

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Local authority

Inspection dates

6–9 June 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Adult learning programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- The proportion of learners who achieve accredited qualifications in entry level English and mathematics, hospitality and catering and business studies is high.
- Information, advice and guidance to support learners in preparing for their next steps in education, training, employment or working towards employment are good.
- Tutors place a high priority on the development of learners' English and mathematical skills. Consequently, learners develop and apply these skills quickly and skilfully.
- Learners have good attitudes to learning and develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem. They make good progress in their learning and are proud of their achievements.
- Highly effective relationships with a range of partners ensure that the provision meets local and national priorities and community needs, particularly for the most disadvantaged.
- Senior officers and governors have thoroughly reviewed the service and have successfully realigned it in order to meet the needs of the local community.
- Tutors skilfully plan learning to meet the needs of learners. Most learners are making good progress and completing their courses.
- Managers and tutors are highly committed to providing high-quality adult learning, particularly for those who are socially disadvantaged, long-term unemployed or have limited educational attainment.
- On non-accredited programmes, tutors do not set sufficiently specific learning goals for learners or monitor them frequently enough to demonstrate learners' progress.
- Feedback following assessment is not always detailed or specific enough to help learners improve their work.
- Quality systems are not yet sufficiently rigorous to improve the quality of provision across the whole service.
- Actions for tutors following observation of teaching and learning can be vague. Actions are not followed up systematically to help tutors improve their teaching practice.

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. Programmes are offered in 29 venues, including libraries, community centres and children's centres. Programmes are available in nine subject areas. Approximately 20% of courses lead to qualifications.
- The unemployment rate across the Sefton borough is slightly lower than the rate for the north west of England but matches the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- On non-accredited courses, improve the setting and monitoring of students' personalised learning goals to ensure that students make good progress in lessons and over time and achieve their goals.
- Strengthen quality assurance arrangements to improve the quality of provision across the whole service by ensuring that:
 - the quality improvement plan is evaluative and sharply focused on accurately identified strengths and areas for improvement in the self-assessment report
 - learners' destinations are easily and quickly analysed.
- Improve feedback to learners following assessment by ensuring that learners know the progress they are making and are given clear, detailed and specific guidance on what they need to do to improve.
- Improve teaching practice further by:
 - producing a detailed, and specific action plan for tutors following observation of teaching, learning and assessment that links clearly to key areas for improvement
 - monitoring action plans systematically to ensure actions are addressed rigorously.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior officers in the council are fully committed to supporting the service and ensuring that it fulfils the council's priorities for skills development, training for employment and meeting the needs of the local communities in Sefton. Senior officers and managers of the service are relentless in their determination to provide high-quality entry level, level 1 and level 2 courses to enable residents to re-enter the education system and complete their courses successfully.
- Following the previous inspection in October 2015, senior officers and governors initiated a thorough review of the service and managed the required improvements skilfully. Significant changes were made to the range of courses offered. A far greater emphasis was placed on the provision of English, mathematics and employment-related courses, with a considerable reduction in learning-for-leisure courses. Many staff left the service and a new head of service, three curriculum managers and other staff were appointed as a result of a detailed staffing review. Many remaining staff accepted new job roles to contribute successfully to the re-alignment of the service.
- Managers and tutors are highly committed to making learning attractive to adults who are socially disadvantaged, long-term unemployed or have limited educational attainment. They are united in their mission to provide high-quality adult learning programmes to enable people to develop personally and vocationally, and to progress to further learning, volunteering and employment.
- Staff development is good. Staff value their continuing professional development, which has had a beneficial impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and on learners' progress. Since the previous inspection, staff management has improved considerably. Managers promote positive working relationships between themselves, tutors and learners. Managers appreciate, and are responsive to, colleagues' opinions.
- Leaders' and managers' business development planning for 2016/19 is ambitious and forward looking. They successfully identify opportunities for developing the service progressively.
- Managers have developed good partnership working with a range of external organisations. By working closely with two subcontractors, they have increased the geographical reach of the service successfully and now deliver provision in socially and economically deprived communities. Management of subcontractors is good. Partnership working with children's centres is strong and participation in learning by parents and carers is good. For example, parents and carers are improving their skills in English and mathematics. Those who speak English as an additional language are becoming proficient in expressing themselves orally and in writing. As a result of their learning, parents and carers are now in a stronger position to support their children's development of English and mathematics.
- Managers have strengthened quality improvement arrangements since the previous inspection. For example, mandatory training sessions have been introduced for all staff and the quality of learners' files are regularly and thoroughly reviewed. Managers make good use of data at the fortnightly managers' meetings for scrutinising learners' retention, progress and achievements. However, the approach to recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement (RARPA) requires further improvement. Although learners'

