

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Local authority

Inspection dates:**13–16 October 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	Good
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Requires Improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- On accredited adult learning programmes, the proportion of adults achieving qualifications was low in 2013/14.
- On non-accredited programmes, tutors do not apply the success criteria consistently: target setting and progress monitoring for learners varies in quality too much.
- Staff too often do not provide sufficient, detailed feedback to learners about errors or specific improvements they need to make.
- Tutors do not routinely develop learners' English and mathematical skills across the rest of the curriculum.
- Managers do not sufficiently monitor learners' progression from non-accredited programmes onto those leading to qualifications or jobs.
- Managers do not implement quality improvement actions rigorously enough to enable the service to improve rapidly.
- Managers do not manage staff performance robustly enough to tackle many weaknesses in teaching.

The provider has the following strengths

- Senior officers in the council have a clear and ambitious strategy to enable the service to make a significant contribution to improving skills, employment and community resilience.
- Managers have established a wide range of strong partnerships to target much of the provision at disadvantaged groups.
- Most learners on accredited programmes make at least the progress expected of them. Learners on English and mathematics courses make good progress.
- Tutors in English and mathematics lessons use the results of initial and diagnostic assessment well to ensure that teaching meets learners' individual needs.
- Learners grow in confidence and self-awareness. Most learners develop appropriate attitudes and behaviour for learning.
- Tutors are particularly effective at using their knowledge and skills to improve learning through informative demonstrations, particularly in practical lessons.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) manages Sefton Community Learning Service (SCLS) within its investment and employment division. The service also engages two subcontractors to provide programmes throughout the borough. The service offered a range of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities, funded by the Skills Funding Agency, to 2,421 adults in 2014/15. Programmes are offered in 70 venues, including libraries, community centres, social services centres, children's centres, Sefton Carers' Centre and sheltered housing accommodation. Family learning is provided in 22 venues. Programmes are available in 11 subject areas. Approximately 10% of courses lead to qualifications.
- The unemployment rate across Sefton borough is slightly lower than the rate for the north-west of England, but matches the national average. The proportion of young people not in education or training is higher than the north-west average. More young people gain grades A* to C at GCSE than the average in the north-west and the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Establish a robust and consistent way of monitoring and recording learners' progress on non-accredited courses, by ensuring that all staff appraise success in the same way, base targets for learners on both course and personal objectives, and focus more on helping learners to progress into further and higher education or employment rather than repeating learning.
- Ensure that marking is accurate and that feedback to learners is developmental rather than just motivational.
- Make the service's quality improvement more effective, by ensuring that managers set and closely monitor realistic improvement targets for provision, and use the outcomes of lesson observations to improve rapidly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Improve the management of the performance of teaching staff by introducing a more robust appraisal process that identifies accurately what tutors need to do to improve their practice and closely monitors the improvements that they make.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Quality improvement arrangements are not yet rigorous enough to enable the service to improve rapidly. Managers have made significant improvements to the service's self-assessment process. Their evaluation of most aspects of the quality of provision is thorough and identifies accurately many of the improvements needed. However, the timescales for achieving many of the planned improvements are overambitious, and too many actions have not yet been completed.
- Performance management is not sufficiently robust to tackle many weaknesses in teaching. Managers' reviews of the performance of tutors do not result in sufficiently precise or accurate targets for improvement. As a result, too much teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Staff benefit from a range of relevant staff development opportunities, including training on the implementation of safeguarding and 'Prevent', the promotion of equality and diversity, and the integration of English and mathematical skills into other subjects. Managers have recently introduced a new performance review system and a more robust lesson observation process, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of these changes.
- Senior officers in the council and service managers have taken decisive action in recent months to improve and re-align the work of the service so that it more effectively meets the council's priorities for skills, employment and community resilience. They have produced a detailed and comprehensive strategic plan with clear objectives and ambitious and challenging targets. However, a few of these changes are taking longer to put in place than anticipated, and it is still too early to see the impact on improving outcomes for learners.
- The service has a wide range of strong partnerships with agencies such as children's centres, charitable organisations and other providers. These enable managers to target much of the provision successfully at groups of disadvantaged adults, such as parents living in deprived communities, people with ill health, and unemployed adults. The service has robust arrangements in place for managing subcontracts and ensuring that subcontractors provide high-quality learning that meets the needs of its target groups.
- Learners benefit from good advice and guidance that enable them to make informed choices about their next steps. They receive helpful guidance about opportunities to progress to the next level of study with other providers including local further education colleges. The service works closely with the council's information, advice and guidance service to provide careers guidance for learners on pre-employment courses. Managers do not monitor effectively the destinations of learners when they complete their courses, so are unable to evaluate the impact of advice and guidance on enabling learners to progress in their learning and in their careers.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Senior leaders have strengthened governance arrangements recently through the establishment of a board made up of senior council officers and other stakeholders. The new board receives detailed reports about the service's performance and provides good support and challenge to the service manager.
