

Inspection of Portsmouth City Council

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 April 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Portsmouth City Council offers adult learning courses based mainly around community and family learning as well as courses in English, mathematics and English for speakers of other languages. The service, known as the Community Learning Service and operating from the Learning Place, is located in the heart of Portsmouth and also offers apprenticeship standards in level 3 business administrator, level 3 teaching assistant and health and social care at levels 4 and 5. There are currently 35 apprentices and 117 adult learners in learning, with 1,257 adult learners enrolled so far this academic year. Leaders work with two subcontractors but do not currently have any learners with one of these.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners enjoy their studies at the Learning Place. Adult learners, many of whom are returning to learning after a long break from the classroom, improve their independence and enhance their social skills as a result of the courses they take. They improve their skills in written and spoken English and learn the mathematics they need to achieve their qualifications and function well in everyday life.

Adult learners attend extremely well and are very rarely late. They respect each other and support and motivate each other well. They produce high-quality work and gain the confidence and motivation to move on to further learning or employment.

Apprentices gain new knowledge, skills and behaviours that make them more effective in their workplaces. They have high rates of attendance at training sessions. Level 3 business administrator apprentices learn about, for example, prioritising their workloads and improving their time management, which gives them confidence in the workplace. Level 3 teaching assistant apprentices learn in detail about how to safeguard their pupils. They understand how to spot signs of radicalisation and extremism and the importance of recording any concerns about pupils carefully.

Learners rightly feel well supported by passionate, experienced and well-qualified teachers, managers and leaders who enthuse and interest learners in the subjects they study. Learners feel safe at the Learning Place. They value the inclusive environment that staff create which helps learners become more independent, self-assured and resilient. Almost all learners feel that their courses prepare them well for their next steps.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a clear and considered intent for the learning programmes that Portsmouth City Council offer. Leaders concentrate on improving the confidence and mental health of those who are long-term unemployed or socially isolated. They ensure that family learning courses help parents understand how to support and communicate better with their children. Leaders plan their English and mathematics courses carefully to meet the needs of the local area. They make sure that their apprenticeships strengthen the quality of the workforce in the council and meet the need for more teaching assistants in the city of Portsmouth. Leaders have worked successfully with staff in both the Learning Place and subcontracted provision in the City of Portsmouth College to reverse a decline in the number of adults who can benefit from the courses they run.

Leaders work closely and effectively with subcontractors to teach specialist courses for hard-to-reach groups of learners. For example, they work closely with adults recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and the unemployed to help them gain employment. Leaders work with managers in subcontracted provision to develop the

curriculum effectively, check the quality of teaching and learning carefully and to devise suitable systems to measure learners' progress.

Experienced and well-qualified governors know the provision well. They understand in detail the need to integrate the education programmes that leaders offer with the vision that the council has for raising aspirations and achievement in the city. Governors challenge leaders effectively to improve, using their expertise and their strong background knowledge and understanding of education and finance. Governors examine safeguarding concerns frequently and carefully.

Leaders, managers and teachers make sure that they plan courses for adults carefully and logically. Adults on community learning courses start their learning with small and enjoyable topics and activities to improve their confidence and re-engage them with learning. Staff teaching English and mathematics courses ensure that learners understand basic concepts before moving on to more complex topics. They repeat key learning in different contexts in order to help learners remember, contextualise and apply knowledge well. This enables adults to become more-confident learners. For example, those studying English become more self-assured and competent when writing reviews, articles, emails and letters. Those taking mathematics courses lose their fear of mathematics and learn how to carry out everyday calculations without using a calculator.

Leaders organise learning carefully so that almost all apprentices can benefit from logically planned lessons. Employers explain how apprentices become more aware of the needs of their customers, complete work at a more challenging level and improve their confidence as a result of their learning. A high proportion of business administrator apprentices who have finished their training achieve distinction grades. Until recently, a few teaching assistant apprentices were unclear about the structure of their learning and how they were assessed, which has slowed their progress.

