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Ms Lorraine Nicholson
Operations Manager
Access Training (East Midlands) Ltd
Cawley House
96 Cliff Road
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Dear Ms Nicholson

Short inspection of Access Training (East Midlands) Ltd

Following the short inspection on 4–5 November 2015 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in May 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

In March 2014, the ownership of Access Training changed. The three housing associations ownership group (3 Together) continue to maintain the good quality of education and training since the last inspection. As a result, success rates for apprentices remain high. The ownership group is committed to the delivery of high-quality teaching, learning and assessment for all its tenants, learners and apprentices and to providing excellent learning and development opportunities for the local communities it serves. Managers and staff have productive relationships with other housing associations and local employers, and good connections with the local enterprise partnership (LEP) and a broad range of support agencies. Leaders and managers are focused on developing a curriculum that supports the group's business needs, as well as both local and national skills priorities; this is well understood and supported by all staff. Apprentices and learners acquire good personal and employability skills in a safe, open and mutually respectful learning environment where they can develop confidently. All staff have high expectations of apprentices and learners and, as a consequence, attendance and punctuality are good and the standard of work is high. Overall success rates for apprenticeships are high.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have established a culture with safety firmly at the centre of everything they do. They have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and swift action is taken to safeguard learners. Policies and procedures are sound. Staff training and the arrangements to monitor radicalisation, harassment and bullying, and prevent apprentices and learners from involvement, are strong. Managers have put in place a good safety development plan that is understood well by all staff. As a consequence, learners display a good understanding of how to protect themselves from harm and radicalisation. Arrangements and actions to protect the most vulnerable learners are well established. You have strong links with local police and social workers that managers are using particularly effectively to ensure apprentices and learners at risk of harm are referred quickly for support. Staff conduct risk assessments of training environments and workplaces well and, as a result, apprentices and learners feel safe.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers monitor closely the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have introduced a new comprehensive strategy that requires more frequent observations with equal focus on both learning and assessment in classrooms and workplaces, to ensure that the quality of sessions continues to improve. Tutors and assessors use a good variety of activities to motivate apprentices and learners and keep workplace and classroom sessions interesting and relevant. As a result, apprentices and learners are able to reflect well on their own learning. Technology-based learning and assessment are used effectively by staff, apprentices and learners to monitor progress and develop independent learning skills. For example, apprentices following the supporting teaching and learning qualification explore different types of educational approaches from across the world and compare them to their own work settings.
- Since the last inspection, you have successfully implemented 16–19 study programmes. Learners develop good employability skills through work experience that matches their needs particularly well. They develop a good work ethic and work-related behaviour that allows them to improve their attendance and punctuality. Tutors plan highly effective learning sessions to engage learners who often have challenging personal circumstances or additional learning needs. Learners' knowledge and understanding are developed effectively through discussions and independent research using readily available technology. Construction learners develop a good range of technical and practical skills beyond their study programme level as a result of very effective one-to-one support and excellent coaching of trade skills. Animal care learners enjoy their courses and appreciate the opportunity to learn new skills by caring for a wide range of animals. They apply their theoretical knowledge well when considering animal care needs. However, not enough learners progress from study programmes to apprenticeships.

- Since the last inspection you have improved target setting. Staff now set appropriately challenging and detailed action points for the majority of apprentices and learners, which help them to make good progress. Verbal and written feedback from staff provides clarity of areas for improvement and apprentices and learners are clear about what they need to do to progress. Target setting is particularly good, involving the apprentice, the employer and the assessor, who collaborate well to meet specific programme and workplace needs. Staff set well-focused targets to support individual learning in English and mathematics lessons; learners are clear about the importance of developing these skills to support their employability. Apprentices and learners would benefit from more explicit identification of the skills they develop as they progress through their programme of study. For example, childcare learners make good progress generally in their knowledge of the sector but they struggle to explain what specific skills they develop when looking after children.
- You have successfully implemented strategies to help learners and apprentices to overcome barriers and to improve their English and mathematical skills. As a result, achievement in functional skills in these subjects is good. Learners who have low entry levels or low GCSE grades in English and/or mathematics are supported well to achieve functional skills at an appropriate level and then progress further. Learners on study programmes develop a good standard of technical language and writing skills that they apply effectively in their workplace, particularly in care and clinical services. Construction learners are able to work on mathematical calculations to determine volumes of cement needed to construct block walls or exacting wood dimensions required to produce halving joints, culminating in a high standard of bricklaying and joinery. Tutors care about their learners and provide good individual support to overcome barriers to learning and improving English, mathematical and employability skills. However, not enough learners studying GCSE English and mathematics are achieving higher grades.
- In the 2014 self-assessment report, you identify that initial assessment of learners' skills requires improvement. You have improved procedures considerably and all potential learners now undertake diagnostic testing and receive detailed information about their programme prior to commencement. These improvements ensure that programmes meet learners' needs more closely. Results of the initial assessment of learners' skills inform the way in which the programme is taught and also indicate what support individual learners need.
- Managers and staff have established good links with other providers, schools, Connexions and the local authority. These links give potential learners good access to information, advice and guidance about the programmes on offer. Although apprentices and learners do receive guidance at the end of their programme of study, progression routes are not clearly identified and therefore they are not always prepared well for their next steps.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and directors should ensure that:

- individual learning targets clearly identify the knowledge and skills that apprentices and learners must develop
- staff use data on leavers' destinations to prepare apprentices and learners well for their next steps
- more learners achieve high grades at GCSE in English and mathematics
- more learners progress from a study programme to further education, apprenticeships or employment.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Hamp
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by the operations manager as nominee. We met with directors, the managing director and senior managers. We visited two sites to observe teaching, learning and assessment and looked at apprentices' and learners' work. We held meetings with learners, staff and employers and reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding.