

Doncaster MBC

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 51578

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Last day of inspection: 21 January 2010

Type of provider: Local Authority (adult and community learning)

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) delivers its adult and community learning through the Adult, Family and Community Learning Service (AFCL). The service is a direct provider of learning and is located in the council's Children and Young People's directorate. A senior management team comprising the Head of AFCL, the strategic curriculum manager and the quality manager lead the service, supported by four curriculum manager posts. South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) fund the provision, much of which is targeted at adults living in deprived areas. Additional funding from DMBC is used to support senior posts. Doncaster is recognised as one of the most deprived local authorities in the country, with a population of around 290,000.

This monitoring visit follows the re-inspection in February 2009 of DMBC adult and community learning (ACL). At that inspection, quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity were satisfactory, while achievement and standards were good. The provider's overall effectiveness was satisfactory and capacity to improve was good. Preparation for life and work and community learning were satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What further progress has there been in improving the self-assessment process and ensuring that action plans lead to improvement? Reasonable progress

The service has further developed self-assessment well. At the last inspection the self-assessment process was satisfactory but position statements updating its findings were too positive in some areas. Tutors are now more substantially involved in writing the curriculum self-assessment. Curriculum managers and their teams make good use of performance data on attendance, retention and achievement to inform their judgements. Increasing use is made, through focus groups, of feedback from learners and tutors. Curriculum self-assessment drafts are moderated through meetings involving other sections of the local authority. To date there has been no moderation involving interested parties outside of the local authority. The latest report is comprehensive, mostly evaluative and seeks to address the criteria in the new common inspection framework. Action plans have led to improvement in all of the areas identified at the last inspection including the use of personal learning plans and the promotion of equality and diversity to learners. The quality improvement plan is detailed but some sections do not contain precise targets and are not sufficiently evaluative. Not enough is written about the impact on learners of measures that have been implemented.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in further improving outcomes for learners? How effective are arrangements to maintain the high success rates on accredited courses? Have there been further improvements and are retention rates still high? Reasonable progress

Doncaster has made reasonable progress in further improving outcomes for learners. At the previous inspection, success rates on accredited courses were high for most learners on Skills for Life courses and in community learning. By 2008/09 success rates for Skills for Life learners were 77%, a rise of nine percentage points from the previous year. In community learning, success rates were 90% in 2008/09, a similar rate to the previous year.

Learners are highly motivated, confident and continue to develop a range of new skills. At the last inspection the service was starting to develop methods to monitor the progression of learners. Further improvements enable the service to demonstrate that internal progression between courses is good for community learners at 60%. However, internal progression for Skills for Life and family learning learners is not as well developed. Actions to address this include, improvements in the mapping of progression routes, information, advice and guidance and improved tracking and partnership working. In 2009/10 progression from Skills for Life and family learning has increased from the previous year with targets set of 40% for Skills for Life and 30% for family learning.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve the use of personal learning targets to plan and monitor learning and achievement? Reasonable progress

Doncaster has made reasonable progress in improving the use of personal targets to plan and monitor learning and achievement. At the last inspection, managers had introduced new learning plans but they were being used inconsistently and individual targets were not always appropriate or measurable. In community learning sessions, many goals related to the whole group and not to the individual learner.

Staff worked well together to design formats for two standard individual learning plans, that all agreed meet the needs of their learners. They have benefited from many training events on the setting of specific and measurable targets. Most tutors' individual learning plans are regularly moderated, leading to good actions for improvement. Learners are encouraged to use a numerical grading system to assess their starting points and progress made. Weekly targets set by tutors are used well to pin-point specific achievements in sessions. Many learners add their own personal targets to this list. In practical sessions, good photographic evidence is used to record their learning. The overall system is working well but there are still minor inconsistencies in implementation. While the achievement of tasks is well-recorded, the assessment of what has been learned is less well-developed.

How much progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning and in the sharing of good practice? Significant progress

The provider has made significant progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning and in the sharing of good practice. In the last inspection teaching and learning were judged to be satisfactory, in spite of an increased proportion of good teaching identified. The service now assesses its teaching and learning as good and the observation profile supports this judgement. Measures to improve teaching include more regular observations, observations to check on themes such as induction and the completion of individual learning plans and a rigorous moderation process. The provider has trialled paired observations internally and is now involving external partners in this. The observations judgements are objective, lead to good actions for improvement and are followed up by curriculum managers well. Inspectors agreed with the main findings of observations.

