

West Sussex County Council

Local authority



10–13 November 2015

Inspection dates**Overall effectiveness****Inadequate**

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

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- The arrangements for safeguarding learners are not effective. Leaders and managers have not suitably checked all tutors or venues to ensure learners have a safe learning experience.
- West Sussex County Council (WSCC) managers do not adequately manage and monitor the provision, which is wholly subcontracted to Aspire Sussex Limited (Aspire).

The provider has the following strengths

- Aspire's new leadership and management team has taken decisive action which has improved many aspects of teaching and support. It manages the curriculum and tutors well.
- Leaders and managers work very productively with partners to provide an extensive range of courses that meet the needs of WSCC's learners and its community.
- Tutors promote diversity well and create highly inclusive learning environments where learners from different cultural backgrounds learn and work harmoniously together.
- Teaching and learning are good. Tutors use a wide variety of learning activities that inspire learners and make learning fun.
- Tutors have high expectations of learners and challenge them to achieve their goals.
- Learners receive very good support, particularly those with learning difficulties and learners with disabilities. This helps them to become more independent learners and citizens.
- Tutors give good-quality and highly personalised advice and guidance about progression between courses. This support motivates learners to advance to higher level courses or gain employment.
- Learners develop good skills, knowledge and confidence.
- Most learners achieve well and make good progress. Learners produce high-quality work.

