

blueSCI

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58579

Name of lead inspector: Dr Pamela Blackman HMI

Last day of inspection: 24 March 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. blueSCI is a very small learning provider which works with vulnerable learners on Train to Gain programmes. The centre has been in operation for five years offering services to the local community and people with personal mental health issues. Eleven learners are on literacy and numeracy programmes of whom nine are women and two are from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is the first inspection for blueSCI. The company has had funded learning since 2008. Recently blueSCI has not met its minimum levels of performance (MLP) and funding is being withdrawn from April 2011. Negotiations are underway to transfer the provision to another local provider from September 2011 when current learners have completed their programme.
2. blueSCI employs 11 staff, most of whom work part-time, including two directors, a centre manager and a full-time tutor. The staff are supported by a large number of volunteers who help deliver a range of educational and support programmes as part of the wider well-being service including counselling, art, horticulture, computer maintenance and a range of craft sessions. Fifty to 100 people use the wider well-being centre weekly.
3. In December 2010, the unemployment rate was 5.1% in Greater Manchester, compared with a national rate of 3.7%. The 2001 census showed that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is 8.9% in Greater Manchester, compared with the national average of 9.1%. The proportion of school leavers gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, in Greater Manchester in 2009/10 was 45.7% compared with 53.4% in England.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Preparation for life and work: Foundations for learning and life	11

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 4
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Capacity to improve	Grade 4
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Aspect	Grade
Outcomes for learners	4
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	4
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	2

Subject areas	Grade
Foundations for learning and life	4

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of blueSCI Skills for Life provision is inadequate. Managers provide limited strategic direction and leadership for the programme as it is not a priority within the overall well-being service. Outcomes for learners are inadequate, particularly the proportion completing within their planned timescale. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and blueSCI satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of its learners. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. The very vulnerable learners accessing the provision feel safe and protected from abuse. blueSCI promotes equality and diversity well and has some good initiatives to sustainably manage resources. Quality improvement arrangements are inadequate and target setting is poor. Value for money is satisfactory.

Main findings

- Overall outcomes for learners are inadequate. In 2009/10 success rates fell to well below the national averages. Current learners are making satisfactory progress towards their learning goals. Attendance is good. Learners enjoy their learning and develop good personal and social skills.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Sessions are well-paced, lively and interesting. Assessment of work is satisfactory. However, too few teaching resources are used to support learning and little use is made of technology.

- The range of programmes satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of learners. Learners have clear progression routes in order to progress. They have access to a good range of enrichment activities offered as part of the wider well-being programme.
- Partnership arrangements with employers are not a priority for blueSCI. However, it has developed a number of positive local partnerships for the benefit of learners.
- The personal and social support provided to learners is satisfactory but not effectively co-ordinated with the literacy and numeracy learning. The additional learning support on the literacy and numeracy programmes is insufficient to meet all learners' needs fully. Initial assessment is not effective.
- Leadership and management of the programme are inadequate. While the overall provision to support individuals with mental health difficulties is well received by the people who use the service, the provision of literacy and numeracy is not prioritised and little has been done to improve the provision over the last three years.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are satisfactory. blueSCI creates a very safe learning environment. Learners feel very safe and respected. blueSCI has taken appropriate actions to safeguard very vulnerable adult learners, including appropriate referrals when necessary. Although blueSCI currently does not keep a central record, all staff and volunteers have undergone the required checks.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place. The ethos of the organisation is about overcoming barriers to learning. Targets have been set to increase the number of male learners from minority ethnic groups accessing the programme.
- Quality improvement arrangements are inadequate. No self-assessment process is in place and quality improvement plans are now three years old. The collection, analysis and actions from learner feedback are underdeveloped and feedback from other stakeholders, such as employers, is not used. The use of data is poor and organisational targets have not been set to bring about improvements.
- blueSCI provides satisfactory value for money. Overall success rates, while unacceptably low, are showing an improving trend. The directors have been inventive in ensuring the organisation has sufficient funding to continue. blueSCI is committed to ensuring it uses its resources sustainably.

What does blueSCI need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates through better initial assessment to ensure learners are successful.
- Identify and provide for learners' additional learning needs by offering specialist learning support.
- Better integrate the literacy and numeracy programmes within the wider well-being activities by monitoring the whole learner experience.

