

Aspire to Learn

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58568

Name of lead inspector: Derrick Baughan HMI

Last day of inspection: 8 October 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Aspire to Learn (AtL) was established in 2007. It has contracts with the East of England Skills Funding Agency to provide training in health and social care, education and training and business administration. It operates from offices in Woodford Green and has learners across East London and Essex. These contracts form the bulk of its work. The organisation is run by a Managing Director, who was the nominee. In 2009 it appointed a general manager. An administrator provides support to the five assessors, four of whom are permanent appointments and one, the lead internal verifier, is a contractor.
2. Currently there are two directors, one of whom is the full time Managing Director. AtL has recently recruited a general manager and office manager to replace one person. The provider works closely with another organisation, Career Development Centre (CDC). This organisation delivers training for health and social care learners, under sub-contract. AtL delivers teaching assistant training for CDC, as part of another sub-contract. It has not been inspected previously. Owing to learner numbers, only the provision in education and training was inspected and reported on. Learners in other subejct areas were interviewed to contribute to overall findings.
3. The provider provides training on behalf of the following provider:
 - Career Development Centre
4. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the provider:
 - Career Development Centre

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Train to Gain	100 learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Education and Training	2

Overall effectiveness

5. AtL's provision is good. Learners achieve exceptionally well. An extremely high percentage of them achieve their qualifications and many of them do so in less than the planned time. Their work is of a very high standard and they gain a good range of personal and professional skills which equip them well to develop their careers further.
6. The training and coaching that learners receive is outstanding. Staff are extremely well qualified and focus very strongly on outcomes for learners. This helps learners to progress quickly in their studies. Staff are extremely supportive and respond exceptionally promptly to requests and questions from learners. Employers are equally very supportive and provide good opportunities for learners to develop and demonstrate their skills.
7. Assessment of learners' abilities is frequent and well planned. Feedback is used well to help learners progress. The training is matched very well to the needs of the learners. Programmes are tailored well to their individual needs and circumstances of their employment.
8. Managers and staff work extremely well together to create a culture of improvement which focuses well on learner achievement. The team communicate very well, in a variety of ways. Meetings are regular and cover

learners' progress in detail. Staff recruitment and training is highly effective. Finding and training staff who have the right skills to help learners progress is a key feature.

9. The safeguarding of learners is effective. Learners feel safe at work and are particularly knowledgeable about all aspects of safeguarding and child protection. Equality and diversity is covered well at induction. However, learners' understanding of diversity is not always sufficiently well reinforced during the programme. A few learners do not have sufficient understanding of the subject.
10. AtL focuses very well on continuous improvement. It knows itself well and implements effective changes well and quickly. Data are used well to monitor learners' progress but less well to manage the provision overall. Quality improvement has been improved and plans are now rigorous.

Main findings

- Success rates are extremely high. In 2008/09 overall success rates were 96%, over 12% higher than the national average. Success rates achieved in the planned time scale at 95%, were 25% higher than the national average. Current learners are making exceptional progress.
- The development of professional and personal skills is excellent. Learners gain very good classroom and planning skills. They contribute well to the planning and management of learning. They gain significantly in confidence and self-esteem.
- The standard of work is very high. Learners' work is well organised and presented in their portfolios. Work is clear and detailed and shows a detailed level of understanding of the subjects studied. In some cases the level of detail of learners' work exceeds the requirements of the programme.
- Learners make significant improvements in their economic and social well-being, and especially in their employment prospects. Volunteers have found permanent employment and those already employed have gained additional responsibilities in their jobs. Learners progress well and several intend to train as teachers.
- Coaching, training and learning are outstanding. Frequent workplace assessment sessions are systematic and effective in supporting learners' acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills. Where these sessions include short periods of formal teaching, these are delivered extremely well. Learners value the coaching, assessment and guidance by tutor/assessors, which contributes to their good progress.
- Assessors are well qualified and experienced. They are strongly motivated. They focus on successful delivery of the programmes and outcomes for learners, which they do outstandingly well. Target setting and tracking of learners' performance are robust. However, a few targets set have insufficient detail.

