

Merton Adult Education

Local authority

Inspection dates

13–16 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- On courses leading to qualifications, the proportion of learners who successfully complete their studies is declining and is too low.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have not managed to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Staff do not provide learners with enough information about how to keep themselves safe and the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation.
- Tutors do not use the results of the assessments of learners' skills well enough to teach lessons which meet the needs of all learners.
- Managers do not ensure that their evaluation of the quality of provision is matched closely enough to the evaluation by managers at their main subcontractor. As a result, managers do not have a full overview of the areas for improvement.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners on community learning courses develop good practical skills and produce work to a high standard.
- Leaders and managers have taken bold and effective steps to restructure the service through a subcontracting arrangement with a local college to secure its long-term future. In doing so leaders and managers have secured the long-term future of adult education for local residents.
- Learners with an identified learning difficulty and/or disability make good progress in developing the personal and social skills they need to live more independently.
- Learners benefit from effective information and guidance at the start of their course, which ensures that they are on the correct course to meet their career or personal goals.
- Leaders and managers have successfully changed the subjects offered to meet the needs of local residents. In doing so, more learners access courses in order to gain employment.
- The proportion of learners who achieve a grade 4 or better in GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics has improved and is high.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Merton Adult Learning (MAL) forms part of the London Borough of Merton service. The borough is characterised by a difference between the more deprived east, Mitcham, and the more prosperous west, Wimbledon. From September 2016, all of the courses are taught by subcontractors, the main one being South Thames College, with the exception of a small proportion of courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- About two thirds of MAL's learners are on community learning courses and the other third are on courses leading to qualifications. Most of the courses leading to qualifications are in subjects which help learners gain employment.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is of a consistently high standard by ensuring that:
 - tutors make better use of information gained prior to the start of the course to plan and teach lessons which meet the needs of all learners
 - targets set with learners are meaningful, measurable and achievable and that learners know exactly what they need to do to achieve these targets.
- Staff should inform learners how they can keep themselves safe, in particular in relation to the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation.
- Ensure that leaders and managers use the evaluation of teaching and learning observations to help improve teaching practice.
- Ensure that leaders and managers from the service work more closely with those of its main subcontractor, to ensure that they evaluate the quality of provision together, share a common view on the strengths and areas for improvement, and use their evaluation to raise standards.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have completed a thorough review of the adult education provision. They have successfully restructured the service and, working primarily with one local college, have subcontracted out most of the courses. In doing so, they have secured the financial viability of the service and ensured that Merton residents continue to have access to learning opportunities.
- Following the implementation of the 'Bridging the Gap' adult learning strategy and the effective use of data, leaders and managers are commissioning more practical and skills-based courses from subcontractors. The new courses are targeting the more deprived areas of the borough in order to improve the life chances of adults in those areas.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors judged that the overall effectiveness of the service required improvement. Since then, leaders and managers have not been successful in raising the standard of teaching and learning sufficiently. As a result, the proportion of learners who successfully gain their qualifications on accredited courses has declined and the service continues to require improvement.
- Following the restructuring of the service, the largely new management team has responded well to challenges caused by this transition and has ensured the continuity of provision for residents. The late withdrawal of a potential subcontractor was dealt with decisively so that programmes ran as planned.
- Leaders' and managers' own evaluation of the quality of provision and planned improvements do not sufficiently match with those of the subcontractors to ensure a common approach. As a result, it is not always clear which partner needs to do what to improve the quality of provision.
- Leaders and managers, in their arrangements to monitor and judge the quality of provision at subcontractors, focus too much on compliance with processes rather than critically evaluating the impact on learners' progress and achievement. At quality reviews with subcontractors, managers do not routinely record the impact that support for tutors has on learning.
- In their observations of teaching and learning, staff do not always accurately identify how well learners are learning. In joint lesson observations with inspectors, MAL observers identified well teachers' strengths and weaknesses, but did not evaluate sufficiently the impact of teaching on learners' progress.
- Leaders and managers at the council produce a rich set of helpful data which measures progress against contractual and performance targets. However, they do not use this information well enough when analysing predicted achievement or differences in achievement between groups of learners.
- Leaders and managers have built positive and collaborative working arrangements with subcontractors and other partners. As a result, learners benefit from improved facilities and access to a better range of resources, for example careers guidance and a wider range of progression opportunities onto higher-level courses.
- Staff from MAL have used best practice from other providers effectively to inform and