 - Elected members of the council with responsibility for the service's work are committed to ensuring that the service makes a positive contribution to achieving the council's priorities. However, they are not yet involved actively in monitoring the performance of the service and the quality of its provision.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Staff receive comprehensive information and appropriate training about how to ensure that learners are kept safe, including training delivered in partnership with Merseyside Police on radicalisation and extremism.
 - Learners and staff feel safe. They know how to report any concerns about safeguarding. Managers respond quickly to any concerns raised by staff and learners. All safeguarding incidents are resolved appropriately or referred to other relevant agencies. However, the recording of safeguarding incidents is not always rigorous enough.
 - Staff working in family learning settings where children are present, accompanied by parents or grandparents, have not always been assessed rigorously enough to confirm that they pose no risk. A minority of staff working in schools and children's centres had not had a recent disclosure and barring check. Senior council officers recognise this, and took appropriate action during the inspection to remove the risk, including temporary suspension of classes until satisfactory checks had been received.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- In too many cases, learners' personal targets are not sufficiently specific or challenging, and tutors do not routinely monitor and record learners' progress towards meeting them. Consequently, learners are not sufficiently aware of what they still need to do to achieve their personal targets.
- Tutors do not always systematically check learning during sessions. For example, in one lesson the teacher gave out instructions for a task and did not check that the learners understood them. As a result, learners did not complete the task until the teacher had gone round and explained it to them again, individually.
- Tutors' written feedback on learners' work is in too many cases insufficiently detailed; in a few cases, marking is incorrect or absent. As a result, learners are not sufficiently aware of the errors they have made or of the specific improvement they need to make to their written work.
- The service promotes an ethos of mutual respect and inclusion. However, tutors do not routinely reinforce or extend learners' awareness and understanding of diversity during lessons.
- In visual arts lessons, too many learners are repeating the same course year on year. As a result, they make insufficient progress in developing their existing skills further. Very few learners on these courses progress onto higher-level study. Too much teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement and, as a result, not all learners make rapid enough progress.
- Tutors work well with learners to establish a good learning atmosphere which engages and stimulates learners, and use a range of activities to ensure that learners' interest is maintained and their understanding is reinforced. However, they do not always make effective use of questions to help learners develop their own ideas and make progress.
- Tutors are particularly effective at using their knowledge and skills to provide successful demonstrations, particularly in practical lessons, to help learners understand the techniques needed to achieve the task. Demonstrations are clear and covered at an appropriate pace to enable learners to follow them. Learners benefit from these demonstrations by then applying the techniques themselves. Regular reinforcement by the tutor enables learners to continue to develop these skills.
- Tutors in discrete English and mathematics lessons use the results of initial and diagnostic assessment well to identify and meet learners' individual needs. As a result, much of the teaching in these subjects is well matched to learners' needs. Tutors are good at relating their subjects to everyday life. As a result, learners understand well the relevance and importance of English and mathematical skills. However, tutors in other subjects do not routinely develop learners' English and mathematical skills across the rest of the curriculum.
- Learners benefit from good support in most lessons. In practical lessons, tutors monitor closely the development of learners' skills. Prompt and effective support helps them to understand how they are progressing on specific tasks. For example, in a visual arts lesson, the tutor was very effective in helping learners understand the importance of correct measuring before they committed paint to paper. In an English lesson, the teacher and support assistants provided excellent support to six learners who had additional learning needs. However, in a few lessons tutors are not sufficiently supportive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Most learners grow in confidence and self-awareness. They value their increased skills and take great pride in their work. Learners recognise how to apply their new skills at home. For example, learners on mathematics courses develop skills that enable them to help their children with their homework, such as working out fractions and percentages. Learners on a British Sign Language course learn signs that enable them to communicate more effectively with deaf people they know.
- Learners benefit from the safe learning environment promoted by the service. They support the service's strict no-tolerance policy to bullying. They feel safe and understand the arrangements in place to protect them. They are knowledgeable about staying safe, including internet safety, healthy eating and healthy living. In a session on Spanish cookery, the tutor emphasised the importance of a healthy diet and advised learners not to add too much oil when frying vegetables.
- Almost all learners develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours for learning. Learners show a great interest in, and thirst for, learning. Classes are inclusive and provide a clear and easy way to learn and challenge each other. Learners are extremely positive about their experiences in lessons and are keen to contribute in class during discussions and in responding to tutors' questions. They support each other well in their learning. As a result, learning sessions run smoothly with very few disruptions.
- Learners mainly foster the culture of mutual respect and tolerance promoted by the service. They

