

Wigan Borough Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Local Authority

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Wigan Borough Council receives funding from the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council for personal, community and development learning, first steps, family learning and neighbourhood learning in deprived communities provision. Subjects include information and communication technology; sport and leisure; art and crafts; modern foreign languages and Skills for Life. Most courses are non-accredited. The council's Learning and Employment Service, part of the Department of Adult Services, manages the adult and community learning provision. Partner providers, who are generally voluntary and community sector organisations and schools, deliver it.

The council holds the main contract for a European Social Fund project focused on young people who are disengaged or at risk of becoming disengaged from learning, and to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training. This provision is out of scope for this monitoring visit.

At the council's last full inspection in May 2009, all main aspects of provision and the two graded subject areas were graded satisfactory; equality of opportunity was graded good.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the council made to improve the level of detail and range of judgments in its self-assessment report and maintain the increased rate of improvement noted at the previous inspection? Reasonable progress

The self-assessment report for 2008/09 is particularly detailed. Judgments are based on a wide range of evidence including data and feedback from stakeholders. The council has adjusted its timing of self-assessment to ensure that datasets and analysis of other management information are complete and available for consideration. The self-assessment process is inclusive of partner providers; their subject area self-assessment reports are now of consistent quality. The report uses the revised 2009 common inspection framework, but responses to the main aspects are inconsistent. The report does not answer each sub-aspect consistently, including areas of particular relevance to this sector such as community cohesion. All aspects are covered in full in subject reports. However, the report is very long and includes a number of areas of repetition that do not support its effectiveness as a focused and concise document.

The post inspection action plan and quality improvement plans are thorough, detailed and respectively link clearly to each aspect of improvement identified either at the previous inspection or through the self-assessment process. Most actions include challenging and measurable targets. Managers monitor action plans regularly

each term to establish the degree of progress made and have maintained the improved pace of progress identified at the previous inspection.

Quality improvement arrangements

What progress has the council made to ensure that its quality improvement arrangements are sufficiently thorough and includes effective use of a full range of measures? Reasonable progress

Most of the council's quality improvement arrangements are beginning to promote sustained improvement. Thorough and clear service level agreements now explicitly identify the various expectations and requirements for providers and the council's responsibilities to monitor and manage its contracts. The identification of good practice has improved. The council uses its provider network meetings as a useful forum to share these examples. The sampling and collection of learners' feedback is systematically planned, and its analysis is beginning to identify particular areas for improvement. The council now has confidence in the accuracy of its data and uses these effectively to plan and monitor provision.

The observation of teaching and learning has improved. The proportion of tutors observed this year has increased significantly to 75%; paired observations, moderation and checks on the process to recognise and record progress and achievement are in place. However, the council recognises that observation of teaching and learning remains an area for development. The current model is overly compliance based. Observers do not comment sufficiently on learning or standards. Observation grades, for the sample seen, are high by comparison with judgments. Early developments for a revised process indicate comprehensive and coherent documentation, guidance and grading criteria.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the council made to ensure that retention is consistently high across all its provision and that its retention and achievement data are accurate? Reasonable progress

The council has worked very effectively to ensure the accuracy of its data. Much staff development and support for partner providers has been given to develop their capacity to understand the need for, and skills to provide, consistently accurate data. Monitoring and audit arrangements include thorough checks of individual class records of attendance and achievement in comparison with centre based and centrally held records. The council and its partner providers are now highly confident in the accuracy of data.

Overall retention, achievement and success data for the first term of 2009/10 show good outcomes at respectively, 88%, 92% and 80%. The council has identified the need for further improvement in a small minority of subject areas where these rates are lower. The improved accuracy of data has enabled the identification of achievement gaps for learners in some priority areas and the small proportion of

learners from minority ethnic groups. Actions to tackle these show early signs of success.

Processes to recognise and record progress and achievement

What progress has the provider made in developing and implementing a fit for purpose system to monitor and record learners' progress and achievement? Reasonable progress

The process to monitor and record learners' progress and achievement has improved. Tutors observed during the visit use the process more consistently than previously. All learners seen had individual learning plans and all included targets and evidence of assessment. However, as recognised by the council, the process remains an area for improvement. Many targets are clear and measurable although most are generic; individual learning plans do not always include learners' personal targets. A few learners commented that the tutor asked about their personal targets at the start of the course, and built these into their planning for learning. In better individual learning plans, assessment against targets included examples of evidence of achievement, verified by the tutor. These included digital images of products made or hard copy examples of work. A minority of assessment records over-emphasise learners' self-assessment, unsupported by evidence of achievement, and include reference to 'attendance' as evidence that the targets had been met.

Programme management

What progress has been made to improve teaching and learning further through wider access to information and learning technology, the take up of staff development and teaching qualifications and the full implementation of the Skills for Life strategy? Reasonable progress

The councils' e-learning strategy sets a clear vision for 2009/11. A team of six e-champions collectively support each centre's development and implementation of the strategy. E-guide training for the team is progressing satisfactorily. All main centres have access to information and learning technology (ILT); staff ILT training is mandatory. Plans to extend the range and access to ILT include improved community resources and virtual learning environment developments. Inspectors observed the effective use of ILT in three of the five sessions observed.

Staff attendance at training is now a requirement. All tutors attended mandatory training in 2009. The proportion of qualified staff has increased significantly. The council is making good progress towards meeting its target for 90% of staff to be qualified to required standards by 2010/11 and 100% by 2011/12.

Implementation of the Skills for Life strategy is well supported by specialist advice and training. Seventy percent of tutors attended Skills for Life awareness raising and smaller proportions attended additional training. The information, advice and guidance team take a higher profile at enrolment than previously. The literacy and numeracy screening tool is identifying learning needs well, although the proportion

of learners accepting support is disappointingly low. A few learners are beginning to refer themselves for support. The council's Skills for Life strategy group is currently revising and updating the strategy.

Safeguarding vulnerable adults

What progress has the council made to ensure the safeguarding of vulnerable adults?

Reasonable progress

The council now meets government requirements in this area. Virtually all staff have attended the basic safeguarding awareness training and all tutors, managers and administrative staff have been Criminal Records Bureau checked. Safeguarding is discussed at course, centre and management meetings and actions to promote its implementation are well monitored. The council has a generic risk assessment for the service as a whole and more basic risk assessments are in place at subject level. Safeguarding is publicised widely at centre level. Learners report that they feel safe when attending centres and their classes. However, the generic health and safety risk assessment was rarely contextualised for specific activities in the sample seen. Although learners interviewed have a basic awareness of e-safety, no policy for this is in place, nor is it mentioned in the e-learning strategy. The learner charter, dated 2008, does not mention safeguarding.

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