

Southampton City Council

Inspection date

5 June 2009

Inspection number

333092

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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:

- Preparation for life and work

Description of the provider

1. Southampton City Council (SCC or the service) offers adult and community learning through its contract with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight LSC for the provision of personal and community development learning (PCDL), neighbourhood learning in deprived communities (NLDC) and a skills for jobs programme. Programmes in these areas form the basis of this inspection. SCC subcontracts most of its programmes to local colleges, community schools and voluntary sector providers.
2. Additionally, SCC provides programmes not in scope for this inspection for ex-offenders, unemployed adults and young people using funding from the European Social Fund. It also has a small LSC funded Train to Gain programme too recent to inspect.
3. A senior manager has day-to-day responsibility for the provision supported by three staff and managers. Some 60 tutors teach on learning programmes, 50 of whom work on subcontracted provision.
4. In 2007/08 preparation for life and work, the focus of the inspection, accounted for around 25% of SCC's adult and community learning provision. It includes family learning programmes, provision for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, some employability programmes and NLDC. Other provision predominately including programmes in leisure travel and tourism, and arts media and publishing programmes was not inspected in its own right but contributed evidence to overall judgements on the effectiveness of the provision, its capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management.
5. In 2007/08, 5912 learners followed 1023 courses, with over 50% enrolled on courses which lasted no more than eight hours and just under 80% on courses with non-accredited outcomes. A third of learners on courses where fees are charged were in receipt of fee remission.
6. Southampton has a population of over 230,000, 74% of whom are over 19. The city economy is centred on the service sectors. Data from the 2001 census shows that approximately 8% of the population are of black and minority ethnic heritage. The proportion of adults of working age with qualifications below level 2 is 35% and below level 3 is 51%. The unemployment rate is close to that for England as a whole.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Sector subject area

Preparation for life and work	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory : Grade 3

7. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. The quality of provision is good. Achievement and standards and leadership and management are satisfactory as is equality of opportunity. Preparation for life and work is good.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory : Grade 3

8. SCC has satisfactory capacity to improve. It has maintained satisfactory standards since the last inspection despite a significant restructuring. It has remedied weaknesses in curriculum planning and in its arrangements for improving teaching and learning. The collection and analysis of data have improved significantly although the service does not yet make sufficient use of management information to develop the provision. Retention and achievement rates are high, although retention is declining in 2008/09. Measures used to recognise learners' achievement and success on non-accredited courses are not yet sufficiently effective.
9. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. The service has a clear and well communicated annual self-assessment and development planning cycle. The process is inclusive and consultative. The service provides good support and guidance to its own staff and subcontracted partners to carry out their own self-assessments, which contribute appropriately to the service's self-assessment report. The service's development coordinators provide good assistance to subcontractors in the preparation of their own local reports, particularly new staff unfamiliar with the self-assessment process. Arrangements to moderate the results of the self-assessment process are effective. The current self-assessment report is critical and generally accurate. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements it contained, although gave less weight to some of the strengths the report claimed. Most grades in the report matched those of inspectors.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning
- good range of programmes to meet the needs of individuals and the community
- good partnership working to develop community capacity
- good strategic planning to reach priority groups

Key areas for improvement

- insufficiently developed arrangements for information advice and guidance
- insufficient use of management information to develop and improve the provision
- insufficiently effective setting and reviewing of learning goals in non-accredited learning