- Develop further opportunities for learner feedback by more formal and systematic mechanisms.
- Develop a self-assessment process to include feedback from learners, staff and other partners.
- Collect and use data better by more consistent monitoring and reporting on targets.
- Secure a safe transition to a new provider at the conclusion of the Train to Gain contract.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- how they learn in the classroom by helping each other
- the very safe and secure environment in order to learn
- the positive, stimulating and fun sessions
- gaining a qualification
- the opportunity to develop understanding and confidence in maths
- the holistic approach and wide range of activities on offer.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the insufficient number of helpers in the classroom
- the insufficient amount of homework
- limited access to the computers they have
- the noise distraction from the music studio especially when taking tests
- the links to other sessions at the centre such as poetry
- the range and number of trips and activities focused on literacy.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- no response from employers.

What employers would like to see improved:

- no response from employers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

5. blueSCI has inadequate capacity to make and sustain improvement. This is the first inspection and blueSCI has done little to bring about improvements to the programme over the three years of its operation. Staff delivering the programme are not well supported by directors and quality improvement arrangements are inadequate.
6. Overall success rates are poor, particularly the proportion of learners completing within their planned timescale. blueSCI is currently not meeting its minimum levels of performance required by the Skills Funding Agency and its contract has recently been withdrawn. The very vulnerable learners do enjoy good personal support and feel very safe. For these reasons the 11 remaining learners will complete their programme with blueSCI before the contract is withdrawn.
7. blueSCI has not prepared or completed any self-assessment over the last three years. An initial development plan was in place in 2008 but this has not been updated. In preparation for the inspection blueSCI prepared a summary of its strengths and areas for improvement. While inspectors agreed with some strengths others identified were considered as standard practice. Inspectors agreed with the key area for improvement, but identified a number of other significant areas. The use of data is poor and no organisational targets have been set to bring about improvements.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 4

8. Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Success rates in literacy and numeracy for adult learners on part-time courses are low. Overall success rates have declined from 87% in 2008/09 to 54.5% in 2009/10. The proportion of learners completing by their planned end date has also fallen dramatically from 66.7% in 2008/09 to 14.3% in 2009/10. There are no discernable differences in outcomes for different groups of learners.
9. Most learners currently following a literacy or numeracy programme make satisfactory progress towards achieving their learning goals. However, a small number of learners are making very slow progress. These learners receive support from a volunteer support worker in their classes.
10. Attendance is generally good and learners are keen to progress. They enjoy their learning and are enthusiastic and motivated.
11. Learners are developing good personal and social skills. They can identify how improving their skills in literacy and numeracy will help them towards improvements in their personal lives and future employment. Most learners have increased their confidence and self-esteem since joining the programme.

Many have gained improved organisational and time-management skills. Most demonstrate commitment and responsibility to improving their economic and social well-being through regular attendance and participation in learning sessions.

12. Learners generally follow either a literacy programme or a numeracy programme and a small number have progressed to complete both. Five learners have progressed to a higher-level programme after completing their course. Four learners have progressed to gain positions as support volunteers at the centre.
13. All learners feel very safe. Learners speak very highly of the learning environment as being very safe, secure and welcoming. There is a strong culture of mutual respect. Learners have a good level of awareness of safety and the responsibility they have to themselves and others around them.
14. Many learners are able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being. The centre offers a varied weekly programme of taught and guided sessions to promote health and well-being. Sessions are run independently of the literacy and numeracy programmes and learners choose to attend any number of sessions each week.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory. Learners are taught in very small mixed-ability classes. Teaching is generally good and learners enjoy attending the sessions. The tutor has a good rapport with the learners and sessions are made lively and interesting. The pace of sessions is good. There is some differentiation in activities and questioning techniques are varied. However, the limited range of teaching strategies used does not fully meet the learning needs of all learners and there is little opportunity for learners to work in small groups or pairs. There are too few teaching resources and little use of technology to support teaching and learning.
16. Learners' progress in literacy and numeracy sessions is monitored satisfactorily by the tutor on a weekly basis. The tutor conducts learning reviews with each learner every eight weeks where overall learning goals, as identified in the learners' individual learning plans, are reviewed and discussed. Targets set are specific and easy for the learner to understand. Tutors set homework regularly and provide useful feedback on how to improve.
17. The range of provision is satisfactory. The part-time literacy and numeracy programmes offer learners the opportunity to build on what they have already achieved and extend the development of their skills and knowledge. Sessions take place in the day and there are coherent progression routes for learners to advance their skills should they wish to do so.
18. blueSCI does not undertake any work with employers but it does have a number of effective partnership arrangements in place for the benefit of

learners. Partners include Jobcentre Plus, Next Step, the disability advice service, and the local college. It also has a long-standing partnership with a nearby voluntary organisation where learners, for whom English is not their first language, are directed. The provision offered at blueSCI is responsive to local needs and the centre is inclusive and used widely by the community.

