

Hill Holt Wood

Not-for-profit organisation

Inspection dates

15–17 May 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Senior managers, supported by the trustees, have eradicated the main weaknesses found at the previous inspection and presided over a period of continuous improvement in outcomes and in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Staff provide a safe, nurturing environment that prioritises the safety and well-being of each learner and consequently learners make significant gains in their personal development, work-readiness and capacity to improve their life chances.
- Trustees are passionate about the value of education in combating disadvantage and raising the aspirations of young people at risk from social exclusion; they support and challenge senior leaders well to achieve these ideals.
- Learners enjoy the wide range of practical woodcraft and construction skills that their tutors help them to develop; learners use natural wood to build bird-boxes and well-crafted items of garden and office furniture.
- Learners develop a respect for their environment and they take pride in making a positive difference to the ecology and wildlife of Hill Holt Wood.
- Learners' attendance and achievement continue to require further improvement.
- Managers do not evaluate systematically all of the management information available to them.
- Tutors' expectations of a few learners are too low and consequently these learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Hill Holt Wood (HHW) is a registered social enterprise and charity situated in ancient woodland in Norton Disney, Lincolnshire. Most of the 63 learners currently on programme are young people with a recognised social or learning need and/or disability. Learners follow study programmes in eco-friendly construction, hospitality, land-based studies and landscaping, as well as a motorbike mechanics course previously taught at a site in Gainsborough. In addition, tutors deliver heritage woodcraft in a second woodland. The provider recruits learners primarily from the Lincoln, Sleaford, Gainsborough and Newark areas. Typically, they attend for three days per week over an academic year.
- The proportion of young people leaving schools in Lincolnshire with at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is similar to the national rate. Educational levels of the Lincolnshire population as a whole are slightly lower than average for England. Unemployment is higher than the national rate.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate the actions already taken to ensure that the three-year trend of steady increases in the proportion of learners attending classes and achieving their qualifications continues; take further action to accelerate the pace of these improvements.
- Ensure that tutors have suitably high expectations of all their learners, especially the most able, and provide sufficient challenge to enable them to make rapid progress.
- Managers, as well as trustees, should analyse carefully the range of data on recruitment, retention and achievement so that they can make accurate evaluations about the quality of provision and outcomes achieved by different groups of learners; they should take swift action to make necessary improvements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior managers, supported by the provider's trustees, have taken decisive actions to improve significantly the quality of provision. Together, they have successfully eradicated most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and made good progress in tackling those that remain. This has led to better outcomes for learners, including good gains in personal development and improvements in their achievement of qualifications.
- Senior managers and trustees are highly committed to improving the social and economic circumstances of learners. They provide well-considered support and personalised education programmes for learners with complex and multiple needs and often chaotic and disorganised life styles. Consequently, an increasing proportion of learners with a poor record of participating in learning remain on programme and progress to further education, training or employment.
- Managers work closely with employers to ensure that HHW's land-based, construction and catering programmes reflect the demands of the agricultural, building and hospitality industries. This ensures that learners' achievement of skills and qualifications support their career aspirations. In addition, managers place particular emphasis on ensuring that the curriculum promotes the values of environmental sustainability.
- Managers use their links with employers well to provide learners with good-quality work-related activities. The activities undertaken by learners are suitably challenging and provide valuable opportunities to improve their vocational and interpersonal skills. For example, learners on catering programmes work as a team to cook and host a regular community lunch club for older people.
- Staff participate in a wide range of training to develop their professional teaching and learning skills, which has contributed to improvements in the quality of learning sessions. Managers plan staff development to help tutors deal confidently with learners who have specific barriers to learning such as mental ill health or behavioural challenges.
- Self-assessment arrangements are good. Leaders and managers know the provision well. They have a realistic understanding of what needs to improve and how to achieve those improvements. Judgements in the self-assessment report are clear and evaluative. Trustees and the chief executive officer (CEO) make good use of the detailed quality improvement plan to accelerate the pace of improvement to benefit all learners.
- Managers have successfully used quality improvement arrangements to promote high standards of provision since the previous inspection. They use the results of a recently introduced observation of learning process to identify correctly key strengths and areas for improvement. However, post-observation feedback does not always give sufficient guidance to tutors on how they can improve their practice.
- Managers use data to assess performance effectively. They set and monitor achievement targets and quickly intervene where shortfalls are evident. However, managers fail to evaluate systematically all of the available relevant data to identify trends and improvement actions, for example in the performance of different groups of learners, or to establish patterns in achievement or retention over time.

