

APM Learning and Education Alliance Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

29 January – 1 February 2019

| Overall effectiveness | | Requires improvement | |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement | 16 to 19 study programmes | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement | | |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement | | |
| Outcomes for learners | Requires improvement | | |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | | Requires improvement | |

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Senior leaders and managers do not have a good enough oversight of the progress of all learners to enable them to improve the provision rapidly.
- Governors have been slow to ensure that managers addressed fully all the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders' actions to improve provision are not sufficiently precise and do not identify sufficiently the impact of measures to improve learners' experience.
- Too few learners attend learning sessions and achieve all aspects of their study programme.
- Trainers fail to use routinely learners' starting points to plan learning to ensure that learners, particularly those most able, achieve their potential.
- Trainers do not provide learners with sufficiently challenging targets to help them make consistently good progress towards achieving their qualifications and wider employability skills.
- Learners are not sufficiently aware of how to stay physically fit and to lead healthy lifestyles.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers have developed well a programme that attracts and supports learners who were previously not in employment, education or training.
- Trainers provide a safe and welcoming learning environment that enables learners to build their confidence and move on to further training and employment.
- Learners benefit from useful advice and guidance that help them to make an informed decision about their future career options.

Full report

Information about the provider

- APM Learning and Education Alliance Limited is a division of Advanced Personnel Management (APM) Group UK Ltd. It is a privately owned training provider. The main administration centre is in Newtown, Birmingham. The study programme team is led by the senior business manager. This manager took up the leadership of the provision in August 2018 and reports to the chief operating officer. APM Group also provides apprenticeship and adult education programmes under a different contract with the Education Skills Funding Agency.
- At the time of inspection, there were 158 learners in centres in Cannock, Coventry, Chelmsley Wood, Nuneaton, Tamworth and West Bromwich. All learners follow a study programme of accredited qualifications in employability skills and in English and mathematics. They also undertake work experience and social action activities. Most learners have previously failed to participate successfully in full-time education, training or employment. All learners receive bursaries, are entitled to free school meals, are care leavers or come from families with low household incomes.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that governors support senior leaders to remedy swiftly the identified weaknesses.
- Ensure that leaders:
 - collate accurately information about learners' progress towards their achievement of qualifications and the development of their personal, social and employability skills
 - use the information about learners' progress to devise precise actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that all learners make good progress and achieve their qualifications
 - significantly improve learners' attendance at sessions
 - significantly increase the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications, including GCSE English and mathematics.
- Leaders should ensure that trainers:
 - plan learning that takes account of learners' starting points to ensure that the most able learners achieve their potential
 - monitor closely learners' progress towards their achievement of qualifications and their employability skills
 - set individual learners challenging targets to ensure that they make good progress in all aspects of their study programme
 - develop learners' understanding of how to manage and live a healthy lifestyle.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Governors and senior leaders have not addressed all the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have made some progress in most areas, for example in ensuring that learners undertake work experience. However, learners' achievement of qualifications and the use of management information to monitor learners' progress still require improvement.
- Immediately following the previous inspection, governors and senior managers did not give enough attention to the performance of learners and the quality of provision. They were slow to tackle the very low performance in the north-east centres. They have recently closed the centres to focus provision in the West Midlands.
- Quality improvement arrangements are not sufficiently robust. Leaders now include managers in the self-assessment process and they make better use of information to inform judgements. However, the report is still too descriptive and does not focus sufficiently on the impact of the provision on learners. It does not show in any detail an evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The quality improvement plan has actions against the many areas for improvement identified. Too many actions lack detail and measurable milestones for leaders to assess their progress sufficiently.
- Leaders and managers have improved the use of management information, particularly in reporting achievement rates, retention and attendance. However, they do not currently have a good overview of the progress that learners are making. They do not monitor formally the range of personal and social skills that learners gain in the programme, such as teamworking and communication. This limits their ability to be precise in their improvement actions.
- Leaders and managers have a very clear vision, 'to enable better lives'. This principle is at the centre of their decision-making when planning the curriculum. Leaders and managers engage with local and regional bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce and the local enterprise partnerships. They are responsive to local demands, particularly for learners who are disadvantaged.
- Managers have a productive relationship with Connexions and other agencies who refer most learners to the study programme. As a result, the programme contributes well to the reduction of young people who are not in employment education or training in the region.
- Leaders and managers have designed the study programme to be responsive to learners' employability skills and social awareness. They have revised the programme recently to include accredited units on creating a personal profile and interview techniques to help learners gain employment. The social action component of the course enables learners to contribute to their local community by supporting others.
- Performance management arrangements are effective. Leaders have restructured the management of the study programme to ensure greater lines of accountability. The observation of teaching, learning and assessment focuses appropriately on learning. Leaders now evaluate accurately the quality of trainers' teaching, learning and