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

10. Achievement and standards are satisfactory, a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report. Some 80% of the provision consists of courses that have non-accredited outcomes. Measures of achievement the service uses on these courses are not sufficiently reliable. Success rates are high on the mainly short programmes leading to accreditation, often at 100%.
11. Retention rates were high in 2007/08 at 100% on courses leading to accreditation, and 96% on those with non-accredited outcomes. However, data for 2008/09 show a declining trend in retention on both types of course, most of which are short. The self-assessment report identified retention as satisfactory.
12. The retention and achievement rates of learners from black and minority ethnic communities, and by gender and age, are similar to those for other learners in 2007/08.
13. Achievement and standards are good on preparation for life and work programmes. In the current year all learners entering for entry and level 1 qualifications in literacy have passed. Of numeracy learners, 83% have achieved at level 1 and 100% achieved at level 2. This represents a significant improvement from the previous year. Achievement is good on other programmes. The attainment of learners on programmes for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good.
14. Learners demonstrate well developed skills, confidence and positive attitudes to their studies. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities develop the communication skills and confidence needed to take more responsibility for themselves and to progress to other kinds of learning. Parents, carers and children on family learning programmes communicate well and play effectively together. The standard of learners' work is good, particularly the games family learners make to play with children at home and the diaries learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities produce.
15. Attendance is satisfactory. Attendance of observed sessions was 80%. However, in some classes attendance patterns are erratic and the number of learners attending regularly is low.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. The quality of provision is good, as identified in the self-assessment report. Teaching and learning are good. In most classes in preparation for life and work, learners participate enthusiastically and work very collaboratively in well planned whole group, small group and individual activity. The pace of sessions is good,

retaining learners' interest well. Learners and tutors make good use of teaching and learning resources of a high standard including digital technologies. The emphasis on Every Child Matters themes in family learning is particularly good. Support for learners with language, literacy and numeracy needs is good. In a minority of sessions, however, learners are not consistently involved in tasks and activities, and tutors do not check their understanding sufficiently. Handouts and whiteboard presentations are poor. Accommodation for learning is satisfactory overall.

17. Across the provision as a whole, tutors make effective use of assessment appropriate to the subject area to identify learners' starting points, and on accredited programmes, to establish readiness to sit external tests. Good contextually relevant materials form the basis of initial assessments of the literacy and numeracy skills of learners on family literacy language and numeracy (FLLN) courses. Highly effective use of symbols and signage enables learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to identify their needs particularly effectively.
18. The recording of individual learning needs and reviewing of learners' progress is insufficiently effective. Learning objectives often place too much emphasis on the subject and tasks rather than on learners' individual goals. The measurement of achievement is not focused sufficiently on learners' development of skills and knowledge. The outcomes of reviews of learners' progress are not always recorded. However, the recording and monitoring of the progress learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make is innovative and highly effective.
19. The extent to which programmes meet the needs of learners and employers is good. SCC provides a particularly wide range of programmes to meet individual and community needs. It offers a broad range of water-based activity catering for very diverse interests, popular classes in areas such as dance and the visual arts as well as programmes aimed more specifically at local residents not traditionally participating in learning. In preparation for life and work, the range of externally accredited FLLN programmes is good. The service routinely designs its pre-employment courses to meet the needs of individual employers, and to ensure those completing the courses receive job interviews.
20. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Tutors provide regular informal support, while a wide range of specialist information and additional support is available from within the service and through partner organisations. The work of additional learning support staff in some classes is good, but in others their role is not sufficiently defined. Information and guidance are integral to all pre-employment training. Family learners often receive effective guidance from tutors and providers, but not all receive sufficient timely information about future courses. Across much of the provision information and guidance available to learners is restricted to the publicity provided by local centres. Advice on the most suitable programme, and information about opportunities at other venues, is rare. SCC recognises in its self-assessment report the need to improve guidance and is developing its website to improve the range of information available.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

21. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, as identified in the self-assessment report, and good in preparation for life and work. Strategic planning to reach learners in local priority neighbourhoods is good. The service clearly identifies activity and priority groups in local communities when planning and locating provision, using local demographic data and labour market information effectively. It successfully extends its activity by drawing in additional financing from a range of sources. Following a recent restructuring the service is well aligned with key council-wide strategic priorities. Progress to implement the new structure and recruit to newly designated posts is good. SCC staff understand the strategic direction and new roles and responsibilities well.
22. Partnership working to develop community capacity and widen participation is good. The service works collaboratively and effectively with a wide and diverse range of partners to meet the learning needs of deprived communities. It works closely with schools and children's centres in these and other areas to provide family learning programmes which match their circumstances. In collaboration with the council's social services department it provides courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities during which the learners' key workers also receive valuable training, Pre-employment programmes build well on good links with government agencies and employers. The service provides important help to some partners to fund capital projects.
23. Curriculum management of preparation for life and work programmes is good. Staff are well qualified, communication between and across teams is frequent and effective as are arrangements to share good practice and resources.
24. Arrangements for planning the curriculum, commissioning provision and managing subcontractor partners are satisfactory. Target setting and performance against targets are satisfactory. The adult learning plan sets out appropriate targets for overall participation. Each subcontractor has its own clear participation targets. Regular contract review meetings include satisfactory checks on performance against these and the quality of the provision. However, some aspects of the contract review process are not sufficiently thorough and well established, as identified in the self-assessment report. No targets are set for achievement.
25. SCC's development coordinators are responsive, supportive and accessible. Formal and informal communication within the service and with partners is satisfactory. However, many subcontractor staff are new in post. Some are not sufficiently clear about new roles and responsibilities within the council's ACL service. Some lack sufficient knowledge of the self-assessment process.
26. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. Regular observations of teaching and learning, and the curriculum support review process, contribute

