

Merton Adult Education

Local authority

Inspection dates

17–20 November 2015

Overall effectiveness**Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Outcomes for learners

Require improvement

Adult learning programmes

Require improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications is too low.
- On community learning programmes learners' individual targets are often too broad, and do not identify exactly what learners are aiming to achieve.
- Managers' self-assessment is not evaluative enough, and action plans for improvement lack measurable targets with dates for achievement.
- Teachers do not make enough use of the results of the initial assessment of learners' skills to set targets and plan learning so that learners make good progress.
- Arrangements for evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and learning are not fully effective.
- Community learning programmes are not linked well enough to employability courses or careers guidance.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners on community learning programmes develop good practical skills and the standard of their work is good.
- Attendance is good, and learners arrive well prepared, well equipped and keen to learn.
- The council has focused strongly on seeking the views of learners about the future of the provision.
- Displays of learners' work are used effectively to promote equality and diversity, and fundamental British values.
- Learners enjoy their programmes, work collaboratively and share and celebrate each other's successes.
- Learners on courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) quickly develop good language skills, and confidently use these to debate topics in lessons.
- The majority of learners benefit from prompt, effective and sensitive support during classroom sessions.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Merton Adult Education (MAE) is a London Borough of Merton service and a division within the council's community and housing department. The head of community education manages the service and reports directly to the director of community and housing. The majority of courses are offered at the main centre but a number of courses are provided in partnership with other organisations in venues such as libraries, children's centres and other community locations across the borough.
- About two thirds of MAE's learners are on non-accredited community learning courses, with the other third on courses leading to qualifications. Most of the courses leading to qualifications are in the area of preparation for life and work, and almost all learners are adults.
- The 2015/16 academic year is the final year that MAE will offer adult education directly; from September 2016 all of the provision will be offered via subcontractors. At the time of the inspection MAE had started to develop its arrangements for selecting subcontractors and a project team was in place.
- Merton is an outer London borough, characterised by the difference between the poorer, more deprived east of the borough (Mitcham) and the wealthier, more prosperous west (Wimbledon).