assessment practice and identify appropriate actions to improve. The recently appointed manager responsible for teaching and learning has implemented appropriate professional development to improve trainers' practice. It is too early to judge whether recent actions to improve trainers' practice have had a positive impact on learners' experience and outcomes. Managers identify how well trainers are performing and give them appropriate support to meet their expectations and standards.

The governance of the provider

- The provider has an executive team, which fulfils the function of governance appropriately. The team was slow to ensure that managers addressed rapidly the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- In the last year, team members have set up a quality board, chaired by the head of quality and compliance, to report to the executive team. The team now receives much-improved information on the performance of learners in terms of achievement, attendance and retention. However, the team does not yet receive sufficient information on the progress that learners are making from their starting points. The team uses the information received to hold managers appropriately to account.
- The executive team has been fully involved in restructuring the management team. The team has appointed new managers to improve the quality of provision and has also overseen the appointment of new teaching staff on the study programme. The executive team has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the study programme. Executive team members are aware of what actions managers are taking to improve the provision and now monitor routinely the impact to ensure that improvements are sufficiently rapid.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- In the last six months, leaders and managers have revised the safeguarding policy. They have appointed additional designated safeguarding officers. The study programme now has two officers who have received enhanced training.
- All staff receive annual updated training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Teachers have recently received training on how to integrate safeguarding, British values and awareness of radicalisation and extremism into their teaching. Managers are currently evaluating the impact of this training through their observation system.
- Safeguarding issues are reported appropriately to the quarterly executive management meeting. Senior leaders receive an annual safeguarding and critical incidents report, which gives them an overview of incidents that have occurred. The report also identifies lessons learned and what actions managers are taking as a result to strengthen arrangements further.
- Leaders and managers have good links with external agencies. They have a good understanding of issues that may pose a risk to learners in their locality. They raise staff awareness of these issues well and provide a safe environment for learners in their centres.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good. Too few trainers use learners' starting points or take account of their individual needs to plan learning. As a result, learning activities fail to challenge the most able learners to make the progress of which they are capable. The most able learners often become distracted and demotivated because they have already completed the tasks and do not have additional, more challenging, activities to extend their knowledge and skills.
- Too often, trainers do not use information about learners' progress effectively. Although trainers meet routinely to review learners' performance, they do not check and assess learning carefully enough. They do not have sufficient information to show learners the progress they have made towards achieving their qualifications or to set them appropriately challenging targets towards acquiring new skills. Consequently, learners are unsure of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Because of high staff turnover, managers frequently use supply staff to cover sessions. Too often these trainers do not have sufficient expertise or access to learners' information to plan work to ensure that learners make good progress. Too many lessons are cancelled and, as a result, learners are expected to study on their own or miss learning. Previous trainers have left the provider without ensuring that learners' workbooks are complete. This means that learners repeat previously covered topics, and new trainers do not have accurate starting points from which to plan learning. As a result, these learners make slow progress.
- Most trainers give learners accurate and helpful feedback. The majority of learners use the information to revisit their work to correct mistakes to meet assessment requirements and standards. However, a few trainers fail to provide learners with appropriate feedback, so they do not know what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.
- Learners value, and benefit from, small group sizes and the provider's approachable and supportive staff. The informal but professional atmosphere in the centres makes it easy for learners to work individually or in groups on their various activities. Learners respect each other and their trainers. Learners' behaviour is largely good. They enjoy their learning in a positive and comfortable environment. Learners speak positively about how much easier it is to integrate with others at the provider, compared to large groups at school. For example, learners felt comfortable in a functional skills English session to agree or disagree with each other's answers and to work collaboratively to work out the correct response. Learners stated that they would have been reluctant to engage in this way previously.
- Trainers help learners studying English and mathematics to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Learners demonstrate increasing confidence in the manipulation of numbers in a variety of contexts. They can use literary devices such as similes and metaphors appropriately to support their writing skills. Learners in GCSE mathematics can recognise and calculate sine, cosine and tangent accurately, despite struggling with this previously. They enjoy the success and confidence their new skills bring. However, the standard of learners' work is too low in GCSE English.
- Trainers help learners understand, value and appreciate each other's differences. Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity and the importance of