destinations are now monitored more closely, the results cannot be easily and quickly analysed using different search criteria. The self-assessment report accurately identifies strengths and areas for development. The quality improvement plan is too descriptive and not focused sharply on accurately identified strengths and areas for improvement in the self-assessment report. Their impact on quality improvement is, therefore, limited.

- The process for observing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is systematic. However, observers place too little emphasis on what learners are learning and the progress they make. The reports are too descriptive and insufficiently evaluative and incisive. Action plans often lack detail and are not followed up routinely to ensure the required improvements are made.

The governance of the provider

- The board of governors has recently been restructured. Two governors have left and two new appointments made. Governors have a good and diverse range of experience and expertise. They are in a strong position to scrutinise the work of the service and to support and challenge the managers. Most governors have a lead role for an identified aspect of the service; for example, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; safeguarding; and personal development, behaviour and welfare. Other lead roles, such as outcomes for learners, have yet to be allocated.
- Governors meet monthly. They receive regular reports and are well informed about the work of the service. Reports of each meeting are compiled. However, the reports are not always detailed enough and agreed actions are not identified routinely and allocated to named governors.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers place a high priority on safeguarding learners and staff. They monitor the safety of learning venues successfully by carrying out risk assessments. The council operates a safer recruitment policy. Newly appointed staff are appropriately checked to ensure they are suitable for working with adult learners. New staff receive a good introduction to the service's safeguarding policy and procedures during their induction programme. The single central register is frequently updated and gives relevant, detailed information about all members of staff, including those employed by the two subcontractors. Policies are updated frequently to reflect current developments.
- Staff training sessions are held periodically and they focus on relevant topics such as female genital mutilation, the 'Prevent' duty, extremism and radicalisation. Very good links have been developed with Merseyside Police, who make valuable contributions to the staff training programme. The safeguarding lead has been appropriately trained.
- Relevant safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty posters are displayed in classrooms and public areas to alert learners and staff about the action to take if safeguarding issues arise. When incidents are reported, they are recorded efficiently and acted on rapidly. Managers and governors monitor safeguarding incidents at their meetings.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Tutors carefully plan learning and provide learners with highly personalised individual support that helps them develop their confidence and skills. They provide learners with an interesting and varied range of learning experiences. Tutors skilfully use high-quality learning resources to ensure that all learners, whatever their ability, make good progress. For example, mathematics tutors have designed a very effective mathematics toolkit, which is highly valued by learners and helps them revise for their examinations.
- Tutors very thoroughly assess learners' skills and abilities before, at the start of, and during their courses. They use a wide range of activities including interviews, spoken and written exercises and tutor observation to place learners on the appropriate level of course. Consequently, learners make good progress.
- Learners value highly the support they receive from staff. Tutors are patient and explain activities and tasks clearly. For example, in GCSE mathematics lessons, the tutor's clear and detailed explanations of how to use different formulae ensure that learners are confident in answering mock examination questions correctly.
- Learners develop their English and mathematics skills quickly and skilfully. For example, in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) lessons, learners use their good basic vocabulary to construct increasingly difficult sentences when asking for directions. In pre-entry English classes, learners' writing shows rapid progress and the accurate and confident completion of documents.
- Learners develop a good understanding of life in modern British society. Teachers successfully incorporate activities into their lessons to promote equality and diversity, and use current events to discuss subjects such as freedom of speech, tolerance and respect.
- Tutors set learners challenging targets at the start of lessons and review them at regular intervals to assess individual learner progress; however, tutors do not consistently link these to learners' RARPA targets. Learners routinely record their progress in learning logs at the end of lessons but tutors often do not leave enough time for this which results in brief, rushed comments that have little value for learners or tutors.
- Tutors assess learning skilfully during lessons through activities such as observation and practical tasks. However, a few tutors do not challenge learners well enough. For example, tutors do not encourage learners to expand on their answers and extend learning.
- Learners respond well to the detailed, specific supportive and helpful oral feedback they receive from tutors in lessons. Learners use the feedback competently to make improvements to the quality of their work. Feedback on learners' work is often insufficiently detailed or specific and does not help learners improve their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners have good attitudes to learning, are well prepared for lessons and arrive punctually. They develop skills which enable them to become independent learners and often ask for additional work to complete outside of lessons so they can practise their skills at home.
- Learners enjoy their learning and are positive about the new skills and knowledge they

