

Darlington Borough Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

The libraries and Community Learning Service (The Service) is part of Darlington Borough Council's Children's Services directorate. The Service comprises libraries, work-based learning, adult learning and family learning. The learning provision is delivered from a number of sites within Darlington and provides training annually for around 70 work-based learners and 1,200 adults.

Work-based provision is offered in early years and playwork, motor vehicle, construction crafts, business, administration and law, and employability training. The Service offers adult provision in information and communication technology (ICT), classical and modern foreign languages and culture, arts, media and publishing, leisure, travel and tourism, Skills for Life, English for speakers of other languages, and family learning.

At the inspection in December 2007 the overall effectiveness of the provision was found to be good. Achievement and standards, leadership and management, and equality of opportunity were also good. The quality of the provision and capacity to improve were both satisfactory. Provision in early years and playwork, ICT, classical and modern foreign languages and family learning were all good. Provision in construction crafts was satisfactory.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to improve the effectiveness of the self-assessment process, and quality improvement and development planning?	Reasonable Progress
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At the previous inspection arrangements for self-assessment were judged to be satisfactory. The Service has developed the self-assessment process. A quality improvement steering group has been established and a new quality improvement framework and strategy developed. Some of these arrangements have yet to yield results. The self-assessment process has developed and is more consultative. Staff views are collected, analysed and used more effectively in departmental self-assessment reports. Some of these reports are not self-critical enough and not sufficiently backed by clear evidence. Stakeholder satisfaction surveys are conducted annually. Learners are not aware of how their views have been used. The quality improvement action plan includes measurable outcomes and success criteria. Progress against this plan is more effectively monitored and reported. The process for observing teaching and learning has improved, the judgements moderated and managers implement the actions required. Good practice is starting to be shared.

Teaching is improving. The observation process now includes progress reviews but it is too early to judge the impact.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for learners? Insufficient Progress

The service has made insufficient progress in improving its success rates. At the last inspection achievement and standards overall were satisfactory. Success rates for advanced apprentices were slightly higher than the national rate in 2008/09; those for apprentices have declined and are now well below the national rate. Timely success rates for advanced apprentices are good, well above the national rate. Timely success rates for apprentices have declined and remain low. Since the last inspection The Service has begun delivering a Train to Gain programme in health, public services and care. Learner numbers on this programme are small. Success rates are excellent.

Success rates on adult safeguarded learning programmes have declined over a three-year period, mainly due to low and declining retention rates. Learner numbers on these programmes have declined since the last inspection.

Learners are more aware of their own progress. They enjoy their training and are gaining relevant workplace skills. All learners use safe working practices and feel safe. The process for monitoring learners' progress has been revised significantly and support arrangements improved. The Service has established a small workshop to offer practical training in motor vehicle and joinery since the last inspection and recruited and developed staff to provide training in vocational areas.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the range of provision, particularly in foundation learning, and in promoting progression routes? Significant Progress

The Service has made significant progress in improving the range of provision. At the last inspection, response to community needs was satisfactory. Some 28 new programmes have been developed, including language delivery with two large employers. The Service continues to work effectively with learners from deprived areas and with learners who are vulnerable, for example, drug users, teenage mothers and homeless young people. At the last inspection, progression routes were not sufficiently well promoted. The Service has made significant progress in developing progression routes across all its work-based learning and adult and community provision. All work-based learning programmes now have a foundation level to support vocational learning. Learners on business administration programmes and childcare routinely progress from level 2 to level 3. Learners of ICT

have a wider range of programmes on offer. The Service works hard to encourage hard-to-reach learners to progress onto more advanced programmes in family learning. An on-line virtual learning environment has been developed to promote more widely the progression opportunities available and to support learners in more rural areas. All frontline staff have completed initial advice and guidance qualifications to help improve the advice and guidance provided for learners and better signpost progression opportunities.

What progress has been made in improving the monitoring and recording of learners' progress and in its arrangements for mentoring and early intervention?	Reasonable Progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the monitoring and recording of learners' progress and in the arrangements for mentoring and early intervention. At the last inspection, learning targets were set by learners but these were not always updated during reviews. In some work-based learning programmes, the quality of learners' progress and achievement records was inconsistent. A traffic light system has been introduced to monitor and record progress. The progress of each learner is discussed frequently by assessors and the head of service and any issues and necessary interventions are undertaken early to ensure learners stay on the programme. Employers and learners are actively involved in progress reviews and learners value this highly. An individual pastoral mentoring system has been introduced which has been successful in supporting some learners to stay on programme or to re-enter learning. Additional learning support is effectively integrated into all work-based learning programmes. These strategies have not yet had sufficient impact on overall success rates.

Leadership and Management

What progress has been made in extending and improving the effectiveness of partnership working?	Significant Progress
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Partnership working was judged to be good at the last inspection. Significant progress has been made. Effective partnerships with local colleges, other adult education services and a wide range of local providers and community groups continue to provide efficient and effective provision for many learners. Strong partnerships with five other local authorities have led to the development of a shared virtual learning environment which has gained a national award for outstanding collaboration. Frequent contact with partner schools, the foundation advisory team, extended services and the healthy schools team helps engage hard-to-reach learners.

Good links with other work-based learning providers, local employers and the local authority have led to a wide range of work placements, effective collaborative working and referrals, all of which benefit learners. Close working with Connexions advisors and Aim Higher helps promote progression routes. Good support is offered

to partners to enable courses and programmes to be provided in targeted communities.

The Local Authority has commenced delivery on the ESF Youth Participation programme, 'Skills4me', a programme with several partners. The Service's close working arrangements with the 'Skills4me' manager helps it play a strategic role in the planning and development of learning programmes for the 14-19 partnership. The service is working closely with schools and the local college to develop the new Diplomas and has good working relationships with a wide range of support agencies through its involvement with the NEET Reduction Partnership.

What progress has been made in meeting government requirements to secure adequate safeguarding arrangements?

Reasonable
Progress

The Service has made reasonable progress in securing adequate safeguarding arrangements. These were not inspected separately at the last inspection and health and safety overall were judged to be effective. Learners report they feel safe and they have a good understanding of who to go to with any concerns. The Service has introduced e-safety into learner induction and plans further sessions. At the last inspection, The Service relied on council-wide safeguarding arrangements. These have now been tailored to more closely meet The Service's needs. The policies and procedures are fit for purpose and provide clear guidance to staff. They have only recently been introduced and it is too soon to determine their impact. All staff have participated in appropriate basic safeguarding training. The designated safeguarding officer has received initial training and is now awaiting the further training required for her role. The Service makes all the necessary checks on employed staff and volunteers. Staff have their CRB number on their identity badge for easy reference. Extensive service level agreements are in place with partners. These include a requirement for enhanced CRB checks; however, there is no routine monitoring that checks have been undertaken. Good links are in place with the local safeguarding children's board and appropriate referrals and action have taken place when safeguarding incidents have occurred.

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