

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



18 April 2017

Ms Siobhan Saunders
Divisional Manager Employment, Learning and Skills
Economy, Enterprise and Property
Room 21, Kingsway Learning Centre
Halton Council
Victoria Road
Widnes
Cheshire
WA8 7QY

Dear Ms Saunders

Short inspection of Halton Borough Council Community Learning and Skills Service

Following the short inspection on 15 and 16 March 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Halton Borough Council Community Learning and Skills Service was judged to be good in April 2013.

This provider is good.

You and your managers have maintained the good quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection. Learners and partners in Halton value highly the service's work.

You and your team have continued to place a high priority on recruiting learners who have high levels of disadvantage, face significant barriers to participating in education and training and face challenges in getting a job. You have continued to develop the provision well to improve the life chances of your learners and you respond effectively to the community needs in Halton. Your partnership working with employers is exemplary.

The vast majority of your learners make good progress on their courses and achieve well. However, on a few courses such as introductory courses in English and mathematics and early years and playwork, too many learners leave early.

You and your managers have tackled successfully the recommendations from the previous inspection. You have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the courses you deliver. The improvement action plan is robust, detailed and being implemented well. For example, having recognised that tutors on a minority of courses do not set learners clear individual targets, you have provided tutors with

training sessions, guides and samples of good practice to help them to improve their work in this area. However, the quality of learners' targets requires further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that your safeguarding policies and procedures, including those to protect learners from the risks of extremism and radicalisation, are fit for purpose and implemented well. Your staff act promptly and take appropriate actions when safeguarding concerns emerge. The recording of safeguarding incidents and responses, including referrals, is comprehensive.

Your managers have implemented successfully a detailed and high-quality action plan to reduce the risk of extremism and radicalisation to learners. All staff have received relevant training on keeping learners safe and their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. Through regular termly newsletters and meetings, your tutors improve their confidence in discussing the risks and threats associated with holding radical views. As a result, learners are generally well informed about safe practices and are confident about raising concerns. Learners are sufficiently aware of the risks associated with using the internet.

Inspection findings

- Courses are now aligned to support Halton residents' aspirations to enhance their social, economic and personal prospects. Managers work very effectively in partnership with many organisations, including Jobcentre Plus and local employers, to prepare learners to take advantage of the employment opportunities in Halton. New introductory courses in construction, traffic management and customer services help learners develop the skills required by local employers. The skills learned on these courses have enabled many learners to gain employment on the Mersey Gateway project. The provision for learners with mental health issues has improved these individuals' well-being and helped them to deal better with the symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Since the previous inspection, the arrangements to collect and monitor data and information about learners' progression to jobs has improved. Managers use this information well to improve the impact of the provision on communities in Halton, for example by offering introductory courses for learners who wish to gain jobs in care homes. However, you do not collect information about learners' progression into education in sufficient detail, for example information about the progression of learners to higher-level courses.
- Tutors' assessment of learners' achievements on courses that do not have formal qualifications is effective and accurate on most courses. The quality improvement arrangements, for the minority of courses where tutors' assessments are not robust, require improvement. Managers check the quality of tutors' assessments at the end of each course, but this is too late to make timely improvements. Consequently, learners on these courses are not aware of their progress during the course and are unclear about what they need to do next to improve their learning.
- Tutors are supportive of learners and recognise their starting points and their barriers

to learning. Most tutors plan activities that build on learners' previous knowledge and skills. As a result, most learners have clear individual learning targets that reflect their personal learning goals and course objectives, for example writing accurate letters appropriate for different purposes. However, the most able learners are not always given sufficiently demanding targets to ensure that they make good progress and work to the high standard that they are capable of achieving.

- In 2015/16, a high proportion of learners on both accredited and non-accredited courses achieved their intended outcomes. On a few courses, such as early years and playwork and introductory English and mathematics, too many learners left early as they were not sufficiently aware of the course content or what they would need to do to achieve these qualifications. Despite recent improvements, too many learners do not attend regularly or they do not arrive to their lessons on time. Tutors do not consistently set high expectations for learners' attendance and punctuality or link these essential attributes to learners' opportunities in getting a job.
- In 2015/16, considering the low starting points of learners, the proportion of learners who moved on to employment or further courses was good.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of learners who stay and complete their courses in early years and playwork, English and mathematics improves, so that these learners are better equipped to move on to employment or higher-level courses
- tutors set high expectations for learners to attend regularly and arrive to lessons on time, so as to emphasise the importance of the development of these skills for learners' progression into a job
- managers refine the existing quality improvement arrangements to ensure that all tutors complete reliable ongoing assessments of learners' achievements so that learners know what they can do and what they need to do next to make good progress
- managers improve further the arrangements for collecting information about the progression of learners to higher-level courses to inform future developments of the provision to meet the needs of the local community
- tutors set and record clear, measurable and demanding targets for learners, especially for the most able, and assess accurately their progress towards achieving them, so that all learners achieve their potential.

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

Yours sincerely

Shahram Safavi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by the divisional manager for employment, learning and skills, as nominee. We met a range of staff and learners. We observed lessons with your managers and looked at learners' work. We reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, and by seeking their views during on-site inspection activity.