

Hertfordshire County Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Jai Sharda HMI

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Address: Room 145,
County Hall
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8DF

Telephone number: 01992 555482

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context

Hertfordshire County Council (the council) has a contract with Hertfordshire Learning and skills council (LSC) to provide first steps provision and adult safeguarded learning across Hertfordshire. The Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service (the service) manages the provision on behalf of the council. The service directly manages and provides most of the family learning provision. The service subcontracts other provision to a range of providers, including the four local colleges of further education, the university in Hertfordshire and the voluntary and community sector.

This focused monitoring visit follows the inspection in November 2008 at which inspectors judged the council's overall effectiveness to be satisfactory. They also judged achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management as satisfactory, and found capacity to improve and its arrangements for equality of opportunity to be good. Provision in information and communication technology and preparation for life and work was satisfactory and family learning provision was good. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the service made in ensuring that self-assessment and development planning continue to support its capacity to improve?

Reasonable progress

The service's capacity to improve was good at the previous inspection. Self-assessment and development planning continues to support the service's capacity to improve. Senior managers collect self-assessment reports from the 25 subcontractors and then produce a service-wide self-assessment report. A moderation panel carefully scrutinizes the draft report. The service has worked well with some of the smaller voluntary sector subcontractors to support their self-assessment process. The quality improvement plan clearly sets out the key targets and challenges for the service. It clearly identifies the expected improvement actions. Targets are realistic and timescales and responsibilities identified. Senior managers regularly monitor the quality improvement plan and they ensure that it promotes continuous improvement. The service now uses its observation of teaching and learning scheme more effectively as a quality improvement tool. Managers now use summaries from these observations to monitor the quality of learning in different subject areas and for different subcontractors. While the new self assessment arrangements are clearer, they have not yet had sufficient time to be fully implemented.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has Hertfordshire County Council made to improve outcomes for learners? Reasonable progress

Learner retention continues to remain high. Pass rates on the small number of accredited courses are satisfactory. The proportion of learners in family learning provision who opt to take the national tests in literacy or numeracy has increased since the previous inspection. Achievement results for those who take these tests are generally good. Achievement data in non-accredited provision, based upon recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement, are not sufficiently robust. The development of learners' knowledge, confidence and skills is good. Opportunities for learners to progress to higher levels of study are clearly signposted. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

How much progress has Hertfordshire County Council made in tackling the inadequate teaching and learning in ESOL provision? Reasonable progress

Managers have taken effective actions to tackle this area for improvement. Service managers spent a considerable amount of time working with the two subcontractors that are responsible for delivering most ESOL provision. Managers have increased the proportion of teaching observations and improved support for teachers. Managers carried out joint observations with subcontractor staff to help them understand how to grade learning sessions effectively. Specialist ESOL staff from the service's family learning programme worked with the subcontractors' ESOL tutors to help them improve their practice. The subcontractor no longer uses teachers whose performance was unsatisfactory. Lesson planning and schemes of work in ESOL are much improved. Observations of teaching and learning show improvements in the overall quality of learning sessions.

What progress has Hertfordshire County Council made in improving planning for individual skills development in ICT sessions? Reasonable progress

The service has considerably strengthened its procedures for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) to help teachers understand the importance of meeting the individual skills needs of learners. Initial assessment arrangements for learners following ICT programmes has been improved so that learners' previous skills and abilities with ICT is properly assessed before they are enrolled on a programme. Paperwork now records learners' progress and achievement both during and at the end of each programme. The service held a useful staff development event to promote strategies for recording learners' progress and achievement during the summer. Many subcontractors have amended their practices and their paperwork so that learners' progress and achievement is better

recorded. The service's arrangements for moderating the achievement of learning outcomes in non-accredited learning have also improved.

Leadership and management

A key area for improvement at the previous inspection was 'further develop the quality assurance of the subcontracted provision, to include a greater focus on the quality of provision.' How much progress has the service made in tackling this?

Significant
progress

The service has developed a much improved system for monitoring and assuring the work of its 23 subcontractors. All providers receive regular audits of their policies and procedures to ensure that they comply with the service's contractual requirements. The service regularly collects data on learner recruitment, retention and achievement rates from the subcontractors. However, a minority of subcontractors is still slow to respond to the service's requests for data. In addition to ensuring that providers meet their contractual obligations fully, the service has also improved its arrangements for quality monitoring. All subcontractors receive an annual quality monitoring visit. Managers produce an action plan to tackle any identified areas of concern. The service provides extended support for under-performing providers. Some of the smaller voluntary sector organisations receive greater support and monitoring to help deliver their contract. All subcontractors attend a twice a term development day hosted by the service. The service uses this effectively to share good practice and to help providers work effectively with each other.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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