Full report

Information about the provider

- West Sussex has low levels of unemployment with a large, and growing, proportion of adults aged over 65 years. Much of West Sussex is rural or coastal, with areas of isolation. The north of West Sussex, which is mainly urban, has a culturally diverse population with people moving into the area to commute to work outside the area.
- Since the last inspection, WSCC has transferred its adult learning programmes and most of its leaders, managers and tutors to Aspire. A team of WSCC managers has responsibility for managing this contract. Learning takes place in seven main adult learning centres and in community venues, including schools and academies. A small number of unemployed adults study computer courses through a subcontract with Crossland and Dudson Training Limited. Additionally, WSCC has nine learners aged 16 to 18; provision for them was not inspected separately but inspectors' judgements are included within this report.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Take immediate steps to improve the effectiveness of safeguarding by:
 - carrying out appropriate checks on all tutors identified as needing them and maintaining comprehensive records
 - implementing suitable supervision and risk assessments while waiting for the results of these checks to come through
 - conducting more thorough risk assessments of venues and ensuring all community venues offer a safe learning environment
 - maintaining comprehensive records of safeguarding incidents, including the actions taken, people involved and results of any follow-up action taken
 - ensuring that all tutors, volunteers and learning support assistants complete appropriate safeguarding training.
- Review and strengthen WSCC's governance and monitoring arrangements of the provision by:
 - ensuring a more robust monitoring of contract and performance
 - challenging more effectively Aspire's progress towards achieving its key performance indicators and, where progress is not swift enough, interrogating the reasons why
 - revisiting the targets set for Aspire to ensure they contain realistic milestones to measure progress against
 - analysing data more incisively to identify underachieving groups of learners and the impact of actions being taken on improvement
 - defining the expectations for the programme for learners aged 16 to 18
 - checking more thoroughly that Aspire is adhering to its safeguarding responsibilities
 - scrutinising complaints and safeguarding reports to ensure that managers deal with incidents effectively, maintain sufficiently detailed records and escalate cases to WSCC where appropriate.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- WSCC managers do not adequately manage or monitor the provision that is subcontracted to Aspire. The contract management team sets Aspire very ambitious targets, yet when these are not achieved managers do not interrogate the underlying reasons sufficiently, agree alternative actions or revise the target.
- WSCC has not ensured that the small number of 16–18-year-old learners are on a suitable programme of study. They fail to monitor achievement by learners in this age group, which is low and not improving.
- Managers' analysis of data concerning learners' progress requires improvement. They cannot measure the full effectiveness of actions they are taking because they do not have easily available data on all learners' attendance, destinations or progression. In the last year, managers took suitable action to improve the quality of English, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and mathematics teaching, but it is too early to judge whether this has improved learners' achievement of qualifications.
- Aspire recruited many new senior leaders, managers and tutors in the last year, and this process has greatly increased its capacity to improve. Aspire's senior leaders manage change very well and staff morale is good. The strong leadership has already led to a clear strategic direction, improved financial stability, fewer course cancellations and a well-trained team of tutors.
- Curriculum management is good. Faculty managers use very effective systems to maintain, and improve, good-quality teaching. They manage tutors' performance well, set suitable targets and hold very relevant staff training.
- In response to the county's key priorities, Aspire delivers a good and comprehensive curriculum. Leaders and managers listen to and act on partners' and learners' feedback to ensure that courses are relevant. Their very good relationships with partners result in courses being offered in a wide range of community venues across the county, which learners can get to easily.
- Leaders, manager and staff promote equality and diversity well. They create a highly inclusive learning environment in which learners and staff work harmoniously, respect each other and value diversity. Leaders and managers have highly effective strategies for ensuring equality of opportunity for learners, for example through fee remission policies, and through the broad curriculum for learners with disabilities and those with learning difficulties. Managers train staff effectively in diversity. They strengthened the quality of advice and guidance for learners this year, which is now good, and learners are prepared well to make progress in learning and at work, and to live in modern Britain.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Governance by WSCC is weak and exacerbated by changes in the contract management team and representation on the Aspire board. As a result, governors have not effectively challenged leaders' decisions, such as the programmes Aspire offers to learners aged 16 to 18.
 - WSCC has not taken enough responsibility for safeguarding learners. The contract management team fails to check the adequacy of arrangements for safeguarding and for dealing with learners' complaints.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective**
 - Managers have not suitably checked the backgrounds of tutors to ensure that all learners are safe, and in particular those aged 16 to 18 or learners with disabilities and those with learning difficulties. Tutors are not adequately supervised while waiting for the results of background checks.
 - Managers' and tutors' completion of community venue risk assessments are weak and a few venues are not sufficiently secure.
 - Not all tutors, learning support assistants and volunteers have had recent safeguarding training.
 - Managers' records of safeguarding incidents are weak. They do not record the actions taken, or dates and people involved, in sufficient detail.
 - However, tutors and managers deal with individual incidents quickly and take suitable action to ensure the safety of individual learners.
 - Managers have made good progress in introducing systems and tutor training to ensure learners are not at risk of radicalisation or extremism, but this is at an early stage and it is too soon to judge whether these actions have made an impact.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching and learning are good, with some outstanding classes. Tutors have high expectations of learners, which motivates them to achieve their learning goals. Tutors are well qualified and use their experience and expertise to good effect so that learners apply their learning and see its relevance.
- Tutors engage and inspire learners through a wide variety of learning activities that make learning fun. Learners enjoy the practical activities, which increase their levels of ability, confidence and technical skills. In a very effective Italian class, learners sang songs in Italian to enhance their pronunciation and accent.
- Learners participate fully in learning activities because tutors deploy effective strategies to involve all learners, including those lacking in confidence. Tutors question learners skilfully to check they understand concepts before moving on to a new topic. Most tutors use interactive learning technology effectively to enable learners to learn at their own pace and rectify mistakes immediately.
- Tutors challenge learners well in class. In mixed-ability groups, they increase the level of difficulty in tasks so that new learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need while experienced learners become more proficient and extend their abilities. In an art improvement class, the tutor's careful planning of activities enabled all learners to improve their artwork by developing new ways of applying pastel colours.
- Learners are enthusiastic about their studies and often choose to work independently in their own time. This helps them to consolidate their learning. For example, mathematics learners practise their algebraic skills using clips on a video-sharing website.
- Learners receive good support. Tutors ensure they give help and guidance that is highly individualised to each learner. This is particularly effective for learners with disabilities and those with learning difficulties in helping them to achieve and become more independent.
- Tutors plan learning activities that promote diversity particularly well. They draw on the wide range of cultural backgrounds within groups of learners to illustrate and enliven learning activities. In an English lesson, a learner described how Diwali is celebrated in their community; the tutor then steered this subject into a full-class discussion. This work developed learners' language skills while raising their awareness of different cultures.
- Assessment is generally good. Tutors identify learners' starting points thoroughly to set challenging but realistic targets for individual learners. During classes, tutors tell learners how they can improve their work, which they find useful. One tutor used a homework activity imaginatively to help learners identify and rectify common mistakes.
- Although most tutors develop learners' English and mathematical skills effectively within learning activities, a minority do not incorporate learning in mathematics sufficiently well. In particular, they do not highlight where learners can improve, use and apply mathematical skills during practical activities.
- A few tutors do not give learners sufficiently detailed feedback about their work. These learners are less clear about the progress they are making. Delays in receiving feedback for learners taking English, ESOL and mathematics qualifications do not help them rectify ingrained errors quickly enough.
- A very small minority of teaching is dull and unimaginative. In these classes, learners do not develop or use their skills and knowledge sufficiently because tutors do not plan effectively to meet their needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

