

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



5 July 2019

Mr Barry Wren
Principal
New Directions
The Learning and Employment Service
330 Northumberland Avenue
Whitley
Reading
RG2 8DH

Dear Mr Wren

Short inspection of New Directions – The Learning and Employment Service for Reading.

Following the short inspection on 5 and 6 June 2019, 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 the provider was judged to be good in December 2015.

This provider continues to be good.

New Directions (ND) and its subcontracted partners provide a wide range of accredited and non-accredited adult learning programmes designed to raise the skills and enrich the lives of the local community. The service's direct delivery represents nine tenths of its funded provision. The remaining tenth is subcontracted to external providers and local authority-based partners. All the subcontracted provision is community learning. ND's curriculum focuses on provision for adults, with the main courses being employability, functional skills and GCSEs in English and mathematics, information technology qualifications and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Since your previous inspection, leaders and managers have made sure that the learning and employment service continues to provide a good educational experience for learners and apprentices. They have worked effectively to provide a welcoming and safe environment for learners to develop new knowledge and skills. Leaders and managers have not fully rectified all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. However, a recently appointed assistant principal and quality manager recognise where further improvements are needed and are introducing new strategies to address these.

Leaders and managers have accurately identified through their self-assessment process that current arrangements for managing the performance of subcontractors

are not sufficiently rigorous. As a result, they have developed advanced plans to implement a set of more robust arrangements to oversee the quality of the delivery of subcontractors to be implemented in the forthcoming academic year.

Managers have installed high-quality information technology into most classrooms and tutors use this well to present information and record subjects they have discussed. Tutors make good use of worksheets and topics that are relevant and useful in developing learners' English and mathematics skills in the context of their home and working lives.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have introduced a well-considered apprenticeship programme. Apprentices benefit from frequent visits and effective support from their assessors; the large majority are making good progress. Apprentices are developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours for their job roles.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers give safeguarding a high priority. They have maintained good safeguarding arrangements since the previous inspection. Managers and staff make sure that learners are safe and feel safe. Learners know who to talk to if they have any concerns. Staff at all levels make sure that the centre provides a safe environment for learning. Managers deal with concerns promptly, record them in sufficient detail and use links with external agencies where appropriate.

All staff have a good understanding of their 'Prevent' duties and have recently completed training on the topic. As part of their induction learners receive training on how to stay safe, including e-safety and the risks associated with extremist activities and radicalisation. Tutors reinforce these themes in their taught sessions.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have effective oversight of the performance of the great majority of staff delivering the service's directly delivered provision. They use annual appraisals with teaching staff to set ambitious, but realistic, targets that are regularly monitored at one-to-one supervision sessions.
- Tutors complete annual self-assessments on the quality of their own teaching and assessment. This helps them to identify their own areas for improvement and provides managers with information on service-wide training needs, which they meet well through a well-planned programme of staff development.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment delivered by direct delivery staff. Senior managers and members of the advisory board are trained to undertake observations and learning walks, to supplement those carried out by quality managers. As a result, they have accurately identified those teachers who need further support to improve their practice. In a very small number of cases, leaders and managers have made sure that those teachers who have not been able or willing to improve have left the service.

- Leaders and managers do not have sufficient oversight over the quality of teaching, learning and assessment delivered by all of their subcontractors. This applies particularly to those working for some of their delivery partners within the local authority. The service's quality managers have recently started a programme of regular observations of subcontractors' delivery staff and provided them with training on how to improve their teaching practice. However, they have not yet been able to be sure that the development actions following these observations have been implemented fully. Managers of subcontractors' delivery staff are slow in reporting back progress against these actions. This is particularly the case for family learning programmes delivered in the local authority's children centres. As a result, the pace of improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too slow.
- Leaders and managers have improved the speed with which they manage underperformance. However, there have been a few instances in the management of subcontracted provision where they have not acted swiftly enough.
- Leaders and managers have insufficient oversight of the current performance of subcontractors. Managers do ensure that subcontractors are selected to deliver provision through an appropriate commissioning process. They are clear about the quality standards they are expected to meet during the period of their contracts. However, managers do not meet with subcontractors regularly enough or record the outcomes of the meetings they have to assure themselves of the quality of their performance. As a result, leaders and managers do not have enough information on the progress of current learners.
- Tutors know their learners well and ensure that they all have a chance to participate in activities and discussions during lessons. Tutors are adept at drawing out information from less confident learners and checking that they understand complex terminology and language. Learners on English and mathematics courses do not always reflect on how they can apply their learning to everyday life or what aspects they need to improve.
- Learners and apprentices' work is routinely marked by tutors and assessors and provides good evidence of learning and progression. However, feedback from tutors is generally positive and does not always tell learners how to improve.
- Assessors undertake frequent visits to apprentices and their employers to make sure that apprentices make good progress. Apprentices who are following new standards-based apprenticeship programmes are not aware of the progress they are making. They do not know that they can achieve pass, merit or distinction grades, because staff have not made them aware of this. As a result, targets for most-able apprentices do not challenge them to aim for a higher grade.
- Learners benefit from high-quality careers information, advice and guidance to help them select the right courses. This includes individual and group guidance during initial classes and at the end of each course. The information provided helps learners make the right choices and supports them to progress on to further courses. A good proportion of learners move on from non-accredited to accredited courses or from ESOL to vocational courses.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they implement the new arrangements for managing the performance of subcontractors as a matter of priority to make sure that they have effective oversight of the quality of the provision that they deliver
- they make sure that teachers and tutors improve the quality of feedback on learners' and apprentices' work so that they are clear about what they need to do to improve
- they improve line managers' involvement in the standards-based apprenticeship training programmes so that they can support apprentices to develop the right skills, knowledge and behaviours for their roles
- they monitor and record the progress of standards-based apprentices more effectively so that they know what progress they are making and the grades they can achieve.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted inspector were assisted by the quality manager, as nominee. We met with you, members of the senior management team, members of the board, managers, tutors, learners and apprentices. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment and reviewed students' work. We scrutinised key strategic and policy documents, including those related to safeguarding, quality assurance and the performance of provision. We analysed data on students' and apprentices' achievement and progress from their starting points and considered their views.