The governance of the provider

- Since the previous inspection HHW's leaders have strengthened the effectiveness of the board of trustees by appointing additional members with extensive knowledge and experience of education. Trustees now have much clearer roles and responsibilities for promoting excellent provision and are committed to raising standards and aspirations for HHW's learners and staff.
- Trustees take a keen interest in strategic and operational decision-making and on the potential impact on learners of their decision. As advocates of high aspirations for the most disadvantaged young people, trustees scrutinise carefully the pace and outcomes of actions taken by senior managers. They make good use of their considerable expertise to support programme improvement, for example by providing staff with training on fundamental British values.
- Board members use detailed management information reports to challenge the performance of senior leaders. They place a high importance on the scrutiny of performance data and improvement targets. However, trustees recognise that they do not fully evaluate data sufficiently to identify patterns and long-term trends.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have established a caring learning culture that accords a very high importance to learners' safety and well-being. All staff are suitably vetted before they begin their employment.
- Managers know the learners well and have a clear understanding of each learner's specific needs and vulnerability. Staff routinely share information on potential and actual safeguarding concerns that helps protect learners from harm. All staff closely monitor learners' behaviour and intervene promptly if necessary. Learners know how to raise a concern if they feel unsafe. They are confident that staff will deal promptly and sensitively with anything they bring to their attention. Managers maintain detailed and regularly monitored records of concerns raised by learners.
- Managers have developed good links with external welfare agencies that they use well to refer learners for specialist help and guidance when necessary. A pastoral tutor provides learners with useful personal support that helps them stay on their programme or re-engage with learning. Managers work well with parents and carers to help learners progress and achieve.
- The designated safeguarding officers are appropriately qualified. They make good use of the detailed improvement action plan to enhance significantly the safety and welfare of learners. Managers have introduced learning and promotional activities that support effectively learners' engagement with and understanding of fundamental British values. One activity involved learners producing placards and posters in support of a local anti-bullying campaign. Learners have a reasonably good appreciation of the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Tutors are knowledgeable and passionate about their subject areas. They use their knowledge and skills well to plan and teach sessions that interest and meet the needs of the majority of learners. Learners appreciate their tutors' knowledge and value the way they successfully relate teaching to the real-life situations they encounter in the provider's woodland setting. For example, learners make benches and bird boxes for the woodlands landscaped garden areas. They also learn how to make a 'dead hedge', which involves using cut branches and foliage to create a barrier, which can offer shelter for small animals, especially birds.
- The vast majority of learners make the progress expected of them. Qualification achievement rates have improved greatly since the last inspection. The standards of learners' work is good and the proportion of learners who successfully pass external tests in functional skills English and mathematics is improving. On an advanced-level course, one learner designed and project-managed a sensory garden for a local special school successfully and is progressing onto a foundation degree in art.
- Learners develop good employability skills. They work in the community, managing nature reserves and walking routes, including 130 miles of footpaths. The majority of learners are engaged in these conservation activities regardless of the vocational pathway they are undertaking. Learners take additional qualifications to support this work, such as how to use a strimmer and other bladed tools safely.
- Learners enjoy practical lessons and are able to demonstrate a high level of skill in handling and using tools and machinery. One learner has developed a high level of heritage woodcraft skills and sells his wooden bowls at a local craft fair.
- Learners benefit from the comprehensive support they receive from tutors, which enables them to complete their qualifications. Tutors foster productive relationships with their learners and as a result, learners develop increased confidence and self-esteem, which improve their ability to carry out their job roles well. Learners who need extra help to enable them to progress and achieve receive good individualised support.
- The majority of learners receive clear and constructive verbal and written feedback on their work. They know how well they have done and what they need to do further to complete their assessments. Verbal feedback encourages learners to develop their skills and increases their confidence. Written feedback, however, does not always encourage learners to achieve outcomes above those required for the qualification.
- Learners develop appropriate skills in mathematics and in English. In vocational subject areas, learners receive basic instruction in, for example, how to correctly measure a piece of wood in preparation for sawing it, but tutors do not always help learners to develop mathematical skills to a level higher than that required for carrying out specific practical tasks. Tutors routinely correct spelling mistakes and grammar errors in the majority of learners' written work. Learners' use of spoken English during sessions is good.
- In a minority of lessons, tutors' expectations of learners are too low and a few learners are not encouraged to work to their full potential. Tutors do not consider learners' starting points sufficiently and as a result, the pace of work is not pitched at a sufficiently high level to help the most able to progress at the rate of which they are capable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- HHW's team of rangers, tutors and managers provide a nurturing and supportive environment that encourages learners to take pride in their learning and achievements. The provider's tranquil and peaceful setting in ancient woodland provides a conducive learning environment in which young people thrive and grow. Learners develop effective strategies to manage their personal circumstances and, with the support of caring and sympathetic tutors, address their individual barriers to learning and prepare for their next steps.
- Learners benefit from the wide range of practical and vocationally relevant study programmes that HHW offers. They learn valuable skills and trades that are in demand locally, such as motorcycle maintenance, joinery, heritage woodcraft and horticulture. Learners enjoy working with their hands during practical sessions and they are excited about learning new skills such as using an electric strimmer, building a wooden table or preparing meals for themselves and others.
- Learners are polite and courteous to their tutors and to other learners. Their behaviour during the inspection was exemplary. Learners work well in small groups and support each other during learning sessions. Their attitude to learning is good and they are keen to learn, demonstrating genuine enthusiasm for the subjects they are studying.
- Learners receive high-quality, impartial advice and guidance, which ensure that they have a good understanding of their career options and what they need to do to achieve them. HHW staff have good relationships with local schools, which enable prospective learners to know about the opportunities that HHW provides, and to select the most appropriate course for them. Learners attend careers fairs, and visit local colleges and employers to explore opportunities for their next steps, and in practical sessions, tutors highlight the careers potentially available to learners when they complete their study programme.
- HHW's tutors and managers place a very high priority on helping learners to keep themselves safe from abuse, sexual exploitation and extremism, including when using social media. The CEO takes a personal responsibility for ensuring that learners are safe at all times. Managers work very closely with a wide range of local voluntary and welfare agencies dealing with substance misuse, homelessness, mental health and offending behaviour to ensure that they refer learners to appropriate organisations where necessary.
- HHW's managers have taken a lead in promoting learners' development so that they are well prepared to respect others and contribute to their community and the wider society. All learners now complete a study unit on British values. Managers invite a range of visiting speakers to talk to groups of learners about democracy, local elections, modern slavery, religion and tolerance. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of British values and are able to articulate how these values relate to their lives outside of the learning environment.
- Learners' attendance requires improvement. In the last 12 months a much closer focus by tutors on learners with erratic attendance, known problems at home or specific medical conditions has resulted in significant improvements in attendance. Tutors have also begun to involve parents and carers to encourage learners to attend. They are quick to escalate attempts to contact absent learners as soon as practicable after they fail to appear at the

