

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection also focused on specialist provision in:

- Family learning

Inspectors also examined evidence from programmes in health, public services and care, floristry, information and communication technology (ICT), arts, media and publishing, modern foreign languages, education and training and preparation for life and work, which although not reported on separately, was used to support judgements in achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (the council) receives funding from Birmingham and Solihull LSC to provide adult and community learning across the borough of Solihull. The council subcontracts a vast majority of the provision through a partnership with Solihull College (the college). The college provides accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities in 12 sector subject areas, the largest being arts, media and publishing at 38% of the provision in 2005-06. The college provides all family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) and longer wider family learning courses. The council directly provides wider family learning first steps short courses, in 13 libraries and eight community centres. The council has a small European Social Fund (ESF) contract to support widening participation. It also has a contract for learndirect provision, which was not included in this inspection.
2. In 2005-06, 1,038 learners enrolled on externally accredited programmes, 1,674 on informal and recreational learning and 1,318 on family learning programmes. At the time of the inspection there were 1,416 learners on adult and community learning programmes. The council's community services directorate has overall responsibility for the adult and community provision. In partnership with the college, the head of community services (libraries, arts and lifelong learning) is responsible for the co-ordination and strategic development of the adult and community provision.
3. The borough of Solihull, to the southeast of Birmingham, has a population of around 200,000. The south of the borough is relatively affluent, with areas of high employment. The north of Solihull has significant areas of deprivation and high unemployment, with four of the wards among the top 10% of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. Around 5% of the population are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject area

Family learning	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards are good. Retention is high across all learning programmes and success rates are high on much of the accredited provision. Learners develop a good range of vocational and personal skills. Progression to further learning courses is good.
5. Teaching and learning are good overall. Tutors plan sessions well and effectively use a good variety of teaching and learning strategies and resources. Learners work productively and produce work of a high standard. Assessment is satisfactory overall. The recognising and recording of learners' progress and achievement on non-accredited courses is currently insufficient.
6. The council's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners and to social inclusion is good. Highly effective partnership arrangements help to identify and provide a wide range of learning opportunities, particularly in areas of social and economic disadvantage. Learners have good access to a range of progression opportunities.
7. Guidance and support are good overall. Learners have an appropriate understanding of progression opportunities. Those on college courses have good access to college support services and links with the college's additional support team are very effective. Support to meet learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs is particularly good. Well-trained tutors provide learners with good access to more intensive additional support.
8. Leadership and management are good. Strategic plans clearly identify priority areas and actions. Curriculum management is good, with very effective curriculum planning and good support for tutors. The processes to implement the recognising and recording of progress and achievement on non-accredited learning are insufficiently implemented. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall, with good use of projects to target previously under-represented groups of learners. However, the monitoring of equality of opportunity is insufficient. The quality improvement arrangements are good and the processes to improve teaching and learning are highly effective.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. The council demonstrates good capacity to improve. Quality improvement arrangements are generally good and are successful in securing improvements in retention and achievement and in teaching and learning. The college's processes for the observation of teaching and learning are comprehensive and effective, with more informal support in place on the council's wider family learning programmes. Since the previous inspection, the council has made good progress in improving leadership and management and the quality improvement

arrangements. Many of the previously identified weaknesses have improved since the previous inspection. However, equality of opportunity remains satisfactory.

10. Overall, the self-assessment process is effective. It is comprehensive and thorough for the vast majority of the provision. The process of self-assessment for the subcontracted provision is managed well and usefully involves staff and service users. The self-assessment report for this part of the provision accurately identifies the strengths and areas for improvement. However, self-assessment is insufficiently developed for the council's leadership and management and wider family learning programmes.

Key strengths

- Good strategic leadership and management
- Highly effective partnership arrangements
- Good curriculum management
- Good use of projects to widen participation
- Good teaching and learning
- Highly accessible and wide range of provision

Key areas for improvement

- The monitoring of equality of opportunity
- The self-assessment of the council's leadership and management and wider family learning
- The further implementation of processes for recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement in non-accredited learning

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

11. Achievement and standards are good, as identified by the self-assessment process. Retention rates are high across all the provision. Success rates are high on much of the accredited provision. For example, success rates on the classroom and teaching assistants' programmes at levels 2 and 3 are high. During the period 2005-06, however, success rates on the modern foreign languages courses at level 1 and some ICT provision were low.
12. Learners enjoy their work. They develop a good range of vocational and personal skills, accomplish tasks well and produce work of a good standard. Learners greatly increase their self-confidence and develop good personal and social skills. Progression is good from first steps learning onto accredited programmes and through the different levels of accredited provision into employment. Attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

