

# Warrington Borough Council

## First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 55268

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**Last day of inspection:** 27 January 2015

**Type of provider:** Local authority

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## Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

### Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Warrington Borough Council following publication of the most recent inspection report on 16 December 2014, which found the provider to be inadequate overall. At the inspection, outcomes for learners and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged inadequate. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was judged to require improvement. Inspectors graded two subject areas; community learning was judged to require improvement and business administration and customer service was judged inadequate.

This first monitoring visit focused on the improvement action plan, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the management of subcontractors, the process for recording and evaluating learners' progress and achievement, and safeguarding.

### Themes

#### **What progress have leaders and managers made in producing and implementing a clear action plan to address the areas for improvement identified at inspection?**

Senior managers have produced an action plan that describes actions that they will take in response to the recommendations from the last inspection, and the expected outcomes. However, the actions are insufficiently specific and do not state precisely what improvements managers will make. For example, one intended outcome is that 'the quality and effectiveness of self-assessment is advanced', but no detail is provided about what managers will do to improve the self-assessment process. The action plan lacks any indication of timescales for completing the actions and does not specify at what points managers will review progress.

Managers record the progress that they have made on the action plan, but the statements only describe what they have done, and do not evaluate the impact of actions in improving the quality of provision. The record of progress so far shows that senior managers are not responding with sufficient urgency to the serious weaknesses identified at the last inspection.

Senior managers have provided two reports to the council's directorate management team on progress made against the improvement actions. However, these reports are insufficiently detailed or evaluative, and do not refer to the impact of early actions to improve the quality of the provision. Council members have not yet received any reports on progress made since the last inspection.

## Priorities for improvement

- The action plan should be re-written urgently. It must identify clearly the specific improvements that will result from successful implementation of each action. It should include timescales for implementing each action that include frequent review dates and a clear indication of expected progress at each review date.
- Senior managers must take action quickly to address the significant weaknesses identified at the last inspection. They must monitor closely and record on the action plan the impact of this action in improving the quality of provision and outcomes for learners.
- Monthly progress reports to senior officers in the council must provide a full and clear evaluation of the impact of actions that managers have taken to improve the provision. Council members should receive regular reports on the progress that managers are making in improving the provision.
- Senior officers and council members must challenge and hold senior managers to account for improving the quality of provision quickly.

## What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the management of subcontractors?

The management of subcontractors remains very weak. Senior managers are not aware of the performance of each subcontractor. They have given insufficient support to community learning managers, who are attempting to introduce improvements to the management of subcontractors. There remains a lack of clarity around individual managers' roles, responsibilities and levels of accountability.

Community learning managers have held a meeting with all subcontracting partners at which they reported on the findings of the last inspection and discussed planned improvements. They have carried out quality monitoring visits to all except one of the subcontractors. They have met with resistance to implementing planned changes from some of the subcontractors.

Subcontractors have yet to submit a self-assessment report for their 2013/14 provision. As a result managers are unable to collate these into an overarching self-assessment of the quality of the council's provision.

The process for monitoring the quality of subcontracting providers relies too heavily on brief visits to each provider and focuses insufficiently on assuring the rigour of the subcontractor's quality improvement arrangements. Reports following quality improvement visits are brief; they lack clarity and do not focus on the most important aspects that will improve the provision rapidly for current learners. They provide insufficient detail to the subcontracting provider about precisely what they need to do to improve the quality of provision.

The contract between the council and each subcontractor provides no information about the minimum level of performance that the council expects from subcontracting providers. The contract includes little reference to the council's expectations about the quality of many key aspects of provision such as recording learners' progress and achievement, promoting equality and diversity, and ensuring that all learners are safe. It lacks information about how the council will monitor quality or what sanctions it will put in place if performance is not good enough.

Managers are not aware of the details of courses that subcontractors are providing or the number of learners enrolled on each course. They do not check the timetable of courses that they receive from subcontractors is accurate. Inspectors tried to visit two sessions that did not take place at the venue and time indicated on the course timetable.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- As a matter of urgency, senior managers should meet with managers from each of the subcontracting providers and clearly state the council's minimum standards of performance and expectations regarding quality assurance arrangements and cooperation with council managers. They should confirm this in writing and include the information in the contract document. Managers should use the standards and expectations when carrying out visits to monitor the quality of provision.
- Quality improvement visits must have an increased focus on gathering first-hand evidence about the performance of each subcontractor. This will include visiting all centres frequently, carrying out lesson observations, evaluating the provider's records of learners' progress and achievement, and seeking learners' views. Managers must record the outcomes of the visits fully, identify clear actions and timescales for improvement, and monitor progress against these actions at subsequent visits.
- Managers should require subcontractors to provide a self-assessment report that covers all activity up to December 2014 as a matter of urgency. They should then use these reports to evaluate quickly and accurately the overall quality of provision, and identify actions for improvement.
- Senior managers must provide detailed written information to subcontractors about contractual requirements. This should include clear information about expected quality standards particularly in teaching, learning and assessment, monitoring and reporting arrangements, and sanctions for underperformance that include termination of contract if performance remains consistently poor. This information should be included as an appendix to the contract.
- Senior managers need to ensure that course timetables received from subcontractors are accurate.