inclusion. For example, when exploring successful job interviews and potential discrimination, the trainer used a TV advertisement promoting tolerance, understanding and observation of religious beliefs to show how employers can respond positively to employees' needs. Learners discussed the importance of understanding equality and individual differences, so that they can work successfully in modern Britain.

- Permanent staff are appropriately qualified and use their expertise carefully to prepare lessons and resources for the majority of learners. They develop a positive learning environment that means learners are eager to learn, contribute readily in class and are happy to correct their own and each other's work when they make mistakes. Trainers have high expectations in terms of respect, ground rules and a zero tolerance of bullying. For example, learners who had suffered from bullying talked confidently about their safe environment and their appreciation of the clear ground rules where peers respect each other.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too few learners attend regularly and often do not arrive in time for the start of their sessions. As a result, these learners do not make the progress expected of them. Trainers work well with learners to help them re-engage with their programmes. They follow up absence with phone calls, texts and emails, and, if appropriate, visit learners' homes. Consequently, attendance rates at each centre are improving and a higher proportion of learners remain on their course.
- Those few learners who have education, health and care (EHC) plans fail to receive sufficient specialist support to meet their individual needs. Trainers do not have ready access to these plans. As a result, they are not able to plan fully the support necessary to ensure that these learners make good progress.
- Managers accept that learners are not sufficiently aware of how to stay physically fit and to lead healthy lifestyles. Managers have recently started a calendar of health-related sessions such as healthy eating and the benefits of exercise, but it is too early to judge the impact of these activities on learners' understanding. However, learners receive effective support for their emotional well-being. Trainers have developed close links with local health organisations to ensure that learners access specialists as required.
- Trainers manage potential risks effectively to ensure learners' safety and well-being, including travel to centres and cyber security. Consequently, learners are safe and know who to go to if they have concerns. They can explain how to be safe online. They are confident to report any inappropriate messages and to recognise bullying behaviour. Trainers review routinely learners' personal and social concerns. As a result, learners are more able to deal with personal issues and remain on their programme of study.
- At the start of their programme, learners receive effective advice and guidance. They undertake an appropriate assessment of their starting points and learning needs. Trainers use this information well and place learners on the most appropriate course. Learners continue to receive helpful advice during their course for them to decide on future career options. For example, learners not knowing their capabilities, or what they want to do, work closely with mentors to develop their confidence. After completing suitable work-experience placements, learners are more able to plan and work towards various careers

in areas such as the retail and rail industries.