13. The quality of provision is good overall. Teaching and learning are good, as was accurately identified by the self-assessment process. Tutors plan learning sessions well and make effective use of a good variety of teaching and learning strategies and resources. Tutors demonstrate good subject knowledge and provide learners with good individual support. Learners work productively and participate well in often creative and imaginative learning activities. Assessment is satisfactory overall.
14. Arrangements for identifying and providing courses that meet the needs and interests of learners are good, as identified by the self-assessment process. Managers plan the wide range of provision very well and take good account of social and economic data to target the provision carefully in areas of greatest need. Progression opportunities are good, with a wide range of non-accredited provision and accredited provision at different levels, offered at times to suit learners.
15. Learners receive good guidance and support. Those on college courses have good access to college support services. Support to meet learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs is particularly good, with well-trained vocational tutors and good access to more intensive support as required. Support for adults with learning disabilities and/or disabilities is good, with well-established links with the college's additional support team. The council's and the college's work on securing the outcomes of the Every Child Matters themes is good. In family learning, parents and children greatly enjoy learning and make good progress. Managers and tutors pay good attention to risk assessment and safeguarding arrangements. They very effectively target under-represented groups and courses

actively promote healthy living. Learners receive appropriate information before they enrol on programmes and about progression opportunities.

16. The implementation of the arrangements for identifying and recording achievement on non-accredited programmes is insufficient, an area for improvement that the self-assessment process accurately recognised. Learners' individual learning plans are not always sufficiently completed. The recording of learners' progress is not sufficient and too much emphasis is placed on learners' self-assessment.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

17. Leadership and management are good overall. Strategic management is good. Councillors and senior council managers work closely in partnership with the college to set a clear strategic direction for the development of adult and community learning provision across Solihull. Strategic plans make good use of consultation with service users and clearly identify priority areas and actions.
18. Partnership arrangements are highly effective, both within the council itself and with a wide variety of external organisations, as identified by the self-assessment process. The council's significant partnership with the college for the delivery of much of the adult and community learning provision works particularly well, with effective formal and informal communication between the two organisations. The lifelong learning partnership brings a range of organisations together effectively to plan and target adult and community learning in Solihull.
19. Curriculum management is good, as identified in the self-assessment process. The work of the adult and community learning operational group greatly contributes to the effective implementation of curriculum change and development. Centre managers and subject co-ordinators work well to plan coherent programmes and to secure improvements. Staff have a strong focus on improving retention, achievement and teaching and learning. Formal and informal communications are good.
20. The council makes good use of effective projects to widen participation. A wide range of specific projects target minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, men and people aged over 60. The ESF ENGAGE project provides a range of innovative taster opportunities, with relevant progression routes, for working age adults in targeted neighbourhoods in north Solihull. Learning champions effectively make contact with local residents to develop a wide range of learning opportunities. The wide range of projects has shown a year-on-year growth in learner numbers overall, although the number of men and over 60s on programmes did not meet targets in 2005-06.

21. The council has appropriate equal opportunity policies. The diversity strategy includes the race equality strategy and is supported by a detailed action plan to meet the council's requirements against the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The council appropriately meets the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.
22. The arrangements to improve teaching and learning are highly effective. The college's arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are very effective in helping to raise standards. These include joint observations, useful moderation of grades, appropriate sampling by senior managers to ensure consistency of approach and very useful feedback to the tutors. Council managers provide good support for tutors but do not yet have a fully developed system for observations of teaching and learning.
23. The monitoring of equality of opportunity is insufficient. Managers generally monitor recruitment by overall learner numbers. Although targets exist for the recruitment of learners by ethnicity, disability, gender and age, managers do not sufficiently monitor progress against these target groups. Minutes of course team meetings and course reviews make little mention of equality of opportunity.
24. Self-assessment of the council's leadership, management and wider family learning courses is insufficient and is one area where the council and college partnership is insufficiently developed. The college has effective processes for self-assessment and the current self-assessment report is comprehensive, accurate and identifies most key strengths and areas for improvement. However, the council's processes for self-assessment are not sufficiently developed. The council does not have a current self-assessment report.

