

4.15 Southend Adult Community College

Delivering excellence in equality and diversity and early years and playwork

The majority of learners at Southend Adult and Community College are adults, although its provision includes study programmes at level 1 and 2 for younger learners, and many come from the most deprived wards in the borough. The college places a very high priority on equality and diversity and working with the local community. It was judged 'good' by Ofsted in October 2014 when the inspectorate highlighted:

- many success rates well above national rates;
- learners developing good practical, vocational and employability skills;
- a significant contribution to reducing the number of NEET young people;
- effective provision of good work placements for learners on employability programmes;
- good partnerships with a range of agencies;
- curriculum leadership that meets the needs of learners and the community.

In the words of Ofsted, the college is:

‘A great advocate of community cohesion. The main sites are a harmony of respect and joy. They are filled with success stories of individuals from a broad range of backgrounds that motivate others well. All staff ensure that all sectors of the community are welcomed and appropriately catered for.’

‘In lessons, teachers promote equality and diversity very well. The college is an integral part of the borough and many local groups use the classrooms and facilities.’

Key indicators of this success have been the fact that the college has closed achievement gaps between men and women and learners on different programme levels through positive action, improved initial assessment and has a greater focus on outcomes.

Ofsted said that staff:

‘Promote well a culture of respect around the college sites and community venues. Learners respond very well, respecting and celebrating the

cultural and other differences of the diverse college community.’

How has the college achieved this? Through an inclusive approach to equality and diversity which is evident throughout the fabric of the college. The college has a range of curriculum appropriate E&D resources which feature in session plans and schemes of work – these are embedded in delivery. For example, their Moodle for “Beginners learning Italian” features resources about Italian culture; early years teachers use resources that reflect the range and diversity of communities in Britain. Support for learners is very effective taking into account the diverse needs of the learner demographic. In the words of Fred Plummer, a learner aged 58:

‘Before I started college I couldn’t read, but whilst at college my reading has significantly improved and now I can read a lot. I like coming to college, it’s helped me gain confidence, allowing me to read stories to my grandchildren. The college is very welcoming and even though everyone is different, everyone deserves to be treated equally.’

Community information is highly visible and given prominence. For example, the college utilises many examples of diverse imagery in their displays, which are welcoming. The college’s art team have a resource bank of images of diversity which staff can draw on. Central display areas show information and images about key and relevant events such as Black History Month or aspects of social and community life, such as information about people with cancer at a local hospice. The use of electronic display screens means that the college can respond quickly to local events and developments, and contribute to community knowledge and cohesion.

Staff are supported in a variety of ways. All staff have access to the Global Dimension curriculum resource which includes a monthly list of E&D celebrations and all have been trained through DisabledGo E&D and Disability and more recently Pinnacle training packages.

This deeply inclusive approach to teaching and learning was recently noted by a visitor from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS):

‘The positive and supportive atmosphere and relationships were evident in every area of the college’s activity. I felt welcome and valued the openness of everyone I spoke to.’

She witnessed the range of courses on offer from LLDD, ESOL and apprenticeships to their free ‘Staying Steady’ programme for the over 65s, funded by Public Health England. This latter 16-week course has had over 100 participants and has enabled them to play a fuller part in the community. Yet the college continues to drive forward and is currently working to increase ethnic diversity on the programme through co-ordinated community links and is offering classes in care homes and other outreach venues. Reflecting its commitment to teaching and learning, the college has a dedicated, self-contained centre for high needs students with profound and multiple disabilities. Learners with LDD are judged to make excellent progress towards independent living.

As can be seen from the comments above, both Ofsted and BIS consider that the college demonstrates a rare and effective approach to E&D which is undoubtedly related to its position as a provider of 16+ and adult learning with a curriculum offer that is directly responsive to the diverse needs of its learners and the local community.

Equality and diversity are embedded in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. Within their own practice, tutors work hard to ensure the most appropriate methods of assessment to allow their learners to develop and gain recognition for their developing skills. Tutors always maximise any opportunities to enhance learners’ understanding of inclusivity.

To quote from a level 5 learner talking about her tutor:

‘I showed her the safeguarding, equality & diversity and resilience leaflets that I have created as part of my level 5 and how I now use these within my setting. I explained to her that I have given these to new childminders to help embed these qualities within their settings. She has said I have displayed outstanding qualities by doing this.’

Sector Skills Area (SSA) 1, Early Years and Playwork, has been judged by Ofsted as ‘outstanding’ in two consecutive inspections (2008 & 2014). The college now has level 5 progression courses, with some learners having progressed from L2/3 through to L4/5 and then on to foundation degrees at Anglia Ruskin University. Outcomes for learners are exceptional and consistently well above benchmark. There are excellent vocational progression routes available for learners from level 2 to level 5. Progression rates within the college are very high. Currently a pathway from the level 5 has been developed in partnership with the University of Essex to full honours degree. Success rates for learners are exceptional across all levels.

Learners on level 4, two-year early years courses, with high retention and success rates, moved into supervisory and managerial roles which were the origin of the college’s higher level programmes. Learners are involved in the life of college, and are encouraged to bring in outside activities into the classroom such as Children in Need.

This year they have introduced study programme pathways in



early years and health and social care for their 16-19 learners, widening participation in their excellent training across all age groups. Tutors ensure that learners are involved in the life of the college and support the local community with many volunteering their time in local early years provision and participating in charity events, for example, collecting donations of arts and crafts materials for a local women's refuge.

Learners on higher level qualifications cite their training as having a very positive impact on their practice with one level 5 learner stating:

‘In fact I was awarded ‘outstanding’ across ALL areas of my practice. I truly believe that, without all the knowledge and support I have gained through completing my level 5, that would never have happened and so for that I thank you.’

This is confirmed by the 2014 Ofsted report which said:

‘Success, retention and attendance rates are exceptionally high. Teachers motivate learners exceptionally well, applying high levels of professional standards at all times. Learners work hard to gain a better understanding of the theories and strategies used in the development and support of children and young people. Teachers make excellent use of individual learning plans. Personal tutors provide learners with... highly effective one-to-one coaching and mentoring support.’

‘Staff are particularly good at identifying and providing prompt support for additional learning needs. Teachers use an excellent range of exciting and innovative approaches to assessment and prepare learners well for their assignment work.... encourage learners well to reflect on their experiences and use relevant examples from their workplace and other experience... Learners know well how to keep themselves and the children they work with safe.’

The commitment of the leadership team has been key. Leaders have been intent on driving quality improvement and being quick to respond to changes. Staff have high expectations for themselves and for their learners. In addition, the leadership team has a strong working knowledge of the subject areas and has the ability to translate that into clear goals and expectations and promote a highly effective working ethos.

The college is not standing still. For example, the EY leadership team has led on e-learning and e-portfolio developments which are being rolled out across study programmes and it is developing a Moodle for counselling. One member of staff was highly commended in the Nursery World Teacher of the Year award. The leadership team has also led on revamping the college's TLA processes and recently delivered observation training to staff. This has been informed by the Learning Consortium Learning Framework model which has given the organisation further insights into quality improvement measures.

Teaching and learning remains a central theme of staff development with all staff encouraged to keep up to date with professional practice and look outward, including participation in visits to providers in the EU to identify best practice.

Southend Adult Community College is an adult and community learning provider.