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications by making better use of initial assessment of learners' skills to set targets and plan individual learning.
- Improve teachers' ability to help learners to set their own meaningful, measurable and ambitious targets on community learning programmes so that their progress can be more accurately evaluated.
- Ensure that the observations of the quality of teaching and learning both accurately evaluate the strengths and areas of improvement in sessions, and act as an effective mechanism for staff development and improvement.
- Ensure that managers' self-assessment is sufficiently evaluative and that improvement plans have clear and measurable targets for improvement.
- Ensure that the review of provision is used effectively to refocus community learning programmes more strongly towards employment opportunities and the development of work-related skills; accelerate the rate of response to the government's priorities for community learning, and make better use of links with other providers to develop good practice.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not secured improvements in outcomes for learners taking qualifications; the achievement of qualifications has declined over the last three years. Learners on community learning programmes make good progress in lessons, developing their existing skills and acquiring new ones. Many progress from being complete beginners to producing work of a professional standard. However, systems for recording learners' prior learning and monitoring their progress towards achieving clear, specific and individual targets are not sufficiently robust; they do not enable tutors and managers to accurately measure learners' progress from their different starting points.
- Council managers acknowledge that they have not responded rapidly enough to the government's changing priorities for adult learning. Although the proportion of learners on programmes leading to qualifications, including those in English, mathematics, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and information and communication technology (ICT), has increased substantially since the last inspection, there has been too little focus on developing the wider work-related skills for community learners. As many learners continue learning on the same courses and subject areas, often for several years, it is difficult to ascertain how well the provision enables learners to gain the skills needed to progress to higher levels of education or sustainable economic activity.
- Self-assessment requires improvement. In the self-assessment report, managers describe the provision and actions taken, rather than identifying the strengths and areas for improvement. Their evaluation of the quality of provision for last year was overly optimistic. Managers identify appropriate areas for improvement within quality improvement plans, and review progress regularly; however, few quality improvement plans have sufficiently clear and measurable targets for improvement. It is not always evident how the actions proposed will lead to improved provision or better outcomes for learners.
- Managers regularly review the quality of teaching and learning both by carrying out graded lesson observations and, increasingly, through the use of short, themed observations. However, observers focus too much on teachers' knowledge and activities, and not enough on the effect of teaching on learning and progress by individual learners. Observers identify weak teaching accurately; however, they are too quick to judge teaching and learning to be good based on the performance of the teacher rather than the progress learners make. This hinders the effective use of the outcomes of observations to contribute to staff development activities.
- Managers implement good systems for ensuring that the staff they recruit have appropriate expertise; as a result, the large majority of teachers have very good skills in their vocational subjects. Teachers are enthusiastic and keen to share their skills and knowledge. They understand well how to correct learners' practical work and can demonstrate very skilfully how to carry out tasks and how to correct mistakes.
- Managers take prompt action where teaching is weak, and provide good support and training to help teachers improve. If improvement is not swift managers take action to safeguard standards for learners, usually by terminating contracts or redeploying staff.
- The service responds very effectively and promptly to external partners who identify particular needs in the community. For example, managers adapted art and craft provision to meet the needs of clients referred by the Stroke Association. These courses are very well received and meet specific needs within the local area.
- Staff promote equality and diversity well; the service creates an inclusive and harmonious centre, where learners feel safe, and enjoy learning, meeting and working with people of different backgrounds. Managers have revised policies and procedures to include the promotion of fundamental British values, and incorporated this into training for teachers and inductions for learners. Teachers are aware of their responsibilities to promote learners' understanding of equality, diversity and British values, though not all are yet fully confident in how to achieve this in their own subject area and lessons.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The council has conducted a thorough review of the adult education provision in the borough and developed well-considered plans to secure the future of the service. The review included extensive consultation with the community, partners and learners, to gain their views on current strengths and how the service should be developed.
 - The process of commissioning new providers to offer all of the adult education provision from September 2016 is well underway. Managers and elected council members see this as a valuable opportunity to realign the provision to meet more effectively the needs of residents in different parts of the borough, and to ensure that the curriculum is closely aligned to the government's priorities and local employment needs.
 - Senior council managers and elected members review the quality of adult education regularly. This

oversight is at a high strategic level, and council members acknowledge current difficulties in achieving a more detailed evaluation of quality and outcomes at individual subject or type of learning level. The council is seeking to strengthen quality assurance and oversight as it moves to the new commissioning arrangements.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**

- Service managers ensure that appropriate criminal records checks and other vetting of staff are carried out and recorded; regular training ensures that managers, staff and teachers are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and how to report any concerns identified. Training has now extended to developing staff awareness of their role in preventing extremism and radicalisation.
- Staff raise learners' awareness of how to stay safe, including online safety, and their understanding of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism, through induction and via well-signposted information in the learners' handbook and displays around the college. Learners' own work is used very effectively in these displays to communicate key messages to other learners. These activities ensure that learners are encouraged to think about the meaning of British values and to play a pivotal role in how these are promoted by MAE.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Teachers' initial assessment of learners' skills is thorough and they record results well. However, teachers do not use the results of initial assessment well enough to develop individual goals with learners or to plan learning. In too many cases learners' targets lack detail and clarity, and do not state exactly what the learner is aiming to achieve. Targets are commonly too vague, such as 'improve watercolour painting' or 'make and repair furniture', and this makes it difficult for teachers and learners to accurately assess whether they have been achieved. Targets for disabled learners or those with learning difficulties are mostly only related to their behaviour in lessons.
- In too many cases, where learners are working towards qualifications, teachers do not mark learners' work with sufficient care, and occasionally incorrect answers are marked as correct. When marking learners' work teachers do not include sufficient detail to help learners develop, or focus sufficiently on correcting their use of English. In a few cases teachers' verbal feedback lacks clarity and learners do not understand it well enough. Too much of teachers' verbal feedback is about motivating learners and not enough contains specific information about how they can do better.
- In lessons for disabled learners and those with learning difficulties, teachers often have groups of learners with wide-ranging differences in needs and abilities. In these cases teachers do not always have enough learning support assistants to enable them to meet the needs of all of the learners present. This results in a small minority of learners losing focus and spending long periods of time working on one task.
- In weaker lessons, the pace of learning is slow and learners become bored. In these lessons teachers do not use learning activities sufficiently well to inspire learners or provide them with sufficiently demanding activities. As a result learners make slow progress.
- In better lessons, teachers use their skills well to motivate learners and inspire them. This results in enthusiastic learners who attend their classes well prepared and keen to learn. In ESOL lessons learners confidently discuss and debate complex subjects and develop fluency in using their language skills. Learners benefit from good resources and teaching environments in practical craft lessons.
- Learners enjoy their learning, and on community learning courses develop very good skills. Teachers are often highly skilled in their vocational subjects and manage lessons particularly well to ensure learners develop good practical and craft skills. They are often very adept at working around the class, dividing their time between learners very effectively. Teachers and teaching assistants provide prompt, effective and sensitive support for learners. They know their learners well and ensure that support is provided at the appropriate level for individual learners. Since most community learning classes include learners with a wide range of abilities, teachers are often skilled at switching between helping complete beginners and advising and guiding more experienced learners.
- Teachers use technology well in their lessons to support learning. For example early years teachers use technology well to provide additional resources, links to additional activities and information about the childcare industry.
- Learners feel safe and understand their rights and responsibilities. Teachers pay very good attention to health and safety; for example, disabled learners and those with learning difficulties have very good awareness of how to keep themselves safe when using knives and other equipment during cookery sessions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