- Learners develop well their personal and social skills through peer-working and group discussions. Learners who are on work placements gain and apply these skills in real working environments. For example, learners working with a nature organisation have developed a variety of skills, such as using tools and following instructions, and an understanding of specific health and safety topics. Learners improve their communication skills, preparing them well for progression into further training or employment. However, trainers do not monitor the development of these skills closely enough to ensure that learners make the progress that they should.
- The majority of learners develop appropriate English and mathematics skills. However, the standard of a small minority of learners' work in GCSE English is poor.
- Trainers manage effectively the few incidents of inappropriate behaviour. They respond swiftly and calmly to any challenging behaviour, modelling a respectful response that is replicated by learners. As a result, learners understand clearly the expectations of trainers and the behaviours required in the workplace.
- Learners collaborate effectively with each other, demonstrating mutual respect and application of British values such as tolerance and individual liberty. For example, when developing their interview skills, learners discussed how employers must respect individuals' needs and characteristics, such as a disability or a religious belief. Learners have a basic understanding of extremism and of the potential threat of radicalisation from a range of groups.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have ensured that most learners have access to work-experience placements or effective employment-related activities. The employment coach helps learners to become work-ready through one-to-one sessions and by direct mentoring on the job. Additionally, learners take part in social action community projects to hone their skills, working with a wide range of local voluntary and business organisations. For example, learners prepare food and toiletry packages for a women's refuge, they raise funds for animal habitat rehabilitation and run several coffee mornings to support a national cancer charity. Learners from the Nuneaton centre worked on an art project for the children's bereavement room at a local hospice.
- Leaders accept that they require additional high-quality employer links to ensure that all learners will benefit from productive work experience.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Too few learners achieve their study programme. While a greater proportion of learners now gain their English and mathematics qualifications, too few achieve other qualifications in subjects such as employability skills and information technology.
- Leaders accept that they do not monitor learners' progress routinely. Consequently, they are unable to ensure that all learners receive the appropriate support needed for them to achieve their potential.
- The proportion of learners achieving their functional skills English qualification has improved and is now broadly in line with that of other similar providers. Learners' achievement of entry level 3 functional skills mathematics is around that of similar

providers; however, too few achieve at level 1. Most learners now make good progress in and achieve their functional skills mathematics qualifications. However, too few learners achieve their functional skills level 2 and GCSE English and mathematics qualifications.

- Most learners who complete their course develop appropriate personal, social and employability skills that help them move on to either further learning or employment.
- Compared to the same point in the previous year, a higher proportion of learners remain on their course. However, a significant minority of learners do not attend frequently enough.
- The proportion of learners who move on to further education or employment is improving rapidly but is still too low. Managers have increased the number of work-experience opportunities so that learners are now able to move successfully on to their next steps.
- There are no significant gaps between the achievement of male and female learners. Achievement rates for the few learners who have an Asian or Black heritage are better than those of their peers. A slightly higher proportion of learners who have an identified learning need achieve better than their peers.
- The majority of learners produce work of an appropriate standard.

Provider details

| | |
|---|--|
| Unique reference number | 59174 |
| Type of provider | Independent learning provider |
| Age range of learners | 16+ |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | 158 |
| Principal/CEO | Alan Cave |
| Telephone number | 0121 450 8300 |
| Website | apm-uk.co.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 or above | |
|---|------------------|-----|----------|-----|---------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ |
| Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships) | 114 | 6 | 32 | 6 | - | - | - | - |
| Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Higher | | | |
| | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | 16–18 | 19+ | | |
| | - | - | - | - | - | - | | |
| Number of traineeships | 16–19 | | 19+ | | Total | | | |
| | - | | - | | - | | | |
| Number of learners aged 14 to 16 | - | | | | | | | |
| Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding | - | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | - | | | | | | | |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of quality and compliance, as nominee. 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.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
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| William Baidoe-Ansah | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Barbara Hughes | Ofsted Inspector |
| Lesley Talbot-Strettle | Ofsted Inspector |
| Alastair Mollon | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Alun Maddocks | Ofsted Inspector |

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