- Rigorous internal verification and external verifier reports confirm the accuracy and appropriateness of assessment
- The provision meets the needs and interests of learners and employers well. The programmes are directly relevant to learners' school roles. All employers confirm that the programmes meet their needs and lead to learners becoming more effective and valuable teaching assistants with extended roles. Many learners have secured employment or enhanced school roles through the programmes
 - Guidance and support are good. Learners value the commitment and flexibility of assessors. Assessors visit learners frequently in the workplace to carry out planning, assessments and observations. They communicate very regularly with learners by phone and email. Individual learners with personal and social difficulties are supported sensitively so that the majority gain the qualification. Information about wider career opportunities is not always offered.
 - AtL's focus on learner progress and achievement is very strong. Staff at all levels work well to establish a clear culture of learner achievement. Success rates are very high and learners make good progress. High standards and targets for learner outcomes are set and achieved. All organisational activities focus well on the learner experience.
 - Staff recruitment, training and development is good. Innovative and effective recruiting practices are used to ensure the right staff are appointed. Staff are well qualified and experienced, and their training and development are well managed. Staff induction is very good and focuses well on helping the staff quickly become effective in their roles.
 - The safeguarding of learners, and their understanding of safeguarding, is good. Learners feel safe and have a very good understanding of safeguarding and child protection issues. All staff have undergone safeguarding awareness training and all but one member of staff, who has no contact with learners, has been Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checked. That check is planned.
 - Equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff receive regular training and updating. Staff awareness is good and the company has a very inclusive culture. Induction for learners is good but the reinforcement of their understanding is insufficient. Learners' understanding is broadly average but, in a few cases, too cursory.
 - Actions to improve the provision are effective and carried out very quickly. The provider has established a strong culture of effective and rapid continuous improvement. Staff are empowered to implement changes, that are monitored well to measure their effectiveness. Quality improvement planning has itself been significantly improved and is now good. However, the use of summary data to improve the provision is insufficient.

What does Aspire to Learn need to do to improve further?

- Maintain and further improve the success rates by continuing to focus on learners experience and quality of provision

- Further develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity by embedding reinforcement activities more into the programme.
- Further develop their knowledge and awareness of the effectiveness of the training by better use of summary statistics and data to monitor the provision.
- Further enhance learners' knowledge about wider progression opportunities by improving advice and guidance about routes into higher education and wider career goals

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- The excellent level of support and guidance which helps them focus extremely well on what they need to do to develop.
- The frequent and highly responsive contact with assessors. They particularly like the response within 24 hours.
- The skills that they develop which help them well in their jobs and progression to more challenging roles within the school.
- The significant increase in their confidence, self-esteem and belief in education as a means to developing themselves and their careers.
- The good way that the subjects that they study are closely linked to the actual work that they would carry out in a school.
- The fact that the tutors go out of their way to help learners develop skills and understanding that are not formally part of the course, such as ICT skills.

What learners would like to see improved:

- The resources as a few of the books are out of date and a few of the documents are difficult to read.
- The amount of guidance for learners progressing to advanced level, to cover the different issues.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- The professionalism and high quality of the staff delivering the programme.
- The skills and knowledge that learners gain, that enable them to contribute significantly to enhanced support for children in the schools and take an active part in the evaluation of teaching and learning.
- The progress and overall achievements of learners, many of whom started with low levels of prior attainment.
- The quality of the course which is well presented and has very meaningful content.
- The good team working and communications between the school and the company which has helped them to link job expectations and progression well to meet the needs of the school and the learners

What employers would like to see improved:

- More contact between employers and tutors about the learners' programme and how it could be integrated more into their work in school.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

11. AtL has a very effective strategy for using feedback to improve the provision. The self assessment process has been improved and is inclusive. Staff are empowered to make changes where necessary, trusted to carry out these changes and reflect on their impact. The first self-assessment report, 2008/09, was overly descriptive. However, the provider has recognised this and the draft report for 2009/10 is objective and supported by evidence.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

12. Success rates are extremely high. Overall, 96% achieved their qualification in 2008/09 compared with the national average of 83%, and 95% achieved within the planned timescale, compared with the national average of 70%. Many learners complete earlier than their expected time scales. Learners currently on programme are making extremely good progress with many on target to complete early. Different groups of learners achieve equally well.
13. Learners develop very good professional and personal skills. Learners speak confidently about their increased knowledge of planning and delivering teaching and learning. They have very good classroom management skills, use a wide range of strategies to engage children in learning and use teaching and learning resources confidently. They have improved their communication, self-management and organisational skills significantly and increased their self-esteem. Employers speak extremely highly of the skills that learners gain.
14. Many learners had no previous formal qualifications. The induction increases their confidence and provides very clear guidance. Learners have all enjoyed working towards the intermediate level programme and, due to their sense of achievement, a large number have been inspired to continue to advanced level, or other, training. Many learners confirm that because of the support and encouragement of assessors, they have been able to achieve a qualification for the first time.
15. Written work is well presented and of a very high standard. Learners complete their portfolios diligently. These are professionally presented and well organised. Learners research topics to support their programme and this has enhanced their written work and practical task outcomes. In many cases this work is beyond the requirements of the programme.
16. Learners improve their employment opportunities significantly. They see clearly how their programme helps them develop further in their present, or future, work roles. Learners talk enthusiastically about their ambitions and career prospects. Those who were volunteer teaching assistants have secured employment in schools on completion of their qualification. Other learners have

gained much increased responsibility. Many learners aspire to take further qualifications and training to become qualified teachers.

