

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council Family and Community Education

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 52883

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Last day of inspection: 15 May 2012

Type of provider: Local authority

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

The Family and Community Education Service (the service) is part of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council’s Directorate of Children and Family Services. Funding received from the Skills Funding Agency provides adult and community learning programmes. The service offers a broad range of accredited and non-accredited courses. In 2010/11 there were 2,551 learner enrolments. Around 80% of learners are enrolled on non-accredited courses. In 2010/11, 12 subcontractors, all of who are from the voluntary and community sector, provided around 16% of the courses on behalf of the service.

At the last inspection in May 2010, inspectors judged overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, quality of provision, leadership and management, and capacity to improve to be satisfactory. Provision in family learning was good. Information and communication technology (ICT), and languages, literature and culture were satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the service made in improving the self-assessment process and using evidence to support the judgements?	Significant progress
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The last inspection identified the need for improvements in the use of evidence when evaluating the provision. The self-assessment process is now fully informed by a wide range of accurate and timely data and information. In the latest self-assessment report the service makes very good use of attendance, retention and success rates, and the results from the observation of teaching and learning to evaluate the provision. The use of performance benchmarks is well developed and systematic. A broad range of staff at all levels are involved in the self-assessment process. Tutors produce individual detailed course evaluations which are used very effectively to inform the service’s overall self-assessment report. The service’s moderation process for the course evaluations and the overall self-assessment report is particularly good. All those involved provide a good level of challenge for the course evaluations and self-assessment judgements. The moderation process includes the service’s managers and tutors and also Greater Merseyside Curriculum Improvement Group, Sefton Adult and Community Learning Service and Halton Adult Learning and Skills Development Service. The detailed and systematically implemented quality improvement plan has led to many improvements.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the service made to improve learners’ achievements on accredited and non-accredited courses?	Significant progress
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The last inspection identified that success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on long accredited courses were satisfactory, but they were low for adult learners. Since then, the service has taken a number of very effective actions to improve learner outcomes. Managers and tutors thoroughly monitor learners' attendance and take good actions to ensure regular attendance. Tutors make very good use of the much-improved data to monitor learners' progress and take very effective actions to improve the progress of any learner at risk of non-completion. Success rates on all long accredited courses, including functional skills, have improved significantly by 23 percentage points and are now satisfactory. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 are now high. Success rates on long accredited courses for adults have improved to above the national rate. Retention rates across all accredited courses in the current year are very high at 93% and even higher on non-accredited courses at 99%. In 2010/11, success rates on non-accredited courses were high. The service's data indicate that, while many learners are still on their courses and on-target to achieve, the in-year success rates are 86% which is 10 percentage points higher than the success rates at the same time last year.

Quality of provision

What progress has the service made to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

Reasonable progress

The last inspection found that teaching and learning were satisfactory overall, and included some good features. The service has made reasonable progress in further improving the teaching and learning practices. Since the last inspection, the service has fully reviewed the learners' course-specific initial assessment and ensured that all learners satisfactorily assess their own competencies against a number of criteria before they begin their course. However, not all tutors verify the learners' self-evaluations. The service systematically promotes the sharing of good practice between tutors and with other providers. The observation of teaching and learning, peer observations and coaching arrangements are effective in identifying and sharing good practice and improving teaching practices, especially for tutors with strong vocational experience who are new to teaching. The service has a clear strategy to increase the use of its virtual learning environment (VLE). All tutors have received satisfactory training on how to use the VLE. Learners on some courses, such as arts and crafts, have satisfactory access to a range of teaching and learning resources on the VLE. However, the service acknowledges that more needs to be done to increase the resources available on the VLE for learners on all courses.

What progress has the service made to improve the setting, monitoring and recording of specific targets for learners?

Reasonable progress

The last inspection found that tutors did not always set the learners sufficiently specific learning objectives and record their progress in relation to these targets. Since the last inspection, the service has taken a number of satisfactory actions to improve this weakness. Tutors have received training to develop, set and record learning targets and they are encouraged to develop and use individual learning plans suitable for learners and the courses. The service has also successfully involved learners in developing individual learning plans suited to their needs. Course files are

checked annually and where target-setting is identified as an issue, managers or other staff who are recognised as being experienced in target-setting support the tutors. For example, on courses in languages, literature and culture a group of staff carefully monitor the effectiveness of target-setting and plan for improvements. Target-setting and monitoring and recording of targets for learners are now satisfactory, although some tutors do not set sufficiently detailed learning targets. In some learner progress reviews, tutors do not provide clear details about what learners need to do to further improve.

Leadership and management

What progress has the service made to improve the process for observing teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, the service has improved its process for observing teaching and learning. All the tutors are observed annually by managers and, as part of the peer observation process, by other tutors. The process now includes a number of joint observations. However, some observers focus too much on teaching and not enough on learning, and in some observation records the identified strengths are normal practice. The service is aware of these issues and is working effectively to improve the observers' evaluations, for example, through detailed discussions to share practice between the observers. The service satisfactorily moderates the observation records for consistency of judgements against the given grades and is developing the moderation process further so that the accuracy of the grades is improved. The grades given to the teaching sessions in 2011/12 are more accurate than the grades given in 2010/11. However, the observation records do not always include sufficient judgements about some significant aspects of the sessions. For example, observers do not always comment on the individual learners' targets on non-accredited courses. The service has established good agreements with its subcontractors to monitor the quality of their teaching and learning and has conducted a number of joint observations with them.

What progress has the service made to promote equality and diversity in teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, tutors have received training in embedding equality and diversity in the teaching, training and learning processes. The service has developed a good range of resources to promote equality and diversity further, including a multicultural calendar, a number of case studies about the experiences of under-represented groups, awareness-raising quizzes and games, and guides on possible topics for discussion on equality and diversity themes. The service actively supports multicultural events and community festivals, for example, by including learners in these activities. On non-accredited provision, a specific week has been set aside to promote equality and diversity across all courses. The lesson observations carried out most recently comment on the impact of equality and diversity discussions within the sessions observed but in many of the earlier observations no specific examples were included. Inspectors agreed with the service's review of the record of lesson observations that the monitoring of the promotion of equality and diversity is not systematic and not always recorded. The service recognises that more needs to be

done to ensure that all tutors embed and promote equality and diversity further within their teaching and learning sessions.

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