

Stepping Stones Education and Training Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Providers newly directly funded to deliver apprenticeship training provision' and 'Monitoring visits'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

In January 2018 Stepping Stones Education Limited received its own publicly funded contract. The company delivers apprenticeship frameworks in business administration level 2 and 3, barbering level 2, hairdressing level 3, business improvement techniques level 2, customer service level 2 and 3, team-leading level 2, warehousing level 2 and 3, food production and cooking level 2, licensed hospitality level 2, management level 3 and health and social care level 2 and level 3. They also deliver apprenticeship standards in professional hairdressing, customer service practitioner adult care and lead adult care. At the time of inspection, 68 apprentices were on programmes.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Reasonable progress

Information, advice and guidance at the start of the programme is effective. For example, apprentices complete useful trial periods with an employer before starting work. This helps managers match apprentices to the right programme and at the right level. As a result, most apprentices are clear about their career aims and a few have gained a promotion at work.

At sign-up, tutors review the apprenticeship delivery hours and formulate the off-the-job requirements. Managers monitor apprentices' entitlement to off-the-job training. Tutors use the e-portfolio system to ensure that apprentices have access to sufficient time off-the-job for their studies. However, this approach is not yet systematic. As a result, not all apprentices receive their entitlement and consequently make slow progress.

Leaders recruit experienced tutors who hold relevant teaching qualifications. However, not all tutors hold higher-level vocational qualifications from the ones they deliver. As a result, apprentices have limited progression routes available to them.

Managers and tutors review apprentices' progress monthly. However, tutors do not give sufficient regard to the information needed when completing a review. As a result, not all information recorded in the e-portfolio is precise enough to enable managers to identify where apprentices are falling behind. Consequently, a minority of apprentices make slow progress.

All apprentices complete an initial assessment of their starting points, including in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. However, tutors do not assess apprentices' other skills such as problem-solving. As a result, most apprentices struggle to develop these skills.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Reasonable progress

Apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours effectively. For example, hairdressing apprentices confidently use advanced techniques to colour clients' hair in a busy salon. As a result, employers benefit from the contribution that apprentices make at work.

Apprentices benefit from employer support. For example, apprentices receive coaching from their employer to enable them to develop additional skills and behaviours required by their industry. As a result, apprentices demonstrate professional behaviours when completing their day-to-day tasks.

Apprentices benefit from well-planned ongoing assessment. Feedback from tutors is informative and guides apprentices on how to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, apprentices' work is good and of a high standard.

Apprentices are well prepared for the end-point assessment (EPA). They understand what they need to do to successfully complete the EPA.

Tutors do not make full use of the information gathered at the start of the programme about all apprentices in order to plan well-ordered and challenging training. As a result, a minority of the most able apprentices do not progress as swiftly as they could.

In a minority of cases, tutors do not ensure that apprentices receive regular off-the-job training. For example, team-leading apprentices were not aware of their off-the-job entitlement. As a result, apprentices complete their apprenticeship work in their own time and so make slow progress. They do not achieve within the planned time.

Apprentices develop their functional skills independently through workbooks. However, they do not always develop their English, mathematics and digital skills beyond the level they need to complete their apprenticeship. As a result, too many apprentices are not aware of how to improve the accuracy of their work.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

Leaders have appointed a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy safeguarding lead who hold senior positions within the company. The DSL and deputy are appropriately trained. Both leads understand their roles and responsibilities relating to safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Managers have ensured that all tutors and apprentices complete safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training on induction. Tutors are regularly updated throughout the year.

Managers ensure a thorough vetting process, including the completion of Disclosure and Barring Service checks, for all employees.

Managers do not develop systematically apprentices' understanding of the 'Prevent' duty. Consequently, most apprentices do not have a deep understanding of current threats and local issues that they may face.

Managers complete risk assessments of all employers. However, managers do not systematically review employers' safeguarding or 'Prevent' duty policies. As a result, managers do not always have a clear understanding of employers' safeguarding practice.

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