appropriately to maintaining and improving the quality of the provision. However some aspects are not sufficiently well established. Observation records include useful comments about the provision generally, but do not always contain sufficient judgements on the quality of learning. In preparation for life and work performance monitoring is careful but staff rely too heavily on informal approaches to ensure quality.

27. SCC makes effective use of learners' feedback gathered through learner surveys, and is in the early stages of implementing a new learner involvement strategy. The deployment of resources and equipment is satisfactory, and includes a useful emphasis on providing digital resources for tutors to use in community premises. Management of skills for life is satisfactory. The service has well-established arrangements for literacy and numeracy support across the provision, and is completing a written strategy to formalise these.
28. SCC has developed particularly innovative and successful approaches to using data in establishing the success of learning programmes it provides to ex-offenders. However it makes insufficient use of management information to develop and improve adult and community learning provision. SCC routinely collects detailed data on participation, retention and achievement and analyses the performance of different groups and participation in priority neighbourhoods. It does not share or discuss the outcomes sufficiently with subcontractor partners. Most data are accurate and reliable. However, measures of achievement within its arrangements for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning are not sufficiently well established or reliable. In preparation for life and work programmes, managers sometimes rely too heavily on anecdotal evidence and case studies to measure performance and do not use numerical data sufficiently to monitor progression or attendance patterns. Information on individuals' progression within family learning is not sufficiently detailed or suitably collated, as recognised in the self-assessment report.
29. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. SCC has clear and effectively communicated policies and procedures for learners and staff. Courses are located carefully to provide convenient access for learners in areas of high deprivation. Promotion of equality and diversity within the curriculum is satisfactory overall, and good in family learning programmes. Coverage in staff inductions, appraisals and training is effective. The service provides appropriate support to subcontractor partners in promoting equality and diversity, including help in providing a wide range of adaptive technology to meet individual learners' needs. It offers training in aspects of equality of opportunity which is particularly useful in supporting smaller providers. SCC's monitoring and promotion of equality of opportunity through contract review meetings is satisfactory although the evidence it uses is sometimes not well enough recorded.
30. The service has made satisfactory progress to address a gender imbalance in participation and to promote better involvement of learners from minority ethnic communities and those with disabilities. The participation amongst those from minority ethnic communities is now proportionate to the city's population.

31. Procedures for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults meet current government requirements. All council employed staff, including tutors, are subject to appropriate vetting checks, with details held on a regularly updated central register. A clearly identified designated person is in place. Service level agreements with subcontractors require vetting checks for staff. SCC acknowledges monitoring of compliance and awareness training for its own staff are at an early stage. Health and safety risk assessments for venues where learning takes place are routine, supplemented by detailed risk assessment logs for each programme.

What learners like:

- 'Our tutor is very diplomatic and doesn't make you feel bad when you don't do something properly'
- 'Getting a certificate for the first time'
- The patience and good humour of tutors
- 'I'm learning new things without realising'
- 'I've brought my partner along it's so good'
- 'It's made me think about my children more and how to help them'
- 'The way the course relates to specific situations you are likely to come across at work'
- The good range of learning resources which caters well for the different ways people learn

What learners think could improve:

- 'Sometimes what we do in class is not stretching enough'
- 'I would like to go on to another course but I don't know how I can do this – no one's told me'
- The availability of information about courses across the city - 'I can only get local centre information'
- 'Course is not what I was expecting to be doing'