

Chinese Centre (North of England) learndirect

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Literacy, numeracy and language

Description of the provider

1. The Chinese Centre (North of England) was established in 1999 as a regional Chinese centre. Located in Newcastle city centre, the centre is a registered Charity with the mission to promote social inclusion, equality and diversity.

Its objectives are to:

- Introduce lifelong learning to the local and Chinese community
 - Provide facilities for learning, recreation or other leisure activities with an aim to improving the condition of people's life
 - Facilitate the Chinese community to actively participate in and contribute to the mainstream community in the North-East of England
 - Encourage social inclusion; enable the service to be enjoyed by all communities
2. Since 2003 the Chinese Centre (North of England) learndirect has attracted more than 900 Chinese-speaking learners mostly from Newcastle city centre but also from a 40-70 mile radius of the city. The centre also recruits a small number of learners from the non-Chinese community. The centre opens 6 days a week including Saturdays and Sundays. The centre is approved by University for Industry (Ufi) to offer learndirect courses for speakers of other languages, and provides learndirect courses in literacy, numeracy, language and information and communication technology (ICT). Most learners' language, literacy and numeracy skills are assessed at pre-entry and entry levels 1 and 2.
 3. One hundred and seventy-seven learners enrolled in the period between 30 July 2006 and the inspection on 21 May 2007. Most of the 90 learners currently enrolled are Chinese speakers. Twenty-one learndirect learners are following language courses, 25 literacy courses, 45 numeracy courses, and two learners are enrolled on both numeracy and literacy courses.
 4. The centre attracts learners through a combination of recommendations by the Chinese community and previous learners, direct marketing, and referrals from agencies including Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
 5. The unemployment rate in Newcastle was 3.2% in November 2006, compared with the national average of 2.5%. The 2001 census shows that 6.9% of the population are from minority ethnic groups, compared with the national average of 9.1%.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1

Sector subject area

Literacy , numeracy and language	Outstanding: Grade 1
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding. Learners' achievement of literacy, numeracy and language skills are outstanding. Leadership and management, equality of opportunity and literacy and numeracy are outstanding. Quality improvement arrangements lead to outstanding improvement.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

7. The provider has demonstrated it has good capacity to improve. The Chinese Centre (North of England) learndirect has successfully implemented innovative actions to retain learners and to ensure they succeed. The centre uses a range of quality improvement activities, including those of regional learndirect, to identify areas for improvement and managers and staff take action to correct these promptly.
8. The self-assessment process is inclusive and managers identify and prioritise actions, however, this is the first self-assessment report and some judgements in the report are unclear and grades were understated.

Key strengths

- Outstanding achievement of literacy, numeracy and language skills
- Outstanding teaching and learning
- Rigorous planning and assessment to help individual learners' progress
- Good information, advice and guidance
- Outstanding leadership and management
- Very innovative and successful actions to retain learners and ensure learner success
- Good strategy to widen participation
- Good continuous improvement

Key areas for improvement

- There are no major areas for improvement

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. Learners make exceptional progress in their development of literacy, numeracy and language skills. A very high proportion of learners stay on their courses and achieve their goals within the agreed time limit. The success rate for the end of quarter three was 90%, well above the national average of 72% and the regional average of 69%. For most learners this success rate is measured against personal learning goals negotiated with their tutors. However, the centre is also making good progress towards its target of 88 national test passes over the year, with 59 learners having passed a test at first attempt by the end of quarter three. The low withdrawal rate of 2% also compares well with the national average of 6% and the regional average of 5%. Only 8% of learners take longer than planned to complete their courses, compared with the national and regional rates of 22 and 26%, respectively. Learners work hard, attending the centre regularly, or working online or from CDs at home. Many of the employed learners work in restaurants, and connect online after work in the early hours of the morning. The acquisition of new skills is making a significant difference to the everyday lives of many learners, such as the 73 year-old learner delighted she is now able to shop more independently. Learners enjoy the courses and also benefit from the social contact with others in the centre.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Taught group sessions and very effective bilingual support enable learners with very low language and numeracy skills to benefit from e-learning. Weekly language and numeracy classes are exceptionally well planned to complement the skills taught in learndirect programmes, helping learners to prepare for and consolidate their learning. A wide range of resources such as handouts, whiteboard, games and audio-tapes bring the sessions alive. Learners practise their skills through well-managed group and individual activities during the taught sessions, and through homework. There is good bilingual support to guide Cantonese and the minority of Mandarin speakers with little English through their courses, helping them understand on-screen instructions, for example, and how to use the IT equipment safely. The centre has translated a nationally available introductory course into Chinese as a starting point for learners with very little English. In numeracy class tutors use packaged foodstuffs as aids to demonstrate weights and measures. There is good use of online dictionaries and translation facilities, and additional resource materials, including software, translated into Chinese. Most information leaflets in the centre are printed both in Chinese and English.