first learning session of the day. These strategies have resulted in good attendance for a majority of learners, but managers rightly acknowledge that a minority of persistent absentees results in the provider falling slightly short of its challenging attendance targets. Learners' attendance during the inspection was good.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The large majority of learners progress well from their different starting points and achieve the standards of which they are capable. This is despite learners bringing with them a very wide range of barriers to learning arising from often-difficult home circumstances, mental ill health, financial problems, offending history and challenging behaviour.
- School exclusions and referrals by welfare agencies account for a large majority of learners attending programmes at HHW. The provider's team of rangers and tutors offers a strong nurturing environment that acknowledges these learners' abilities as well as their limitations. The support they provide for learners throughout their programme helps them to progress and achieve.
- The proportion of learners who go on to further education, training or employment is good. In 2016/17, the large majority of those who completed the programme went on to an apprenticeship or into a job with a local employer. Managers' analysis of early leavers shows that a significant proportion of those who left early did so for reasons that were outside their control, such as families moving to another area, poor behaviour, pregnancy, health problems or difficulties at home.
- Qualification achievement rates have been rising steadily for the last three years from a very low starting point and are now close to those of similar providers. Managers rightly acknowledge that they continue to require improvement, especially for those aged 16 to 18, who make up the large majority of learners. Qualification achievement rates for learners aged 19 and over is good.
- Achievement of functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics and in information and communication technology have also improved over the last three years, again from a very low starting point. This has largely been the result of a greater focus on preparing learners for the external tests and the appointment of a specialist functional skills tutor who has worked hard to develop learning resources and strategies to improve achievements.
- The proportion of learners who leave the programme before completing it has been high for the last three years. In-year data for 2017/18 indicates that the provider has retained a significantly larger proportion of the learners recruited during the current year, compared with the two preceding years. However, it is too soon to assess the impact of this improved retention on the likely achievement rates for current learners.
- In most cases, the number of learners is too small to make robust judgements about the relative performance of different groups of learners. However, managers have identified that learners with special educational needs achieve better than those without and that those previously eligible for free school meals perform less well. Managers have only recently begun to consider performance differences between groups of learners and their strategies for minimising these disparities are in the initial stages of development.

Provider details

Unique reference number	52210
Type of provider	Not-for-profit organisation
Age range of learners	14+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	70
Principal/CEO	Steven Donagain
Telephone number	01636 892836
Website	www.hillholtwood.com

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)	14	4	28	6	1	–	–	–
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	7							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	18							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief executive officer, 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

Jai Sharda, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nigel Bragg	Her Majesty's Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector

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