17. Learners feel safe in the workplace and on their programme. They have a very good understanding of health and safety and safeguarding issues and talk accurately and with confidence about these in the context of their working practice and in personal situations.
18. Learners gain social skills and make a good contribution to the community. They are able to interact with others more confidently and feel more able to socialise. Learners and employers talk positively about the benefits to the local community, including a stronger understanding of the value of education. Learners support their own communities well by applying their skills at home and with community groups.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

19. Coaching, training and learning are outstanding. Workplace assessment sessions are frequent, systematic and highly effective in supporting learners' development of knowledge and skills. Formal teaching during these sessions is delivered exceptionally well. Learners value highly the coaching, assessment and guidance by assessors who are particularly effective at helping them develop. Sessions are extremely well-planned and include a wide variety of teaching and learning activities to engage learners and support their progress.
20. Employer support for learners is good. In the best schools a senior colleague acts as the learner's mentor and regularly liaises with the assessor and learner to plan assessment and review progress. However, in a minority of schools, the links between some school-based development and the NVQ programmes are not sufficient. Greater liaison between the assessor and mentor would provide further opportunities to increase the benefit for learners.
21. Assessors are very well qualified and experienced. They are strongly motivated. They focus exceedingly well on outcomes for learners and programme delivery. Target setting and tracking of learners' performance are robust. However, a few targets set have insufficient detail. Rigorous internal verification and external verifier reports confirm the accuracy and appropriateness of assessment. Assessment gives learners a detailed understanding of how to improve.
22. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Provision is inclusive and all learners receive good individual support to achieve their potential. Induction covers this topic very well. However, a few learners have insufficient understanding about wider diversity issues. AtL has identified this as an area for improvement and plans to improve this are well advanced.
23. The provision meets the needs and interests of learners and employers well. The programmes are directly relevant to learners' school roles. All employers confirm that the programmes meet their needs and lead to learners becoming more effective teaching assistants, with extended roles. Activities and support

for learners are matched extremely well to their personal needs and employment types.

24. Partnership working is satisfactory overall and good with most schools. The best schools are substantially involved in the review and evaluation of provision. The partnership with one London local authority is particularly effective in supporting access to training for under-represented groups. Other partnerships of benefit to learners include those with colleges and community support workers to enhance community cohesion.
25. Guidance and support are good. Learners value the commitment and flexible availability of assessors. Assessors visit the learners frequently in the workplace to carry out planning, assessments and observations. In addition, assessors communicate very regularly with learners by phone and email. Individual learners for whom personal and social difficulties arise are supported sensitively with the result that the majority achieve the qualification.
26. Many learners progress from intermediate to advanced level in the Support for Teaching and Learning qualification. Individual assessors provide good guidance to learners about their next steps. However, learners would welcome additional opportunities to explore the range of careers and further learning opportunities beyond the current provision.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

27. The small team of staff work exceptionally well together to create a culture of quality and self-improvement. High standards for all aspects of the provision are set and maintained. The culture is focused strongly on learner achievement. The clear aim of all staff is to be the provider of choice due the quality of their provision. Employer feedback confirms that this is the case and AtL is selected by employers, from a highly competitive field. The benefits of a small number of staff are used well to establish a very cohesive and effective team that communicates extremely well both internally and with partner organisations.
28. Staff are well qualified and experienced. The managing director selects carefully all staff members, to ensure that they have the values and personal qualities to work well within the team and enhance the learner experience. Prudent development of the team ensures that the positive culture is maintained. Regular and detailed meetings focus strongly on learners' performance. Detailed learner data are available and learner information is well recorded. Data about individual learners are used well. However insufficient use is made of summary data and statistics to look at trends and manage the provision.
29. Learners are well safeguarded and protected. All staff have received safeguarding awareness training and all staff involved with learners have CRB checks. The provider plans to carry out a CRB check for the member of staff not yet checked. Action to identify and respond to learners' welfare concerns is swift and appropriate. Learners have a thorough understanding of safeguarding and child protection issues.

30. Equality and diversity is sufficiently well promoted. Recruitment of learners is geared well to local needs. Marketing and other promotional materials reflect well the diversity of the local populations. Induction for staff covers equality and diversity well. All staff receive regular training and updating on equality and diversity issues. Policies and procedures are clear and understood well by learners. Induction for learners covers equality and diversity well. However, learners' understanding is insufficiently reinforced.
31. Engagement with users to support and promote improvement is good. AtL carry out a wide range of surveys of staff, learners and employers. Views are captured at various stages in the learners' journey. Employers confirm that they are consulted regularly about the quality of the provision. Informal feedback is particularly well managed and the response to this is swift. Management of sub-contractors is rigorous.
32. Self-assessment is very inclusive. Staff have numerous opportunities to suggest changes. The provider has established a strong culture of self-improvement. Staff are empowered to implement improvements which are well monitored to measure their effectiveness. The first self-assessment report produced was overly descriptive. The version being developed is much more detailed. Quality improvement planning has been particularly well improved.

Information about the inspection

33. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Managing Director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans and data on learners and their achievement since the organisation started business.
34. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider/college offers.

<p>Record of Main Findings (RMF)</p> <p>name of provider/college</p> <p>Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships</p>
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Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	115	115
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	1	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1	
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	1 1	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2	
Quality of provision	2	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	1	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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