What learners like

- The learning courses - 'the courses are really interesting and creative'
- The range of learning and development activities - 'I love the activities'
- 'The really helpful and supportive staff'
- The opportunity to learn - 'making my brain work and meeting different people'
- The respect they receive from staff - 'being recognised as a person in my own right and learning to use my own initiative'
- The opportunity to learn with their children - 'understanding how my children are taught at school'

What learners think could improve

- The ability to work at their own pace
- The quality of some of the accommodation
- The information about dates and times of courses
- The information about availability of childcare at venues

Sector subject areas

Family learning

Good: Grade 2

Context

25. Of the council's adult and community learning provision, 18% is family learning. The council subcontracts all FLLN and the longer courses in wider family learning to the college. These are delivered in 78 venues. The council delivers wider family learning first steps short courses in 13 libraries and eight community centres. The college provides effective progression routes for these learners. Fourteen partners are involved in the delivery of family learning provision, in primary schools, children's centres and community centres. A wide range of courses are provided, from early start baby talk to literacy and numeracy, as well as Caribbean art and family photos. Courses range from one-hour workshops to 20-hour programmes. In 2005-06, of the 1,318 learners who enrolled on programmes, 5% were men and 8% were from minority ethnic groups. At the time of the inspection 77 learners were on family learning programmes.

Strengths

- Good development of learners' personal and social skills
- Good teaching and learning
- Very effective partnerships to meet the needs and interests of learners
- Good curriculum leadership and management

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient assessment and recording of progress and achievement on non-accredited courses

Achievement and standards

26. Achievement and standards are good. Learners develop good personal and social skills. In particular, learners who have not participated in learning for a long time greatly increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. Learners develop good job seeking skills. Three family learners became learning champions and now promote learning opportunities in their local communities. Learners are more confident to help out in the classroom. They increase their understanding of the teaching methods used with their children. A group of family learners living in an area of social and economic disadvantage have formed a useful community action group. Art classes have led to permanent displays of good-quality work by learners in local community venues.

27. Progression to further learning is good. In 2005-06, 87% of FLLN learners and 56% of wider family learners progressed to further courses at the college. Many learners progress to the classroom assistants' course to develop a career in schools.

Quality of provision

28. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good across the family learning provision. Supportive tutors provide clear explanations and demonstrations. They effectively use a good variety of teaching and learning strategies and resources. Highly relevant and exciting lessons greatly interest and motivate learners.
29. Partnerships to meet the needs and interests of learners are very effective, as identified by the self-assessment process. The council extensively consults with residents and the family learning network. A detailed family learning strategy and action plan carefully reflect service users' identified needs. Extensive partnership working between the council, the college, schools and community and voluntary organisations provides a wide and exciting range of provision in areas of social and economic disadvantage. Provision includes FLLN courses at different levels, short and long courses in wider family learning and a diverse range of taster sessions and workshops.
30. Guidance and support for learners is satisfactory. Useful childcare provision is available at the college. Support for adults and children in first steps wider family learning courses is good. Well-qualified staff provide learners with effective information and advice at the sessions held in the libraries. At the college, guidance staff and tutors provide learners with useful progression information. Learners also receive appropriate information packs. Additional learning support is provided through the college, as appropriate.
31. The recognising and recording of progress and achievement on non-accredited courses is insufficient. Initial assessment for adults and children in wider family learning is insufficient to assess effectively learners' prior knowledge and skills. Specific learning outcomes for adults in wider family learning are not clear enough to enable tutors and learners to assess learners' progress. Processes to record specific and measurable personal learning goals are insufficiently implemented. The recording of achievement is too reliant on learners' self-assessment.

Leadership and management

32. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Communication is good, across council and college provision. Regular staff appraisal clearly identifies staff targets and development needs. Curriculum planning is good. The family learning core group meet regularly and identify clear action points. Staff are well qualified and experienced. They carry out thorough health and safety risk assessments. The accommodation and resources are good in most centres. Staff have a good understanding of the Every Child Matters themes and are very thorough at identifying useful opportunities for learners to achieve positive outcomes in relation to the themes.

33. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Tutors treat learners with respect and develop good relationships with learners. Staff carefully identify the needs and interests of vulnerable families with previously low levels of achievement and target and plan appropriate provision. Learners highly value the provision for families with disabilities. Promotional materials reflect cultural diversity well. However, teaching resources do not sufficiently promote diversity. Managers introduced specific courses to attract more dads into family learning, but the participation rate of men remains low. The monitoring of equality of opportunity is insufficient.
34. Quality improvement processes are satisfactory. The process of self-assessment for the FLLN and longer courses in wider family learning is good, but insufficient for the council's shorter courses in wider family learning. The arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are thorough for the subcontracted provision. However, the council does not produce a self-assessment report for the wider family learning provision that it directly manages and delivers. It does not yet have a sufficiently thorough process for observation of teaching and learning, but managers do provide helpful support for tutors. Course and learner evaluations across family learning are thorough and influence decisions about programme planning and improvement.