improve the provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This has helped learners live more independently. Close cooperation between managers at MAL and in adult social care enables more learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress onto adult education programmes.

The governance of the provider

- Leaders' oversight and scrutiny of the service is effective. Elected council members monitor progress against the set of agreed key performance indicators via the scrutiny review panels and the new established advisory panel provides a useful forum for all stakeholders to offer input, challenge and support.
- The lead council member, together with service managers, has taken a proactive approach to ensure that other directorates within the council align their strategic aims with that of that adult education service. As a result, this has enabled the council to tackle more effectively social cohesion and the well-being of the adult community. For example, closer working with adult social care has supported more adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to increase their independence.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers understand their safeguarding responsibilities well and maintain good links with expert staff within the borough and beyond.
- Leaders and managers keep detailed records of all directly employed and subcontracted staff. Staff, both permanent and hourly-paid, undergo regular training in safeguarding and their role in preventing extremism and radicalisation.
- Leaders and managers use interesting posters, leaflets and course handbooks to promote safeguarding and British values well. The main subcontractor partially funds a resident police officer who provides helpful briefings on a range of topical safeguarding issues.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- At the previous inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was judged to require improvement. In the intervening period, staff have not been successful in raising the standard of teaching and learning sufficiently. Teaching is not of a consistently high enough standard. Tutors are not effective enough in planning and teaching sessions that help individual learners to achieve their goals.
- Tutors do not take sufficient account of individual learners' starting points, including their prior skills, to teach lessons that meet learners' differing needs and abilities. Consequently, the most able learners are not challenged sufficiently in their learning and do not achieve their potential, and the less able learners find the work too hard.
- In too many lessons, tutors set the same learning tasks and objectives irrespective of learners' prior attainment and potential, which do not focus sufficiently on the specific skills learners need to develop. Where lessons are taught well, learners are clear how the

set tasks will contribute to the achievement of their goals.

- In too many lessons, tutors make poor use of strategies to check learning. Tutors rely too heavily on questions that only the more confident learners answer. As a result, it is not always clear who has understood and what has been learned in lessons. Consequently, tutors are not able to plan further learning that is sufficiently personalised to meet the needs of learners.
- A significant minority of tutors do not have sufficiently high expectations of their learners. This is reflected in teachers' poor choice of resources, ineffective linking of theory to practice, and language used in class. As a result, tutors do not challenge learners to produce written and/or practical work of a standard that reflects their potential.
- On a minority of courses that lead to qualification, tutors' feedback on learners' work does not support learners in improving their work. Nor are learners always clear what they need to do to improve. However, tutors' feedback to learners on community learning courses is good.
- Tutors have good subject knowledge and relevant industrial experience that they use to link lesson topics to local employment opportunities. For example, they discuss how the skills that learners develop will help them to find jobs in childcare or self-employed opportunities in furniture restoration, photography and clothes making.
- Tutors are well qualified and experienced in working with learners who have additional social and learning needs. They manage challenging behaviour very effectively. Tutors establish mutually respectful relationships with learners and resolve conflicts that emerge with staff or between learners quickly.
- Learners develop skills that support them in achieving their personal and career aspirations. In English lessons for learners whose first language is not English, learners gain the language skills that they require to progress towards their learning goals. In sewing and furniture restoration, learners produce clothes to wear in the workplace or undertake commissions to restore furniture. They also learn new skills to develop their business.
- Tutors in craft courses are skilled at setting learners challenging goals in lessons. A range of stimulating and motivating activities and frequent and effective checks on learning enable learners to make swift progress and produce work of a high quality. Over time, these learners improve their work further and complete tasks of increasing complexity. For example, in sewing courses learners create a range of different pleats, while in photography learners understand the challenges of taking photos at night.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners who have an identified learning disability or difficulty have a good understanding of living in modern Britain and understand how to keep themselves safe.
- The majority of tutors on community learning courses support learners to develop their mathematical skills alongside their main subject. For example, sewing learners use geometry to adapt patterns which meet their body shapes and calculate the volume of material required.
- Learners benefit from effective information, advice and guidance before the start of their