11. Tutors plan, assess and review learning exceptionally well. Tutors follow a very clear procedure to diagnose needs, plan programmes, set personal goals and targets, and review progress. A flow-chart illustration and bilingual support ensures that learners understand each of these stages. Tutors agree specific and measurable targets for learners, relevant to their everyday life, needs and interests. For example, a numeracy learner has a target to produce a budget for a trip to Hong Kong. A literacy target for another learner is to write three short paragraphs in chronological order about her day. Tutors monitor and review learners' progress frequently, through informal discussion at the end of each centre-based session, and as each course is completed. Staff telephone learners who have not accessed their courses for one week. Tutors assess the achievement of personal learning goals and targets carefully, making good use of role-play with witness testimony for example to assess learners' competence in using language and numeracy skills. Follow-up diagnostic assessments check overall gains in learning at appropriate times in the learners' programmes. The learning goals, targets, and outcomes of assessment are well recorded online, and are used by learners and tutors to review progress.
12. Overall, the centre meets the needs of learners with low literacy, numeracy and language levels well, including the many older learners with no previous experience of formal education. The centre has enhanced the provision to improve recruitment and make e-learning accessible for these learners. For example, it provides support for unemployed people referred by the local Jobcentre in preparing CVs, and runs an accredited citizenship course successfully targeted towards learners wishing to gain permanent residency. This brings learners into the centre who otherwise might not have come. Introductory taught courses and additional software in numeracy and language help prepare learners with very low skill levels for the learndirect courses. The additional taught classes in English and language provide additional support and motivation once learners begin their learndirect courses.
13. Good initial and diagnostic assessment helps to ensure that learners enrol on courses appropriate to their needs. Staff identify additional needs at a very early stage in this process and provide equipment such as large tracker-ball mice and high-contrast, large font keyboards. This help is particularly valued by some older learners who have no experience of using computers, or who have weaker vision. Tutors assess learners for possible dyslexia needs and provide additional one-to-one support. The centre can arrange to refer learners with visual and hearing impairment to a specialist advice agency if appropriate.
14. The centre provides very good information, advice and guidance about learndirect programmes, referring learners to the learndirect national advice line, to other learndirect centres, and to the local college for information about other courses. Two centre staff have level 3 advice and guidance qualifications and are able to advise learners on possible progression routes. Tutors take a close interest in and support learners' aspirations. The centre is developing links with nextstep to extend learners' access to independent advice and guidance. A few learners have progressed to employment or to college courses. Most are not

yet ready to progress to mainstream learning outside the centre, or to learndirect ICT courses. The centre has very good, well-recorded information about what learners do when they complete courses, and is currently contributing to a regional learndirect pilot project to monitor learner progression.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade1

15. Leadership and management are outstanding. The Chinese centre has a clear mission which is well understood by all staff. learndirect courses are very successfully used as a means to support the Chinese community. Managers make good use of data and targets to drive success. There are clear records and well-documented systems including very effective recording of learner attendance and progress. The board monitors performance and learners well. Internal communications are excellent and there are very successful and innovative external partnerships which benefit learners, including those with a local dance school. The success of the centre has been recognised regionally and nationally by external agencies for example the "New Learning Opportunities Award" and regional winner of the "Best UK Online Centre". Staff are well qualified and there is an excellent staff development programme, which leads to measurable improvement in the learner experience. There are very successful actions to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged by staff absence. This includes a register of casual staff who are used in times of illness or other staff absence. Recruitment to posts is rapid. However, for many staff the centre is a way of life and there is insufficient attention to their work life balance. The self-assessment report identifies turnover of staff as a weakness.
16. There are very innovative actions to retain learners and ensure learner success. Staff have successfully developed a learning culture where learning and social activities successfully complement each other. Success is celebrated through the display of photographs and case studies of successful learners and very enjoyable monthly learner awards party. Incentives to encourage learner success include vouchers for a Chinese meal and dance lessons. The centre is well used with attendances of over 30 learners a day.
17. There is a good strategy which is effectively widening participation. The centre is outstandingly successful in delivering its mission to support the Chinese community. It assists learndirect regionally to widen participation. Chinese learners are attracted from outside the immediate area and there are plans to engage new immigrants from mainland China who are Mandarin and not Cantonese speakers. Efforts to engage learners from the non-Chinese community include accepting referrals from DWP and promotional activities such as open days and participation in City Council events. Learners from the non-Chinese community are fully integrated with learning and other activities. The needs of

non-Chinese learners are well met by other learndirect centres in the city of Newcastle.

18. Continuous improvement is good. The centre complies fully with the central Ufi processes and there is clear evidence of rapid action to address any issues which are identified from external audit, the self-assessment process or learner feedback. Managers conduct regular observation of learning sessions. The development plan is clear and leads to improvement; however, the self-assessment report, the first completed by the centre, lacks clear judgements.
19. The centre uses some innovative health and safety practices to ensure the comfort and safety of learners. These include hourly chimes which indicate when learners should take a break from computer screens, and health and safety ambassadors (learners) who ensure learners take a break. Learning games are used to reinforce health and safety, and equality of opportunity at the learner party.

What learners like:

- Good support for learning English
- Very approachable and kind staff
- No competitive atmosphere – everyone supports each other
- Great to be able to attend the centre at weekends
- Convenient location
- Centre activities for young and old

What learners think could improve:

- More teachers for one-to-one support
- Larger rooms

Sector Subject Area

Literacy, numeracy and language

Outstanding: Grade 1

Strengths

- Outstanding achievement of literacy, numeracy and language
- Good support for individual learning
- Thorough assessment of learner progress
- Programme meets needs of learners well
- Good information, advice and guidance

Areas for improvement

- No key areas for improvement

Annex

Learners' achievements

Q3 2007	Enrolments	Counted for data	Success rate (%)	Withdrawal rate (%)
All sectors	763	630	90	2
Skills for life	763	630	90	2

Equality and diversity

Q3 2007	All Ethnic Groups	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese/Other	Mixed	Not Known	White
Enrolments	763	2	4	675	0	0	82
Completion rate (%)	98	50	100	99	0	0	95
Achievement rate (%)	83	100	100	82	0	0	84
Success rate (%)	90	50	100	90	0	0	87
Withdrawal rate (%)	2	50	0	1	0	0	6