Doncaster has invested well in additional resources to improve teaching and learning. This includes a good range of up-to-date information learning technology equipment for tutor and learner use. Tutors share practice well, using a range of meetings, training events, standardisation processes and through the regular internal newsletter. In addition, tutors are beginning to use the new virtual learning environment.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in addressing areas of slow improvement at the last inspection including the Skills for Life strategy and the learner involvement strategy? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection the Skills for Life strategy was not sufficiently applied across the organisation and to the curriculum in many areas. Considerable progress has been made since then in most subject areas. Better support for tutors is available through additional Skills for Life tutors and through additional training opportunities. All tutors are required to integrate Skills for Life into their session plans. Family learning and Skills for Life tutors have made good progress in ensuring that learners enhance their literacy and numeracy skills through the curriculum. In community learning not all tutors are implementing this sufficiently. More tutors of practical subjects are creating opportunities for learners to develop their basic skills in lessons.

Some progress has been made in the development of a learner involvement strategy. Learners state that they can raise their concerns with tutors and these are acted upon. Complaints are recorded and addressed. A representative learner focus group has been established and their recommendations have resulted in improvements to matters such as signage in a car park and the development of a curriculum strategy. The focus group is still largely managed by the service and there are plans to encourage learners to run it for themselves in the future.

How much progress has been made in improving the provider's promotion of equality and diversity to learners and users of the service in the classroom and through subject areas? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection there was insufficient promotion of equality and diversity to learners and users of the service in the classroom and through subject areas. Since then additional measures to address this have led to a number of improvements. All staff attended training to raise their awareness of different ways of extending the curriculum. Major religious festivals are celebrated and used by some tutors in lessons to raise learner awareness of different cultures. There are good developments in the arts, crafts and IT but in several other curriculum areas it is under-developed. About half of the learners interviewed were aware of changes being made to the curriculum. Observers are required to comment on how well equality is promoted in teaching observations. The provider's participation in a festival of learning in a deprived area resulted in contacts with some of the hardest to reach groups. Tutors are responsible for promoting equality during induction sessions for learners. Additional specialist equipment has been purchased such as portable hearing loops to meet the needs of individual learners. Service targets on equality are reviewed regularly. The provider recognises the need to strengthen its measures to evaluate the impact of initiatives on learners.

What progress has been made to strengthen arrangements for safeguarding and how well are they developed and applied? Reasonable progress

Safeguarding is given a high priority and the service has made rapid progress in strengthening its arrangements to safeguard young people and vulnerable adult learners. There are clearly written policies and arrangements for health and safety which are applied to all areas. All staff are informed of their responsibilities and nearly all have attended training. An increasing number of tutors are aware of how to identify learners at risk and of what they should do about it. The Head of Service is the lead staff member for Safeguarding. Learners interviewed and those returning feedback report feeling safe. Health and safety inspections are carried out on all venues and risk assessments on all courses and equipment. Problems with the suitability of venues are swiftly rectified. However, there are still a few venues where furniture and facilities are unsuitable for adult learners. There are sound arrangements to check staff records including Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. This includes additional security checks for staff working in HM Prisons. Policies on bullying and discrimination are appropriately implemented. The service started activities to raise tutor awareness of the importance of internet safety through training in July 2009. Topics such as cyber-bullying and on-line fraud are covered briefly during induction.

What progress has been made to ensure that targets to support service aims are now sufficiently precise and measurable to measure progress? How well is management information used to support this? Reasonable progress

The provider has made reasonable progress in ensuring that targets to support service aims are now sufficiently precise and measurable. At the last inspection inspectors commented on the clear strategic aims that reflected national and regional priorities. However, targets were not always sufficiently established. Management information was not always used sufficiently. Since then the service has worked vigorously to produce accurate and reliable management information for teachers and managers.

The provider now has overall targets, based on trend analysis data, which help inform both team and individual targets to meet service priorities. The targets are included in the quality improvement plan. While many targets are appropriate, others are less challenging. For instance, Doncaster achieved 26% participation by men in 2008/9 with a 25% target. In the current year the target remains at 25% despite the fact that they exceeded this in the previous year. Most service targets are appropriately challenging to meet the planning needs of the provision. Staff are aware of their personal targets and welcome the opportunity to discuss them during their appraisals. The targets are well-linked to service priorities and informed by other measures such as the results of teaching observation and learner evaluations.

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