

First Rung Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

22–25 November 2016

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Almost all trainees progress to apprenticeships, further education and training or jobs.
- The large majority of study programme learners progress to traineeships, apprenticeships, further education and training or jobs.
- Senior leaders and managers have established particularly successful and productive employer partnerships to support and prepare learners for employment.
- Learners develop good professional and vocational skills while taking part in good-quality work placements.
- Trainers provide readily available and good-quality academic support for learners in and out of lessons, which helps learners improve their study skills.
- All staff share a keen focus on supporting their learners in the achievement of their learning and career goals.
- Leaders and managers accurately evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; they make excellent use of the views of learners, and use quality improvement plans effectively to improve the provision.
- All learners quickly improve their attitudes, behaviour and attendance and adopt the commitment required to be successful in a job.
- Senior leaders, managers, trainers and support staff have developed very effective partnership working with external agencies to support learners and remove significant barriers to learning.
- Although improving, qualification achievement rates are not yet good.
- The development of learners' English and mathematics, particularly on functional skills qualifications, requires improvement.
- Learners' targets are too long-term to provide the motivational milestones that many need to make rapid progress.
- Feedback to learners lacks the specific detail that learners need to make precise improvements.

Full report

Information about the provider

- First Rung Ltd (First Rung) is a registered charity operating as an independent learning provider. Established in 1983, it works from training centres in Ponders End, Colindale and Watford, recruiting learners from across the north, east and west of London and Watford areas. It provides study programmes known as 'flex' and traineeships for 16- to 19-year-olds. It directly contracts with local authorities and schools for alternative part-time education provision for 14- to 16-year-olds. It is a subcontractor of a local further education college and a training provider for apprenticeships. Inspectors did not inspect or grade the alternative education and apprenticeship provision as part of this inspection.
- First Rung learners often arrive on programme with significant personal and social barriers to their learning and potential employment. Learners complete work experience placements in business, customer service, retail and childcare settings and work towards qualifications in administration and childcare in addition to English, mathematics and information and communication technology at entry level to level 2.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders and managers should improve the skills of staff in teaching English and mathematics so that learners make better progress and a higher proportion achieve their qualifications.
- Improve the quality of target-setting for the development of vocational, personal and social skills, so that learners have clear and specific targets to help them take small steps towards achievement.
- Provide more detailed and precise feedback on learners' written work so that learners are clear about what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders and managers have established a clear vision and ethos for First Rung and communicate this particularly well to staff and learners. The development of learners' personal and social skills and their preparation for employment or further learning is at the heart of this ethos. Leaders, managers and staff take great care to ensure that the training and support they offer serve the client group well. Senior leaders, managers and staff are ambitious for learners; they have high expectations for learners' progress and take enormous pride in their achievements.
- Arrangements for monitoring and improving the performance of trainers are good. Managers' evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is broadly accurate and informative. They carry out regular and exacting observations of staff and their feedback on staff performance is constructive but candid. Managers have rectified weaknesses in the observation process found at the previous inspection. Trainers now ensure that lesson activities are imaginative, engage learners' attention in class and help them progress. Managers make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and take steps to improve it where necessary.
- Self-assessment is thorough, accurate and evaluative. Managers involve staff effectively in the process and make good use of data and feedback from learners to evaluate provision. Their associated quality improvement plan links closely to the self-assessment report and the longer-term goals for quality improvement in the strategic plan. The quality improvement plan has clear success criteria. Managers and trustees monitor its implementation carefully.
- Staff give learners' feedback high priority in the assessment of provision. Managers carefully listen to the views of learners. They value the feedback learners give and respond to it well, making changes wherever it is possible to do so, for example by improving learning resources or recreational facilities for learners. Learners' involvement in shaping provision improves their sense of self-worth and self-esteem.
- Managers and advisers are particularly successful in working with employers to secure productive work placements for learners. Managers select employers carefully to ensure that they can support learners' development. Advisers provide good guidance for employers that enables them to develop learners' vocational skills and work-readiness.
- Staff have very productive partnerships with a wide range of external support and referral agencies such as local authorities, social services, child and adult mental health services or the youth offending team. They use these links well to provide help and practical support to enable learners to remain in learning.
- Arrangements to promote equality and diversity are good. Trainers and support staff cover these topics well at learners' induction and reinforce them during learners' training and work placements. Staff are intolerant of inappropriate language or behaviour and challenge it effectively. Working relationships between learners are harmonious. Staff model British values very effectively; learners adopt these behaviours in turn. Learners from diverse faiths and cultures are courteous and respectful towards staff and one another. Managers analyse performance data thoroughly to identify differences in the

performance of different groups. Where there are significant disparities they take remedial action, for example by providing targeted support to underperforming groups.