- Although MAE offers a small number of short courses in work-related skills, these are not linked well enough to the remainder of its provision. As a result learners do not benefit enough from work-related learning and too few learners see the connection between the skills they are learning and employment opportunities. The large majority of learners working towards qualifications are on courses in English, mathematics and ESOL, and as, in the majority of cases, their achievement is low they do not always develop the skills they need to progress.
- Where learners take advantage of the careers advice provided by MAE they receive very good advice and guidance. However, staff do not ensure that sufficient learners benefit from this opportunity.
- Attendance is good and learners arrive ready to work and keen to get started with their sessions. They make sure they have the right equipment and start work purposefully immediately they arrive. Learners with caring responsibilities or those with children sometimes arrive late, but teachers have a good understanding of the difficulties they face and have good strategies in place to ensure that late arrivals do not disrupt the class.
- Learners, particularly on community learning courses, take pride in their work and develop their confidence to ask questions and contribute to class discussions.
- Learners on community learning courses enjoy sharing and celebrating each other's successes and commiserating when work goes less well. They work well together and more experienced learners who have already developed good practical skills and knowledge are keen to share their knowledge and help those less experienced. This results in a very welcoming and good-natured environment where beginners feel safe to ask for help, and more experienced learners improve their self-esteem and confidence by sharing their skills.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Although the large majority of learners complete their courses, overall achievement for learners working towards qualifications has declined over the last three years and is below that for other similar providers. Very few learners progress to employment.
- Disabled learners and those with learning difficulties make slow progress towards independence. The outcomes measured by managers for these learners relate largely to behaviour in class, so it is difficult to evaluate how well they gain skills which might support more independent living.
- The large majority of learners are on community learning courses and make good progress. They develop good practical skills and many produce work of a very good standard. A few progress towards running their own businesses selling and exhibiting the work they produce.
- Learners greatly enjoy their learning and value the time they spend at the learning centre. They benefit greatly from the chance to socialise; learners on ESOL courses gain an insight into different cultures and make good use of opportunities to develop and expand their knowledge of topical events. Learners on entry-level ESOL courses achieve very well and gain new language skills rapidly.
- There are no significant variations in the achievement of different groups of learners, such as between male and female learners or those of different ethnic backgrounds.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,894
Principal/CEO	Ged Curran
Website address	www.maec.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	2	214		203		30		
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
					449			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Jo Parkman, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Janet Mercer	Her Majesty's Inspector
Derrick Baughan	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rob Mottram	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Murrie	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the head of community education, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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