Almost all teachers present information and new knowledge clearly and question learners carefully to check and expand their learning. They contextualise learning effectively and relate new knowledge to previous learning well. Teachers assess learners' progress carefully and use the information from these assessments to plan useful additional learning. They arrange helpful support sessions to enable those who fall behind to catch up. Teachers of adults provide clear and useful feedback to learners that identifies what they have done well and areas to develop. This helps learners improve their work quickly and effectively. Teachers' feedback on apprentices' written assignments is congratulatory but does not indicate how to improve. As a result, apprentices are not clear about how to produce better-quality work.

Leaders, managers and teachers create a calm and friendly environment for learning. Learners appreciate the welcoming and supportive atmosphere which helps them settle quickly into their work. Learners listen intently, concentrate, and work effectively with their peers and teachers. They are committed to their learning. Teachers have high expectations for how adults and apprentices behave and, as a result, learners behave professionally in the classroom and the workplace. Learners

rightly appreciate the effective support they receive from staff which helps those who miss lessons or do not fully understand catch up quickly. Teaching assistant apprentices value the additional workshops that staff have introduced to help those whose learning has been affected by COVID-19 in their schools catch up.

Leaders ensure that learners receive useful and comprehensive information to inform them about their next steps. Staff arrange informative and valuable drop-in sessions for learners to talk with highly qualified and unbiased careers advisers so that they understand the options available to them when they finish their courses.

Teachers help adult learners understand and exemplify British values. Teachers and learners agree their rules for the class together, revisit them frequently and discuss sensibly whether they comply with them. Teachers include extra topics in lessons that educate learners about different cultures and beliefs when they arise.

Apprentices benefit from sessions that develop their confidence well and improve their skills at work. For example, apprentices take part in training to become ambassadors for Portsmouth and volunteer to help at local events. Apprentices attend useful additional workshop sessions covering topics such as British values, developing resilience and improving health and well-being, which prepare them well for life and work. Leaders do not have a clear oversight of the content of this curriculum to ensure that all adult learners and apprentices cover the topics that benefit them most.

Staff are proud to work at the Learning Place. They feel well motivated and supported by leaders who take their well-being into account effectively. Staff welcome the clear communication between leaders, managers and staff which enables them to concentrate on their jobs successfully. Most teachers benefit from useful training that helps them develop and improve both their teaching skills and their subject knowledge.

Leaders and managers do not capture sufficient information about learners' starting points on community learning courses to ensure that learners are joining a course that is right for them. Although teachers know their adult learners well, leaders and managers do not have in place effective processes to know in enough detail the progress that individual learners are making.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding staff are suitably qualified and experienced. Staff undergo effective safeguarding training and refresh their knowledge frequently. Safeguarding managers record safeguarding concerns in detail. They refer learners to external partners if needed.

Leaders ensure that they recruit staff safely. Leaders check that learners using computer equipment in the centre cannot access harmful material. Learners feel

safe and know how to report safeguarding concerns. Although adults and apprentices learn about radicalisation and extremism, leaders do not check in enough detail how well staff develop learners' knowledge about staying safe from local risks.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the ways that leaders track learners' broader personal development so that leaders are clear about the topics that will most benefit their learners.
- Ensure that teachers give apprentices constructive and precise feedback on their work so that they know what they need to improve and how they might do this.
- Use the information about the starting points of adults on community learning programmes to ensure that they are on the most appropriate courses.
- Develop ways to ensure that leaders and managers understand the progress that adult learners are making.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53941
Address	The Learning Place 6 Derby Road North End Portsmouth PO2 8HH
Contact number	02392 621860
Website	learn.portsmouth.gov.uk
Principal/CEO	Jo Duckett
Provider type	Community learning and skills
Date of previous inspection	22–25 February 2016
Main subcontractors	City of Portsmouth College The Aldingbourne Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the community learning service manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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