- Managers have placed a high priority on developing learners' skills in English and mathematics and have been successful in helping staff to promote these effectively in lessons. However, their strategies for developing learners' English and mathematics are not yet complete or established well enough across all aspects of provision. Learners' achievement of qualifications in these subjects has improved but is not yet good and written work is not consistently of a sufficiently high standard.
- Managers and staff hold weekly case conferences to discuss learners' progress and identify actions to help individual learners improve. They make good use of qualitative and quantitative data in these discussions. However, staff do not capture the data centrally to help identify patterns in performance or progress, or alert managers and staff to possible concerns.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is strong. Trustees have suitable skills and experience in education, finance, business and employment and a keen interest in the welfare and progress of the client group. They are well informed about strengths and weaknesses in the provision and have high expectations for the training that First Rung provides.
- Trustees use their skills and knowledge well to support senior leaders and managers and hold them to account during their regular board meetings. They are closely involved in determining the organisation's strategic direction and in making decisions about the most appropriate ways forward. They are effective in challenging managers to improve provision and ensure that it continues to serve learners successfully.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Managers and staff pay careful attention to learners' safety and welfare. Managers take appropriate steps to ensure that staff are suitable to work with learners. Staff receive clear and helpful information about safeguarding and the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Staff are sensitive to the vulnerabilities of the learners they work with and the risks they face, and are watchful for signs causing concern. They have good working relationships with coordinating and referral agencies such as local authority designated officers for safeguarding or the 'Channel' programme and make good use of these services when there is a need to do so. Staff promote learners' online safety well and take effective steps to ensure that learners cannot access inappropriate information at First Rung's centres.
- Learners feel safe and cared for by First Rung staff and understand the principles associated with keeping themselves safe and free from risks of radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Trainers use the extensive knowledge they have of their learners well to plan and teach lessons that meet learners' needs and interests; as a result, the large majority of learners make good progress towards the achievement of learning and career goals. Particularly effective lessons enable learners to consider ideas and engage in debate, or to participate

in a variety of activities. Learners and trainees enjoy learning, are articulate in expressing their ideas, and are considerate of the feelings of others.

- Trainers and staff have good subject knowledge and industry experience, which they use skilfully to deepen learners' knowledge and understanding in preparation for work experience and for future employment. Trainers ensure that learners' verbal contributions in lessons are both expected and valued. Trainers plan for, and develop, the use of a wide variety of different learning resources well, including interactive learning resources, which help gain and keep learners' interest.
- Trainees and learners on study programmes completing work-related placements enjoy their work and quickly develop good employability skills such as team-working and time management. Employers speak highly of the skills learners develop that enable them to take on additional responsibilities quickly. For example, in business administration learners effectively manage different tasks and deadlines by preparing interview packs while greeting visitors at reception.
- Staff identify learners' support needs quickly and comprehensively, resulting in high levels of support that help learners and trainees make good progress in the achievement of learning goals. The large majority of learners arrive with poor past educational experiences; they re-evaluate their previously negative view of education and apply themselves well to their chosen course of study and training as a result of the support they receive.
- The majority of learners make effective progress across a range of learning areas. They develop useful vocational skills such as making spreadsheets in information technology or supporting play activities with young children in a nursery. They improve their professional language for work and build the interpersonal skills required to forge healthy relationships with their peers and with those in authority. Learners in a preparation for work lesson thoughtfully debated the impact of 'labelling', and showed empathy and compassion for those who have experienced negative stereotyping.
- Extended new assessment procedures more accurately identify learners' personal and learning needs, ensuring that they start on the right level of programme. Trainers regularly assess learners' progress in lessons and use the results to plan future lessons that effectively meet learners' needs. Learners receive constructive and motivational verbal feedback when they complete tasks in lessons. However, written feedback on learners' assessed work does not always provide the precise detail that learners need in order to quickly improve their work.
- Trainers' expectation that learners make notes in lessons helps them to develop effective study skills. Trainers help learners develop mathematics and information, communication technology skills effectively through the lessons they provide in these subjects. However, the development of learners' written English, for example, through all trainers' and assessors' modelling of correct English in marking and in lessons, is not of an equally high standard.
- The use of targets for learners to help them make progress in achieving all their qualifications is insufficient. Trainers and assessors do not regularly set and review subject-based targets for learners. Trainers record targets that too often relate to whole-unit or qualification achievement and lack sufficient focus on the small steps that learners need to make towards the achievement of their learning goals.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners respond well to the high expectations set for them by staff to improve and develop their employability skills. They quickly improve their communication skills, are well presented, and the large majority of learners improve their self-confidence significantly. They rapidly become more assured and confident in their own abilities in learning and in their personal lives. Learners receive good-quality information, advice and guidance through an extended assessment and induction period at the start of their programmes. As a result, learners make well-informed choices to follow courses that best meet their needs.
- Learners and trainees enjoy timely work placements that are planned and appropriate to their interests and career aims. Learners improve their attitude, behaviour and attendance. They learn about the commitment required to be successful in a job. By interacting with company personnel and exploring different job functions they gain useful information to contribute to their career plans.
- Trainees prepare for their work placements well, and once in their companies they gain a deeper understanding of the expectations and demands of the workplace. They significantly improve their employability skills. They receive particularly good insights into the processes that underpin business activities. For example, customer service trainees in an accounting company learn about payroll processes and develop good telephone techniques to discuss pay-related issues with clients. Other trainees working in early years settings support children by helping them to develop independence in using cutlery at their lunchtime meal.
- All learners receive highly effective and consistent support from their trainers and staff. This contributes significantly to learners' commitment, progress and achievement of their programme of learning, personal development and workplace experiences. The large majority of learners experience many complex personal and social issues and a large number have had poor previous experiences in education. The recent implementation of regular welfare staff visits to learners while in their placements has had a positive impact on learners' attendance and commitment to succeed in employment. The large majority of study programme learners and trainees progress to positive destinations, including higher-level work-based training programmes and employment.
- Learners have more recently benefited from a variety of enrichment activities, which help them further develop their social skills and broaden their knowledge about the process of gaining employment. For example, learners in one group visited Canary Wharf in central London to explore the wide range of businesses located there. Another group enjoyed visiting a London tourist attraction as a social activity. On occasion, speakers from local businesses and charities provide presentations about their work and their expectations for being a successful employee in their organisation.
- The large majority of learners and trainees have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. They understand why they should be tolerant and respectful of different cultures. Childcare learners extend their understanding by preparing a presentation about their culture and share this with other learners in the group. This helps to challenge perceptions and provides an appreciation of the cultural differences within their group. Learners in an English class particularly enjoyed discussing and debating current affairs topics such as leaving the European Union and the impact of living in a democratic society.