- Learners develop good skills, knowledge and confidence. Many learners improve their employment prospects through gaining a good range of vocational skills and qualifications, such as in computing, accounting, hairdressing, beauty therapy and counselling. Learners develop good English skills and use key technical terms, spelling, punctuation and grammar more confidently.
- Learners gain good critical evaluation skills which they use to review their own progress and identify how they could improve. On a creative writing course, learners reviewed their peers' draft texts and discussed how to develop these further.
- Many courses have a strong focus on improving learners' health, nutrition and well-being. This has helped learners with disabilities and those with learning difficulties to save money and eat more healthily as they become more independent in their lives.
- Attendance in most classes is good and learners arrive promptly. Learners take pride in their learning and achievements. They maintain well-organised files of their work, which is generally of a high quality.

- Learners benefit from useful and personalised advice and guidance about learning and routes to further study and qualifications given by tutors and admissions staff. Learners, many of whom start their studies with low expectations, gain the enthusiasm to study further. They acquire personal and social skills which help them progress.
- Generally, learners know how to stay safe. Their tutors reinforce good and safe working practices during classes and take learners' welfare seriously. They make learning about online safety memorable which, for example, resulted in a group of older learners explaining knowledgeably how 'phishing' works and how they are protecting themselves when using the internet.
- Although most tutors develop learners' English skills well within classes, not all develop learners' mathematical skills sufficiently. Learners do not always recognise the importance of mathematics within employment and everyday activities.
- Tutors have received training in the Prevent duty, but few introduce these topics within classes. They miss opportunities to improve learners' appreciation of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Most learners achieve their learning goals well. In floristry, decorating, history, accounting and finance, almost all learners achieve, which is exceptionally good. Learners produce good-quality work, particularly in art and woodcarving where they often exhibit or sell what they have made.
- Learners with disabilities and those with learning difficulties have consistently very high achievement. Many learners with severe disabilities gain good skills and confidence, which helps them to become more independent in their everyday lives.
- Many learners progress well, often starting their course as beginners and moving up to advanced level. In particular, family learners gain sufficient self-confidence from taking taster courses in their children's school to enable them to move on to longer courses held at adult learning centres.
- Learners enjoy learning and make good progress. They acquire new skills rapidly, which they use well, for example, language learners speaking fluently with their peers and learners on a beginners' course, or beginners on an art course producing good artwork. A significant number of learners gain employment or become volunteers after completing courses.
- Learners make good use of the skills they have learned at home and in their personal lives. Learners who experience feelings of isolation or depression benefit enormously from taking part in regular courses and being part of a cohesive group. In particular, elderly learners gain extensive benefits, such as maintaining their levels of fitness, improving their memory and reducing high blood pressure through applying yoga techniques.
- Current learners taking qualifications in English, ESOL and mathematics make good progress because Aspire managers have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching. Achievement by these learners, which accounts for around one-tenth of all learners, required improvement last year.
- Too many learners aged 16 to 18 leave their course before completing. As a result, achievement by 16–18-year-old learners requires improvement.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	6,774
Principal/CEO	Mrs Robyn Kohler
Website address	www.aspiresussex.org.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	3	4,099	6	531		91		31
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14–16	0							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractor:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aspire Sussex Limited ■ Crossland and Dudson Training Limited 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Janet Rodgers, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Charles Clark	Her Majesty's Inspector
Claire Griffin	Ofsted Inspector
Megan Whittaker	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Young	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by one of Aspire's faculty managers, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. 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.

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