course. Learners undertake assessments of their prior skills and knowledge, which is effective in identifying their starting points. Staff use this information well to match learners to the correct course and level of learning.

- Tutors support learners well, and help learners to identify courses that will equip them with the qualifications and skills they require to meet their aspirations. For example, learners are prepared well to go on to university to train as teachers, teaching assistants, engineers or work in health and social care.
- Tutors help learners with more complex learning needs well. Learners develop good personal, social and life skills needed for increased levels of independence and make good progress in achieving their personal learning and development goals.
- Learners have high aspirations, they understand the importance of learning and how this will support their progression to further study and employment. They come to lessons equipped and prepared for learning and follow teachers' instructions willingly. For example, learners in mathematics demonstrate the skills needed to solve equations confidently to support their progression onto engineering courses, while learners in childcare understand the importance of the stages of child development in gaining employment in pre-school and nursery settings.
- Learners are tolerant of each other and show respect for their peers and tutors. They demonstrate good awareness of working with people from different cultures and with different religious beliefs. Learners demonstrate a positive attitude to learning.
- In creative arts courses, learners make good progress and develop the skills needed to produce work to a high standard. For example, learners in sewing classes demonstrate good skills in pattern cutting. In pottery, learners use newly acquired skills to produce a range of ceramic items, while in photography learners demonstrate high levels of skill in image composition.
- Learners benefit from good employability skills support. Learners seeking to develop further their skills and gain employment receive effective help with writing curriculum vitae and personal statements, doing job searches and preparing for interviews. As a result, learners are prepared well to move into employment.
- Learners' attendance in a minority of lessons is not good enough and needs improving. Leaders and managers have recently started to monitor attendance more closely; however, it is too early to assess the impact of actions taken.
- Learners on community learning programmes and courses leading to qualifications do not have a good enough understanding of how to keep themselves safe and the risk posed by extremism and radicalisation.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The proportion of learners achieving qualifications on accredited courses, which make up a third of the provision, has declined since the previous year and is too low.
- The achievement of learners on courses that enhance the skills they need for employment, which accounts for a third of the accredited courses offered, is not good enough. However, the achievement of learners on courses related to creative arts is good.
- The proportion of learners who achieve functional skills English qualifications has

improved, enabling more learners to progress onto further study. However, the proportion of learners who successfully complete qualifications in English for speakers of other languages has declined and requires improvement.

- Since the previous year, the proportion of learners completing community learning courses has increased slightly and is good.
- Across the vast majority of courses, the proportion of learners who stay to the end of their course is high. The vast majority of learners on courses that do not lead to qualifications, such as in family learning, creative arts, languages and health and fitness, achieve their personal learning goals. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well.
- The majority of learners who successfully complete qualifications and then continue studying do so at a higher level.
- In GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics, the proportion of learners who achieve a grade 4 or better has improved, and is now high.
- The very small number of learners on apprenticeships make good progress and are on track to achieve within the specified timeframe.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53325
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,850
Principal/CEO	Ged Curran
Telephone number	020 8545 3640
Website	https://www2.merton.gov.uk/learning/adulteducation.htm

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)	0	1,109	0	221	0	2	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	0	1	0	2	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	South Thames College Richmond Adult and Community College Wandsworth Council							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the service manager for adult learning, 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, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Steve Lambert, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Darrell Bate	Ofsted Inspector
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