- Learners develop their English and mathematics skills well from their starting points and appreciate the importance of these skills to enable them to be successful. Most staff routinely correct spelling and punctuation errors made in learners' written work. However, not all staff provide sufficiently detailed feedback, such as the reinforcement of punctuation or number rules to help learners to reflect back on their errors and work more effectively in the future.
- The majority of learners have a clear understanding of the indicators, risks and dangers of radicalisation and extremism, and the action to take should they have concerns. However, in a very few cases, learners do not sufficiently recognise the risks or the relevance to their personal safety. Trainers and staff create learning environments which promote high levels of trust and respect and, as a result, are able to remove the barriers to learning experienced by the large majority of learners.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners and trainees enjoy their learning and make good progress from their starting points in their personal and social development. This is particularly good for learners with significant barriers to learning and work. Learners improve their communication and self-presentation skills. They make at least their expected progress in their vocational learning. A large majority make good progress in developing vocational skills as a result of their high-quality work placements.
- Almost all trainees progress to apprenticeships, further education and training or employment. Half progress into apprenticeships in business administration or childcare and the large majority remain in sustainable employment. A large majority of study programme learners progress to traineeships, apprenticeships, further education and employment as a result of the significant support they receive at First Rung.
- Progression and achievement rates for the most vulnerable learners and trainees are good. These learners are mainly children looked after, care leavers, young parents or those referred to First Rung by youth offending teams. Of the few vulnerable learners who did not achieve a qualification in 2015/16, almost all progressed to apprenticeships, further education and training or work.
- Achievement rates have improved over the last three years but are not yet good. A large majority of study programme learners achieved at least one qualification in 2015/16. Functional skills achievement rates at level 1 improved slightly from a very low starting point in 2013/14. Achievement rates for level 2 functional skills in mathematics and information and communication technology improved in 2015/16. Entry-level functional skills achievement rates fell in 2015/16. Achievement rates for level 2 functional skills in English also declined and are low.
- The standard of trainees' and learners' work in early years placements is good. They respond well to nursery staff's expectations and feedback to improve their practice. Trainees work well as a team and show initiative in their work placements.
- The large majority of learners' written work is of a good standard and demonstrates their understanding of their vocational subjects well. However, in a minority of cases work is poorly presented and contains spelling and grammatical errors.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- First Rung has 58 learners following 16 to 19 study programmes from entry level to level 2. These provide a good range of employment-focused modules in customer service and business and administration, together with extensive and carefully tailored work experience for each learner. Many learners have experienced incomplete, disrupted or poor learning experiences prior to enrolling with First Rung.
- The vast majority of learners enjoy their learning, including those who have previously had a negative experience in education. Learners benefit from the small class sizes and support which enable them to receive good individual coaching and help. Learners thrive and develop increased confidence and self-esteem alongside vocational and employability skills development that enables them to progress to further education, training or employment.
- Each learner's study programme takes good account of their starting point, the extra help they may need, and their long-term targets. Consequently, the majority of current learners are making good progress. Learners benefit from personal support and effective multi-agency work by staff that enables those at risk to re-engage successfully with their learning, to become more resilient and to progress into further education, training or employment.
- Staff assess learners' ability and potential well at the beginning of their programmes, including their English and mathematics skills, and carefully select and match learners with training and work placements which suit their career aspirations. However, staff do not use this thorough assessment well enough to improve learners' identified areas of weakness in personal and social skills development. Learners are not sufficiently involved in setting their individual targets for improvement, and they do not always have sufficient ownership of the personal targets set by staff to help them achieve their aspirations and goals.
- Trainers set clear boundaries and ground rules for learners and reinforce these in lessons. As a result, learners develop good attitudes to learning, their behaviour is good and they make good progress. The large majority of learners attend regularly and punctually and arrive prepared to learn. Staff consistently challenge inappropriate behaviour and re-engage learners successfully in tasks without disrupting learning.
- Assessment is good. Trainers provide learners with clear motivational and instructive verbal feedback. For example, in customer care, learners receive detailed information on how to develop their skills when dealing with difficult customers. However, too much work is not marked effectively to enable learners to focus on their key areas for improvement. In a small minority of lessons trainers too readily provide solutions to the problems they set and the questions they ask. This does not give learners the chance to explore different solutions and arrive at their own answers.
- Managers and staff work very effectively with a range of employers to offer learners work experience opportunities in line with their career aspirations and abilities. Staff carefully match employers and learners and as result, learners become highly motivated and interested to pursue a career either through employment or further training. Learners benefit from effective information, advice, guidance and support that enable them to carefully consider and plan their progression pathways.