enhance each other's learning through sensitive peer support, respectful listening and considering others' points of view during discussions. Many learners contribute work to local charitable causes and support the provision of a food bank within the main centre. Learners use their skills in the lessons to make products for charity causes. For example, on one course, the learners are making shoulder bags for carrying medical equipment to be distributed by a major cancer charity.

- Learners' rate of attendance during 2014/15 was low but has improved significantly within the current year. However, poor punctuality is still evident in a small minority of lessons.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- The service does not sufficiently monitor the progression of learners from non-accredited programmes onto those leading to qualifications or into employment. In 2014/15, the destinations of almost half the learners was either unknown or to a negative outcome. Many learners choose to return to follow the same programme of study for several years. Targets set by tutors within these classes do not reflect the prior attainment and abilities of many of these learners and are often not sufficiently challenging to drive learners to improve their skills and abilities and fulfil their potential.
- On accredited adult learning programmes, the proportion of adults achieving qualifications was very low in 2013/14. The council's data show that learners' success rates rose significantly in 2014/15 to be in line with those of similar groups nationally. Most learners on accredited programmes make at least the progress expected of them. The few learners who need extra help are well supported to succeed well. Learners on English and mathematics courses make good progress toward achieving their learning goals and their qualifications. They can demonstrate new skills and knowledge learned including applying different techniques for long division and skills in accurate approximation.
- Provider data for learners following non-accredited programmes show consistently high success rates. However, the arrangements for the recognition and recording of progress and achievement are not sufficiently reliable to validate achievement rates. Tutors do not apply the success criteria consistently, and learners experience too much variability in the quality of target setting and progress monitoring by tutors. For example, on visual arts and yoga courses too many learning targets are not specific or challenging enough. Consequently, learners do not make sufficient progress over time.
- Learners mainly produce work that is of the expected standard. Learners enjoy their learning during sessions and speak positively about their experiences and how they apply their learning at home, for example in helping their children with homework. A few learners make excellent progress. For example, in visual arts classes, learners demonstrate a good understanding of the topics of body proportions and perspective when engaged in life drawing and painting in watercolours. A few visual arts learners now exhibit their work professionally and sell work successfully.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,421
Principal/CEO	Steve Wainwright/ Margaret Carney
Website address	www.sefton.gov.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	
	Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18
	N/A	517	N/A	21	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14–16	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mersey Care NHS Trust ■ Merseyside 3rd Technology Sector 							

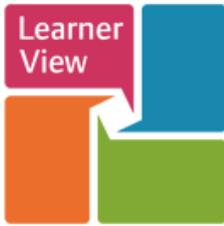
Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Bob Busby, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Hailstone	Her Majesty's Inspector
Derrick Baughan	Her Majesty's Inspector
Brenda Clayton	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the interim manager lifelong learning, 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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