy and numeracy. At literacy Level 1, the improvement has been from unsatisfactory to well above national averages.

65. Success rates for accredited provision at entry level in literacy have remained very low over a three year period, and in numeracy Level 1 have declined and remain well below national averages. Success rates in non-accredited provision are satisfactory. No information is available about the trend in success rates of different groups of learners. Standards of learners' written work are satisfactory.

66. Learners' attendance is erratic. At the time of the inspection, average attendance was low. In one class, attendance since the class started in September was only 48%. Punctuality is poor. Late arrivals frequently disrupted classes, and interrupted learning. Teachers did not address this issue.

Quality of provision

67. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Social and employability skills are developed well. Learners are confident in speaking and listening skills. They acquire useful and transferable skills to assist them in obtaining employment. Learners report increased confidence outside class, and feel they are making good progress. They support one another well in class.
68. Constructive feedback is given to learners to help them improve. In the best classes, plans were differentiated and teachers drew out from the learners how they could improve. Effective use is made of appropriately trained volunteers to assist learners' skills development. This support is highly valued by learners. In a minority of classes checking of learning was insufficient. Diversity was actively highlighted in a few classes. For example, the focus of discussion in one class was the educational barriers faced by a partially sighted learner.
69. Interactive whiteboards are used well to explain new concepts and develop worked examples. In some classes, innovative use was made of relevant websites to cover topics which the learners found highly relevant. Most staff make effective use of the virtual learning platform.
70. The range of provision is satisfactory, although numbers had dropped significantly. Effective partnerships have been formed with other providers, such as the Probation Service, and a mental health hospital, to engage hard to reach learners. The curriculum has been re-designed to meet the needs of pre-entry learners and is still being developed.
71. Support and guidance are satisfactory. Initial assessment and advice and guidance are satisfactory. Progression routes are available and are well understood by learners. Support provided by volunteers and support workers in the classroom is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

72. Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy are inadequate. There is effective sharing of good practice between staff, and resources are pooled to the benefit of learners. Communications between staff and learners are good. Curriculum managers are newly in post, and although they are focused clearly on quality improvement processes, these have not all had time to impact on the overall management of the provision. Aspects of management continue to need further development. The implementation of the national skills for life strategy is inadequate. A brief strategy document was developed in December 2008, but the staff are mostly unaware of it. The action plan is incomplete. There are no named persons or post holders responsible for completing the action, no target dates for completion, and no dates for review of actions or measures of their impact.

73. The use of management information to improve performance continues to be insufficient. Targets are not set at course level. Management information has not been analysed thoroughly to inform judgements on achievements and standards in the self-assessment report. The management of trend data in relation to equality of opportunity is unsatisfactory, and staff have not been trained to evaluate trends in their area of work.

74. The process of self-assessment is insufficiently critical and evaluative. The self-assessment report overstates the strengths of the provision and does not identify all the areas for improvement. The actions in the quality improvement plan do not always address the area for improvement that is required. Course reviews have improved, although there is still variability in the quality of their execution. Monthly online testing has been introduced since December 2008 to enable learners to achieve more quickly. The RARPA process is in place, although it is not consistently applied. The observation of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, although learning is not given sufficient weighting in the grading process.

Annex

Learners' achievements

Learners' achievements in FE funded, accredited provision offered by RBC New Directions

Success rates on accredited entry and Level 1 (combined) and Level 2 qualifications, by length, expected end year and age.

2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for GFE colleges.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	19+			
		Starts – Transfers	ACL Provider Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 long	06/07	443	62.5	70.5	-8
	07/08*	452	63	N/A	
2 long	06/07	100	69	69	0
	07/08*	146	72	N/A	
Short**	06/07	287	60.3	82.9	-22.6
	07/08*	142	87	N/A	

* ACL provider data, not validated

** Courses over 5 weeks long

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain NVQ programmes managed by RBC New Directions 2006 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	39	100
		timely	38	5
	2007/08	overall	17	88
		timely	17	35
	2008/09 (5 months)	overall	45	N/A
		timely	N/A	N/A

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first three months or greater of the LSC contract year

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the provider before inspection