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9 November 2017

Mrs Debbie Poole-Hunt
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Dear Mrs Poole-Hunt

Short inspection of Luton Borough Council

Following the short inspection on 27 and 28 September 2017, 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 September 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

Leaders, managers and teachers are ambitious for learners and have maintained the high standards and good outcomes for learners reported at the last inspection. They have acted upon the recommendations made in the previous inspection report. The broad range of provision continues successfully to target the borough's more disadvantaged communities by supporting learners to become active citizens. Managers choose appropriate specialist subcontractors to target specific groups.

Luton Adult Learning continues to offer a broad and coherent range of provision that spans apprenticeships, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), qualification programmes for unemployed adults and family and community learning courses. More recently, the borough council's officers have relocated the service to enable them to contribute more directly to the strategic economic and skills development programme.

Learners still make good progress across all curriculum areas and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains good. Results for learners following courses in English and mathematics are high and the vast majority on community learning courses achieve their aims. However, too many apprentices drop out before completing their programme.

The quality of teaching is good and sessions are well planned. Not all teachers consistently correct learners' spelling and grammatical errors. Information and

guidance to learners are readily available to help them plan their next steps in education, employment or independent living.

Managers are self-critical and have a good grasp of the service's relative strengths and weaknesses. Senior leaders and elected members are supportive and ambitious for adult learners, but are not providing sufficient challenge and scrutiny to managers.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is well managed. A small team of knowledgeable officers acts as a point of contact for staff and learners should they have any safeguarding or welfare concerns. You oversee this team well. Referrals are dealt with efficiently and followed through to resolution. The service and its subcontractors engage with vulnerable groups including, for example, street homeless people. Risk assessments are thorough and managers take decisive action, such as seeking new venues when there are concerns about staff and learner safety. Subcontractors follow the same procedures and are very alert to learners' welfare.

The safeguarding team has introduced innovative ways of keeping teachers up to date with safeguarding and issues related to the 'Prevent' duty to help them incorporate these into their teaching. They invite teachers, through an online questionnaire, to share ideas on how new information or policies might be introduced in the classroom. The approach is simple and effective and has a very high response rate from teachers.

Managers continually review their practice and procedures in relation to the dangers of extremism. Managers themselves provide training to other organisations on the 'Prevent' duty. Learners' inductions include an introduction to the service's core values of tolerance and respect, which manifest themselves well in the classroom. Caseload officers provide apprentices and employers with good pastoral support and advice. As a result, any work-based attendance, conduct or safeguarding matters are dealt with promptly.

Inspection findings

- Learners following adult education programmes achieve well. Results for learners following functional skills courses and GCSEs in English and mathematics remain high. The vast majority undertaking community learning courses achieve their aims. Achievement rates for those following advanced and intermediate apprenticeships have declined over the last two years, with too many not seeing their programmes through to completion. While slightly better than comparators, the trend is concerning. Managers are aware of this issue and have plans in place aimed at arresting the decline.
- Managers and teachers continue to engage very well with learners from targeted communities and groups, such as Asian women. They have extended participation to, for example, those who have mental health conditions, street homeless people and unemployed men. In addition, those in the local population

with conditions such as obesity, addiction and self-neglect are targeted for support because rates for these conditions in the borough are high.

- The impact of these programmes, gleaned through learner surveys and managers' evaluations, is positive. Impact measures include a reduction in anxiety, an increase in peer support to reduce isolation, gains in confidence and an increase in volunteering. Asian women involved in community learning programmes now have the knowledge and confidence to self-check and refer themselves for screening for various medical conditions. A group of unemployed men were trained to be football coaches and volunteers to run local teams.
- A growing number of learners undertake ESOL courses and make good progress in their speaking, listening and written English. Supported by able teachers, learners demonstrate their confidence, despite only being at the start of their course. Learners following an entry-level class shared a joke made in English. The class was made up of Eastern European, Asian and Middle Eastern learners and provided a good example of diversity, respect and tolerance in action.
- The success and popularity of family learning courses owe much to the joint efforts and expertise of primary school teachers, family support workers and adult learning tutors. They work together highly effectively in recruiting those parents most in need of support, and in offering sessions which fully engage the parents and their children. Parents gain an understanding about, for example, mathematics, phonetics and national tests. They take home games and activities to use with their children. Sessions are enjoyable and very well conducted. Parents' confidence in dealing with the school on a day-to-day basis increases and they are able to meet and socialise with others. Inspectors saw good evidence of parents registering their interest in progressing to further adult learning courses.
- Teachers confidently plan sessions effectively. As a result, learners feel settled and at ease and make good progress. Teachers use questioning effectively to promote independence and inclusion. They support less confident learners to contribute to discussions. On occasion, teachers fail to identify and correct grammatical and spelling errors in learners' work or in teaching resources. Smartboards are used routinely and learners are encouraged to interact with the technology, which, in turn, promotes confidence and positive interactions with peers. Assessors' feedback and targets on apprentices' reviews are based too often on unit completion and deadlines, with too little reference to learning, knowledge or skills development.
- Attendance at sessions is good but punctuality less so. Teachers use course inductions to assess and record learners' starting points, and help them set personal goals. They involve learners in these discussions and are sensitive to any language difficulties which they encounter. Learners' progress is tracked well and monitored, and assistance is provided if they are identified as being at risk of not achieving or dropping out. Written feedback on the quality of learners' work is given routinely by teachers, which helps learners rectify any mistakes.
- Learners receive good information and guidance about new courses or careers options from tutors, subcontractors and, where required, specialist agencies. Sensitive pastoral support from staff helps learners overcome any barriers they

may face in attending sessions.

- Managers are self-critical and accurately identify areas for improvement within their self-assessment report. Subcontracted providers, most of whom are voluntary organisations and charities, are well monitored and receive additional support where needed. This approach helps build the capacity of these specialist partner organisations to engage with the service's priority groups. Quality improvement measures are having a positive impact on learners' outcomes. Managers who observed the quality of lessons alongside inspectors provided insightful and accurate judgements about the quality of teaching and learning.
- Managers recognise the need to increase opportunities to gain feedback from learners and stakeholders to plan provision. The proportion of males engaged with the service – at 25% – has not increased over the last few years.
- The successful community engagement is characteristic of the service and is a reflection of the mature partnerships and networking arrangements that teachers and managers have forged over a number of years. The good liaison which exists with schools and employers, for example, benefits adult learners, apprentices and children.
- Strategic managers and elected members, informed by the borough's 'Investment Framework', articulate well a role for education and skills in relation to tackling local skills shortages and raising aspirations. Discussions have taken place, for example, with building companies about growing new traineeship opportunities to enable local young people to enter the building trade. These, and similar new economically-related initiatives, are at an early stage.
- Governance arrangements, through senior officers and elected members, are supportive and ambitious for adult learners but governors do not provide sufficient challenge and scrutiny to managers in respect of the quality of the learners' experiences and that of teaching and learning.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers arrest the decline in apprenticeship achievement rates evident over the last two years
- strategic leaders' oversight challenges managers more effectively with regard to outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- teachers routinely correct errors in learners' spelling, punctuation and grammar in order that learners confidently apply these key skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors, assisted by the interim service manager as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with managers, staff, subcontractors and elected members. They observed lessons and reviewed key documents, including those related to management, contract monitoring, quality improvement, learners' achievements and safeguarding.