19. Care, guidance and personal support are satisfactory. However, literacy and numeracy support is insufficient to help all learners progress and be successful. All learners completing the initial assessment process are accepted onto the programme. However, the initial assessment process does not sufficiently identify their additional learning needs. Some learners' specific additional learning needs have not been identified and appropriate support is not being provided. One learner with dyslexia has not been offered support and is making slow progress with her literacy programme. Volunteers provide general support for some learners in the numeracy class. However, this support is generic as they are not qualified to provide specialist curriculum support.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

20. Leadership and management are inadequate overall. blueSCI managers, while effective in sustaining a supportive culture throughout the wider provision, are ineffective in raising learners' ambitions. The organisation has had to face a number of funding challenges in the last few years and the provision of literacy and numeracy programmes is one small part of the overall strategic direction. Consequently, blueSCI has not prioritised the Train to Gain programme to either staff or learners. The organisation does not set challenging targets and the collection and use of data are poor. Staff communication is satisfactory. However, because of funding issues staff have not been sufficiently developed and the programme has suffered as a consequence. Staff are vocationally well-qualified but have few training opportunities and have self-funded suitable qualifications. blueSCI has not replaced the consultant who originally managed the programme.
21. Satisfactory safeguarding arrangements ensure learners are in a safe environment. blueSCI prioritises safeguarding across the organisation. An effective policy is in place. However, the policy currently does not include procedures for disclosure or what to do if a staff member is implicated. Staff, including the designated officer, have undergone appropriate training. Allegations and disclosure of abuse follow local safeguarding guidelines. Vulnerable learners have a good understanding of their own safeguarding arrangements. blueSCI has made appropriate referrals with the more serious cases. Records indicate all staff have been suitably vetted and appropriate checks undertaken although blueSCI currently does not keep a centralised record of these.
22. blueSCI is good at promoting equality and diversity and tackling discrimination, particularly for those individuals who suffer from mental health difficulties. Recently blueSCI has appointed a minority ethnic outreach worker to ensure the provision is accessible to local Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities and

targets have been set to increase the participation of men from these communities. A women's-only day ensures that women learners from a range of minority ethnic communities are able to access the provision. All learners are very aware of the dignity and respect policy that permeates the whole organisation. blueSCI takes all complaints seriously and deals with them promptly. Diversity is positively embraced and celebrated.

23. blueSCI satisfactorily engages with learners to promote improvement. The main mechanism for learner feedback is the exit interview at the conclusion of the programme. The analysis is not specific to the literacy and numeracy programme and does not immediately identify key areas for improvement. Other ways of seeking learners' views are not undertaken systematically. A suggestion box is available at the centre and blueSCI has made some changes to the programme delivery following learner feedback. blueSCI does not work with any local employers and their feedback is not sought.
24. Quality improvement arrangements are inadequate. Little has been done in the last three years to evaluate and monitor performance and few improvements have been made as a result. No self-assessment has been undertaken and the analysis of data is poor. While an action plan was developed in 2008, this has never been updated and no targets have been set to improve performance.
25. blueSCI provides satisfactory value for money. While success rates have dipped during the last year to unacceptable levels, they are now improving. blueSCI has been inventive in ensuring financial viability. The organisation has secured funding from a variety of sources so it can continue to offer the wider well-being service for the benefit of people experiencing mental ill health. The centre is available to the whole community. Satisfactory learning resources are used to support learning. blueSCI has developed some good initiatives in relation to sustainability and has a commitment to recycling.

Information about the inspection

26. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's centre manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of comments from the Skills Funding Agency, data on learners and their achievement, and feedback from learners and staff.
27. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and reviewed learners' written work. They looked at questionnaires learners had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions.

<p>Record of Main Findings (RMF)</p> <p>blueSCI</p> <p>Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships. Blank column: insert DWP employability programmes (including Workstep), or Judicial Services or nextstep as appropriate</p>
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Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	11	11
Part-time learners	0	0
Overall effectiveness	4	4
Capacity to improve	4	
A. Outcomes for learners	4	4
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	4	
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	4	
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	3	
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social-well being through learning and development	3	
A3. How safe do learners feel?	2	
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3	
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a	
B. Quality of provision	3	3
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3	
B3. How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
C. Leadership and management	4	4
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	4	
C2. <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4	
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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