

Inspection of Darlington Borough Council

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 June 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Darlington Borough Council provides adult and community learning programmes, education programmes for young people and apprenticeships. It receives funding from both the Education and Skills Funding Agency and Tees Valley Combined Authority. At the time of the inspection, there were 340 learners, of whom 48 were on education programmes for young people. There were 234 adult learners, of whom 75 were on distance learning programmes, 35 on community learning programmes and 124 on courses leading to qualifications in English, mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Fifty-eight apprentices were studying on 12 standards-based apprenticeship programmes, and six learners were in receipt of high-needs funding.

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

Learners and apprentices learn in a calm and welcoming learning environment where they feel valued and respected. Teachers are caring and very supportive.

Learners and apprentices quickly settle into their learning with the support of their tutors. Tutors spend time getting to know their learners, which enables them to understand and anticipate potential challenges and provide learners with good support and encouragement. Learners and apprentices appreciate opportunities to socialise with other learners who have often had the similar challenges in their previous education. Learners on ESOL courses who are newly arrived in the country develop new friends and support networks which helps them to settle more easily and feel valued.

Learners and apprentices participate well in training sessions and demonstrate respect for each other. Apprentices develop their communication skills appropriately when working with colleagues and dealing with customers. Employers value the professional way in which apprentices apply their newly acquired skills and behaviours in the workplace.

Learners and apprentices are motivated to learn. They attend lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Learners and apprentices actively participate in lessons and are confident in asking and answering questions. As a result, they gain valuable knowledge, skills and behaviours.

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

Leaders and managers have developed a range of courses which successfully meet the needs of the diverse communities living in the Darlington area. Managers work closely with a range of partners, including Jobcentre Plus, youth services, charities and local schools, to understand what courses are required to ensure that young people and adults can develop the knowledge and skills required for the job roles which exist in the area. Managers design courses that are relevant and accessible for learners. On education programmes for young people, learners study in small groups, and learning is personalised to meet individual needs. Adult learners who have recently entered the country as refugees from war-affected countries are supported well to learn English.

Leaders, managers and tutors focus well on developing learners' and apprentices' independence. They enhance learners' and apprentices' employability skills and build their confidence and resilience so that they are prepared well for their next steps in education or employment. Managers work very well in partnerships with health care professionals and social workers to ensure that learners receive the support that they need. Tutors work with special educational needs coordinators in local schools to ensure that the transition of younger learners from school is effective. This

collaborative work continues throughout learners' programmes, ensuring that individual needs and support requirements are met consistently and effectively.

Leaders and managers recruit staff with appropriate experience and qualities for working with learners from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Staff engage in a wide range of staff training which is aimed at promoting competency when working with young people and adults. Training raises staff understanding of themes such as equality and diversity, safeguarding, drug awareness and climate change. Managers continue to develop their managerial knowledge and have completed or are about to complete a level 5 apprenticeship in leadership and management. Staff value the range of training opportunities on offer to them. However, managers do not ensure that the few staff who need to develop their teaching skills do so effectively.

Tutors on education programmes for young people and apprenticeships effectively identify what learners and apprentices know and can do at the start of their programmes. They then plan and teach programmes that develop the specific knowledge and skills that learners and apprentices need based on these starting points. However, information about the starting points of adult learners is not used well enough to ensure that these learners quickly make the progress of which they are capable.

Tutors use assessment well to determine further learning and support needs as well as to inform the setting of personal targets. They assess learners' progress frequently in lessons using a range of assessment strategies. For example, they use directed questions to check understanding and to engage more passive learners. On functional skills English courses, tutors assess learners' understanding of various spelling rules, which learners are able to explain in detail to their peers, including how to decode the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Tutors provide appropriate opportunities for many younger learners to engage in relevant work experience opportunities. Some learners work with the local council's parks and recreation department and others engage in work experience with local charities. Tutors work closely with learners who are not yet ready for a work experience placement to develop the skills and behaviours that they need in readiness for a placement later in their programme. However, the re-establishment of work experience opportunities following restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been slow and, as a result, a few learners who would benefit from work experience have not yet had the opportunity to carry out a placement.

Tutors successfully support and encourage adults to join learning programmes that help them to re-engage in education and gain the skills and attributes that they need for their next steps. Managers provide courses with small class sizes, which learners value and, when required, intensive support on a one-to-one basis to help learners overcome anxieties and challenges. This approach ensures that learning is accessible to those who struggle to engage. Adult learners gain valuable skills and can confidently write letters and emails, and communicate more effectively as a result of their courses. On completion of community learning courses, a high

proportion of adult learners progress into further learning or secure and sustain employment.

Trainers integrate English and mathematics well into apprenticeship programmes, to enable apprentices to continue to develop their skills. As a result, apprentices fluently and consistently apply English and mathematics skills in their jobs. Motor vehicle apprentices accurately complete job sheets during the servicing of cars. Business administration apprentices improve their confidence and communication skills when dealing with solicitors' clients.

Employers value and support the off-the-job training that tutors provide for apprentices. This training enables apprentices to embed key concepts into their long-term memory and apply them fluently in the workplace.

Tutors provide helpful feedback, which enables apprentices, and their employers, to know the progress that they are making in acquiring new knowledge and skills. Apprentices make good progress and are well prepared for their end-point assessments.

High-needs funding is used effectively in order to provide learners with the required support that they need to meet their diverse and often complex needs. Tutors plan and coordinate support effectively, enabling learners with high needs to engage fully in all aspects of their learning. Tutors provide personalised support in lessons, and learners with high needs comment positively on the support that they receive and how this enables them to maintain their engagement in learning and employment.

Learners engage in a range of enrichment activities which help to develop their skills further and raise their political and cultural awareness and understanding. For example, a group of learners recently visited the Houses of Parliament with their local member of parliament in order to develop their understanding of the role of the government. This visit has inspired them to write to the member of parliament to request assistance in addressing the issue of motorists speeding in their local area. As a result, they have accompanied the local police in the national 'Community Speed Watch Initiative'.

Elected members of the borough council hold managers to account for the service's performance through regular reports to the council's scrutiny committee. The portfolio holder is a regular visitor to the service, as are local councillors and the mayor. They value the service and can see the difference that the training offer makes to the local community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have well-established policies and procedures that they use to keep learners and apprentices safe. These are reviewed and updated regularly. Designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are appropriately trained and experienced in

their roles. DSLs receive frequent updates from within the local authority and from the regional Prevent coordinator. They disseminate information carefully to keep staff updated on local risks, including radicalisation.

Leaders, managers and staff follow safeguarding procedures closely and comprehensively to ensure that any concerns are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Learners and apprentices are taught about safeguarding, radicalisation and local risks. They know who to report concerns to and are provided with helpful visual prompts, such as safeguarding posters, which are clearly displayed in classrooms and communal areas around the centres. As a result, learners and apprentices feel safe when at the centres and know who to contact if they have any issues or concerns.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that tutors use information about adult learners' starting points to effectively plan learning that meets individual needs.
- Ensure that all learners benefit from a range of work experience opportunities.
- Ensure that tutors receive appropriate training to enable them to continue to develop their teaching skills.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51474
Address	Coleridge Centre Ribble Drive Darlington DL1 5TY
Contact number	01325 248021
Website	www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/learning-skills
Principal/CEO	Alaine McCartney
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	April 2016
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the learning and skills 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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