gain. They develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem; for example, when they complete mathematical calculations of increasing difficulty. Learners are proud of their achievements and produce work of a high standard.

- Tutors and staff provide good information, advice and guidance for learners to prepare them for their next steps in education, training or employment on completion of their courses. The introduction of the 'progression ladder' provides learners with information about higher-level or related courses at SCLS or other venues such as the local further education college. As a result, increasing numbers of learners progress to accredited courses.
- Learners develop good skills for employment as they improve their English, mathematics and information technology skills. Employability courses help learners to develop high-quality curriculum vitae and covering letters and prepare them well for interviews. Learners on courses such as dressmaking develop good technical skills as they use dressmaking patterns to make children's clothes to exacting standards.
- Tutors skilfully develop learners' English skills as they discuss technical terminology such as the definition of assertiveness in employability classes. Learners use mathematical skills well and are able to apply their learning in context. For example, a learner in a mathematics class reported that she could now measure accurately how much flooring she needs for a room in her home.
- Learners demonstrate a good understanding of the values of living in modern Britain. They listen carefully to, and respect the views of, others. Learners discuss the rule of law in relation to recent terrorist attacks and have a good understanding of the threats of radicalisation and extremism.
- Learners feel safe and are kept safe. They know to whom they should report any issues or concerns they may have. Very good support for learners who have a range of complex needs ensures they receive effective care and support through either SCLS or referral to external agencies.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Achievement rates for entry level English and mathematics qualifications are high. SCLS data shows that achievement rates have remained high. Achievement rates for business and catering and hospitality qualifications are very high.
- Leaders and managers analyse carefully the performance of different groups of learners. Where gaps in achievement have been identified, managers implemented successful actions to reduce them. As a result, there are no significant achievement gaps between groups of learners.
- Managers monitor closely the progression of learners from non-accredited to accredited programmes. The proportion of learners who progress to accredited courses has increased year on year since the last inspection. The service has clear progression routes in SCLS, with partners or at local further education colleges. Managers and tutors plan carefully with learners their next steps in education or training, or towards employment.
- Achievement rates for the small proportion of learners on functional skills English and mathematics qualifications at levels 1 and 2 were low in 2015/16. Managers correctly identified that the low achievement rates were attributed to ESOL learners who were

incorrectly placed on functional skills English and mathematics programmes and, consequently, failed their examinations. Managers successfully introduced ESOL programmes with progression to functional skills English and mathematics at entry level, level 1 and level 2. Current learners are making good progress. SCLS's own data shows significant improvement in achievement rates for functional skills in English and mathematics at level 1 and 2.

- Managers routinely collect information about learners' destinations. However, managers do not analyse systemically the destinations of different groups of learners; for example, learners on short or long courses or those who attend courses at subcontracted provision. Managers have skilfully removed learners who repeat the same courses for several years. The introduction of learning clubs has resulted in many of these learners progressing to specialist groups, such as fine art, where they can develop their painting skills further and sell their artwork through public exhibitions.
- SCLS's data for learners following non-accredited programmes shows very high success rates. The arrangements for RARPA have improved significantly since the last inspection. However, RARPA varies considerably across courses. Success criteria are often too generic and aimed at the whole group rather than meeting the individual needs of learners. Most learners make good progress.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54317
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,865
Principal	Andrew Clayton
Telephone number	0151 934 4635
Website	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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	175	-	31	-	-	-	-
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			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	N/A							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	N/A							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Merseyside 3rd Technology Sector Rotunda							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal as nominee. 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 learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Sylvia Farrier	Ofsted Inspector

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