Traineeships

Good

- First Rung currently has 39 trainees on its traineeship programme. The traineeship programme is well planned and comprises a six-week employability programme followed by a period of work experience. Trainees work towards vocational qualifications in childcare or administration which prepare them well for their next steps. Throughout the programme, trainees benefit from lessons to improve their English and mathematics. Trainees receive effective guidance on their next steps and the large majority move on to apprenticeships, employment or further training.
- The use of work placements to develop employment skills is good. Managers make good use of a wide range of committed employers to ensure that each work placement is well matched to each trainee's ability and ambitions. Employers value the opportunity to take trainees on shorter placements where they can assess effectively trainees' skills and attitudes and consider their suitability for an apprenticeship. For example, employers evaluate how well trainees use their observation of children at play to understand the stages of a child's development.
- Vocational staff have good industry experience which they use skilfully to deepen trainees' knowledge and understanding in preparation for work experience. Trainees are well motivated, enjoy their learning and work with concentration and focus in lessons. Most trainees are making good progress on vocational courses. Childcare trainees confidently discuss serious case reviews and quickly learn the importance of keeping young children safe in childcare settings.
- Trainees undertake a good assessment of their English and mathematics skills at the start of the programme. The majority of trainees are making their expected progress in functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. Those who have existing good levels of English and mathematics continue to develop their skills in these areas throughout the programme.
- Assessment is good. Achievements are recorded accurately and trainees benefit from frequent reviews of their progress where they can discuss personal and vocational aspects of their training. However, in a few cases, staff do not set trainees sufficiently individualised short-term targets so they can closely monitor their success. Targets do not routinely focus on trainees' personal and social skill development needs.
- Trainers and support staff provide trainees with helpful oral encouragement and feedback to help them improve their skills.
- Trainees feel safe and know how to raise any safeguarding concerns in the training centres or the workplace. Trainers and support staff very successfully promote an ethos of inclusion and tolerance. Trainees and staff members treat each other with a high level of respect. Most trainees have a good understanding of British values, including the rule of law, democracy and fairness, and apply their knowledge well in the workplace.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51850
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	290
Principal/CEO	Diane Betts
Telephone number	020 8803 4764
Website	www.firstrung.org.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	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18 32	19+ 0	16–18 26	19+ 0	
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher
	16–18 0	19+ 0	16–18 0	19+ 0	16–18 0
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total
	39		0		39
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	15 part-time				
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0				
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency				
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None				

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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

Rosy Belton, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Penelope Horner	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Elliott	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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