

Inspection of Westmorland and Furness Council

Inspection dates:

17 to 20 June 2025

Overall effectiveness**Good**

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

Information about this provider

Westmorland and Furness Council (WFC) manage Cumbria's Adult Learning Service (the service). The service provides programmes throughout Cumbria, including for Cumberland Council. The service offers a range of accredited and non-accredited tailored learning opportunities for adults and learners with high needs. Learners study courses from pre-entry level to level 2. Courses are provided in six geographical areas across the county and are aligned to meet the requirements of these communities. The service subcontracts to four providers.

At the time of the inspection, the service had 985 adult learners and 11 learners with high needs enrolled. The largest numbers are in English, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), mathematics, employability and health and well-being. The remainder study courses in digital, languages, family learning, greener curriculum, learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and arts and crafts.

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

Learners consistently demonstrate exemplary behaviours. They thrive in the welcoming and highly inclusive culture. Learners value the opportunity to study and make new friendships in their often very challenging lives.

Learners significantly improve their confidence and resilience because of their courses and the high level of support that they receive from tutors. They are confident to socialise in groups, apply for jobs and complete homework with their children. Learners with high needs increase their levels of independence and can prepare their own food and hot drinks. Learners identify that their learning has greatly improved their lives.

Learners benefit from broader opportunities in their communities beyond their main curriculum. They have guest speakers from the emergency services, visit museums and participate in choirs, drama groups and local music festivals.

Learners demonstrate high levels of respect and tolerance for their tutors and peers. They listen carefully to the views of others and embrace their different cultures. Learners celebrate events such as National Refugee Week, Eid al-Fitr and Vietnamese festivals.

A high proportion of learners complete additional online qualifications on topics such as mental health and well-being, infection prevention and control, and equality and diversity. This supports them effectively to improve their employment prospects and take the next steps in their lives.

Learners feel safe and know how to report any concerns they have about themselves or others. They use privacy settings when using social media and learn to check their change to ensure that they are not being scammed.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear strategy to meet the needs and priorities of the residents of Cumbria, including those most disadvantaged and furthest from the job market. Leaders work very closely with carefully selected subcontractors to provide a broad range of courses such as warehousing and logistics, as well as online courses, for the hardest-to-reach residents due to their rural location and well-being. After completing their courses, most learners go on to further learning, employment or to the next stages in their lives.

Leaders work effectively with employers and partners in the region. They provide specific short courses in functional skills so that employers can recruit local people to their businesses. As part of a large resettlement programme in the community, the service supports refugees, through the ESOL curriculum, to develop the skills they need to become economically active.

Tutors are experienced and qualified to teach their subjects. Most staff benefit from training that updates their knowledge on topics such as metacognition, phonics and recall of learning. However, staff do not undertake wider training to enable them to plan consistently effective sessions that meet the cognitive demands of learners with high needs.

Curriculums are ambitious and well sequenced. Learners on digital courses start with formatting text, pictures and graphical images, and then progress to creating menus and posters. Learners with high needs develop competency in fine motor skills during pottery sessions and progress to baking, measuring and cutting lawns. The careful sequencing of the curriculum makes sure that learners swiftly make the progress of which they are capable.

Tutors accurately identify and assess the starting points of learners. Adult learners have a personalised learning plan that identifies the support they need and the specific knowledge and skills they need to develop. Learners with high needs, who struggle to transition from school, have individualised curriculums to support them to achieve their personal, social and emotional development goals.

Most tutors use a range of effective teaching and assessment strategies to embed learning and to check learners' understanding of topics. They use quizzes, videos and questioning to correct any misconceptions swiftly. Learners studying functional skills mathematics use language conversion sheets for key terminology, task sheets and physical resources to help them solve mathematical problems such as measuring surface and volume.

Tutors provide clear feedback to learners that helps them to know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Learners on digital courses add borders to images, and create central line columns and colour to their work. Consequently, learners' work improves over the duration of their course.

Learners develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Learners on digital courses identify online scams and phishing emails, and plan digital presentations. In ESOL, learners improve their conversational skills and independently make health appointments and use public transport.

Learners are supported very well with their next steps in life, further learning and employment, including those with the subcontracted provision. They receive useful careers advice from tutors and are supported with CVs, job applications and interview skills. Learners are ambitious to gain qualifications to help them move into employment or voluntary work.

Leaders have in place effective quality assurance processes to bring about improvements swiftly. They have accurately identified that achievement rates in entry level functional skills mathematics and English, ESOL and digital courses have declined. Leaders have implemented rigorous processes to improve these courses. However, it is too soon to assess the full impact of these actions.

Leaders have a strong oversight of their subcontractors. They are diligent in ensuring the quality of their subcontracted provision. Learners with subcontractors achieve extremely well.

Governors receive informative reports on the quality of education. They have a very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. This enables them to provide support and challenge to bring about swift improvements to the service.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Provide training for all tutors to improve their teaching skills.
- Implement fully planned actions to improve achievement on courses in ESOL, digital and entry level functional skills mathematics and English, and evaluate the impact of these actions.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51448
Address	Eamont Building Skirsgill Lane Eamont Bridge Penrith CA10 2BQ
Contact number	0300 373 3300
Website	www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Sam Plum
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	30 January to 2 February 2018
Main subcontractors	Learning Curve Group Limited PHX Training Limited System People Limited The Skills Network Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the senior manager for the adult, learning and global resettlement team, 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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