## **What improvements have been made to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?**

Since the inspection, senior managers have made a number of staffing changes to enable them to improve the quality of provision. The service manager is now directly responsible for all the council's community learning and apprenticeship activity. The post-inspection action plan includes actions to improve initial assessment, target-setting, the assessment and recording of learners' progress, and the development of learners' English and mathematics skills. However, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in community learning remains weak.

Tutors use a wide range of activities well to motivate and interest learners and, as a result, most learners enjoy their lessons. However, not all tutors have high enough expectations about what their learners can achieve. Tutors make insufficient use of probing questions and additional activities to check and extend learning. Too much teaching provides insufficient challenge to the more-able learners to enable them to make rapid progress.

Initial assessment does not identify accurately learners' starting points, and tutors do not use it consistently to plan learning. Targets set for learners are often insufficiently precise and tutors do not always assess learners' progress rigorously enough or record the progress that they are making towards their personal targets.

Teachers pay insufficient attention to improving learners' English and mathematics skills. On several courses visited by inspectors, schemes of work included no reference to the development of English or mathematics skills.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved on the apprenticeship programme. Almost all of the 24 apprentices currently on the programme have achieved or are on target to achieve their qualification in the planned time.

Managers do not have a consistent approach to monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through observation of lessons. They observe lessons in a number of venues but rely on subcontractors to undertake many other observations. As a result, managers do not have an accurate overview of the quality of learners' experiences.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Managers should quickly put in place a programme of training and development for tutors to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This should include setting challenging targets for learners, planning and using activities that enable learners to achieve their potential, assessing and recording learners' progress, and developing learners' English and mathematics skills.
- Following training, managers need to monitor closely its impact on learners' experiences through lesson observations of tutors working for all subcontractors, scrutiny of learners' work, and analysis of progress records.

- Tutors whose performance remains below the required standards should receive intensive support to improve their practice, including additional training, mentoring and, when necessary, formal capability procedures.

### **What improvements have managers made to the process for recording and evaluating learners' progress and achievement on community learning courses?**

All subcontractors have attended training on recording and evaluating learners' progress and achievement but this has had little impact so far. Learners do not always understand the purpose of their weekly progress logs and do not always complete them fully or appropriately. Their personal targets are often too general and not linked to course objectives. Consequently, many learners do not make the progress that could be expected and are not always aware of the skills that they have gained. For example, learners who have been attending a drop-in workshop session for over two years have no complete record of the skills they have gained, improvements to their English and mathematics skills, or how they will use their learning to support them in their future lives.

Managers have identified actions to improve the accuracy and reliability of data on learners' achievement on community learning courses, but the data are still insufficiently robust. Managers do not check that information about learners' retention and achievement from subcontractors' registers and course documents is accurate before entering it into the council's recording system and using it to produce reports. Consequently, the data reports are currently of little value in managing the quality of the provision and holding subcontractors to account.

Managers carry out audits to check that subcontractors are complying with the requirement to record learners' progress and achievement on community learning courses. However, they do not evaluate consistently the quality of how well tutors assess and record progress and, as a result, do not have a clear picture of how rigorous the process is.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- The rigour of target setting and the recording and evaluating of learners' progress and achievement must improve quickly to ensure that learners make good progress. Managers should introduce an internal moderation process to ensure that tutors' assessment of learners' progress and achievement is accurate. They need to monitor consistently through lesson observations the rigour of target setting, assessment, and the recording of learners' progress and achievement.
- Managers must introduce a robust system for checking the accuracy and reliability of data that subcontractors provide on learners' attendance, retention and achievement.

- The evaluation of the accuracy of internal reports on retention and achievement must become much more robust. When reports are inaccurate, managers must quickly identify the reasons and take action to rectify the problems.

### **What actions have been taken to remove the gaps in safeguarding arrangements?**

All staff have undertaken training on safeguarding since the last inspection. The training provided useful information on how to identify and report safeguarding concerns. Training to provide staff with the skills and understanding they need to ensure all learners are safe when attending courses has not yet been carried out.

The risk assessment of the suitability of venues to deliver community learning remains insufficiently robust. Information from subcontractors is incomplete and managers do not check thoroughly whether the risk assessments carried out by community partners are sufficiently robust.

The learning environment in a minority of community centres is poor. In these centres, rooms are cramped and untidy, and frequent disruptions from other centre users make it difficult for learners to concentrate. Inspectors had serious concerns about health and safety at one of the community venues visited.

Staff still do not ask for proof of visitors' identity at all community venues. As a result, the safeguarding of vulnerable learners is insufficiently robust.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Tutors should attend further training on how to ensure all learners are safe whilst attending their courses.
- Managers must take immediate action to improve the poor learning environment identified by inspectors at some community venues.
- Managers need to ensure that all venues are safe and fit for the purpose of community learning. They must improve the risk assessment of venues by requiring subcontractors to carry out full risk assessments and by checking the accuracy of their risk assessment through visits to all venues. Where necessary, they should cease using inappropriate classrooms and venues.
- As a matter of urgency, staff at all venues must check the identity of visitors entering the premises or the classroom.

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