


Sporting Futures Training (UK) Ltd

Address: Business & Technology Centre, Bessemer Drive, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 2DX

Unique reference number (URN): 1278643

Inspection report: 12 May 2026

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Exceptional | |
| Strong standard |  |
| Expected standard | |
| Needs attention | |
| Urgent improvement | |

Safeguarding standards met


The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, learners are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect providers for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The provider has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- **Not met:** The provider has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

1. Inclusion, and leadership and governance

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Strong standard |  |
|-----------------|---|

Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have created a highly inclusive culture. They and their staff model inclusive values daily, which strengthens apprentices' sense of belonging, confidence and aspirations.

Leaders identify, assess and meet apprentices' needs swiftly and effectively. They ensure that staff provide timely, tailored support to apprentices that quickly and expertly reduces barriers to learning and wellbeing.

Leaders have excellent oversight of the support strategies and interventions that staff use with apprentices. They review adjustments frequently and coordinate with employers to adapt and ensure the best support for apprentices. Disadvantaged apprentices, including those who were previously not in employment, education or training, receive targeted interventions that secure their commitment to learning and future success.

Leaders ensure that staff provide highly effective support for apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are known to social care. They have in place specialist assessments, evidence-informed strategies and qualified specialists.

Leaders have detailed knowledge of a wide range of needs, including for learners who are known to social care, care-experienced and young carers. They use their links with external services highly effectively to ensure that apprentices receive responsive, coordinated support. Apprentices participate fully, achieve their qualifications and progress confidently to their next steps.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders have a sharp focus on maintaining quality and have high ambitions for their provision to improve social mobility. Since the previous inspection, leaders have grown the provision while maintaining high standards.

Leaders and those responsible for governance have a fully accurate understanding of the quality of the provision. They use a range of highly relevant information to self-assess and to set meaningful, purposeful actions for improvement. They are highly responsive to feedback, and their decisions are well informed by apprentices' experiences. Leaders respond swiftly when they identify areas for improvement, supported by innovative use of artificial intelligence and digital systems.

Leaders have very strong partnerships with a range of stakeholders, including many local authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts. They have established longstanding and productive relationships, working collaboratively to co-design bespoke programmes, relevant qualifications and targeted apprenticeship pathways. Leaders respond promptly to sector priorities, particularly around special educational needs and/or disabilities and special educational needs coordinator developments.

Leaders ensure that tutors complete highly relevant, meaningful professional development. Tutors stay up to date with current research about pedagogy, which they use to expertly inform their practice and the content of curriculums.

Leaders are very supportive of and responsive to their teams. Tutors have manageable workloads and value the flexibility to accommodate personal needs and to maintain work-life balance.

The arrangements for governance are effective. Governors have extensive expertise. They provide independent scrutiny and challenge leaders to secure sustained improvements. They work very closely with leaders, ensuring that oversight is continuous, focused on performance, quality improvement and apprentices' outcomes.

2. Apprenticeships

Strong standard



Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Most apprentices, including those who face barriers, achieve their qualifications within planned timeframes, and the proportion who achieve continues to increase. All who remain on programme achieve.

Apprentices make substantial progress from their starting points. Those with lower prior attainment rapidly close knowledge gaps and develop skills to succeed. The few apprentices working towards functional skills qualifications make significant progress improving their English and mathematics abilities. However, while almost all achieve these qualifications, too few pass the examinations at their first attempt.

Apprentices produce work of a consistently high standard, both in written assignments and in the workplace. They plan and run high-quality sports lessons and classroom activities, modelling expert technical skills. They teach inclusive lessons, use behaviour management with empathy and support children with complex needs very effectively.

Most apprentices secure employment as higher-level teaching assistants or sports coaches following their apprenticeship and take on greater responsibilities during their time on the programme.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have designed high-quality, purposeful and socially driven curriculums. They work with expert partners to align subject content to workforce needs, including in specialist educational settings.

Leaders understand fully the quality of teaching across the range of provision. Through research-informed practices, they work to ensure that approaches to online teaching and learning are highly effective. They monitor apprentices' progress closely.

Tutors plan curriculums that build apprentices' understanding in a highly effective and tailored way. Mentoring and coaching workshops sit within a well-designed leadership curriculum that builds on apprentices' existing knowledge. Apprentices work closely with others in the workplace, using purposeful coaching techniques to improve the impact of reflective practices across their organisations.

Staff ensure that what apprentices learn is highly relevant to apprentices' work roles. They work very effectively with workplace mentors, who receive impactful training and support from the provider's staff. Tutors understand apprentices' workplace contexts fully. Apprentices apply their learning immediately to their work, which has a swift, positive impact on the children they support.

Apprentices are taught extremely well. Tutors use a range of teaching and assessment strategies to teach content very clearly. They explain new concepts with up-to-date vocational language, using contemporary theoretical models that reflect current educational research.

Leaders and staff prioritise inclusion as a core curriculum thread. They prioritise inclusion and inclusive practices in their approaches to curriculum design and teaching. They provide flexible learning that caters precisely to learners' individual contexts, needs and workplace environments.

Participation and development

Strong standard ●

Leaders have created a safe, respectful, inclusive learning culture where diversity is celebrated. Apprentices attend well and are highly motivated to succeed. Leaders have in place thorough monitoring approaches and respond swiftly to the few cases of non-attendance.

Apprentices are inspired by high-quality experts, such as educational psychologists, who provide masterclasses. Leaders provide high-quality resources to improve apprentices' understanding of a breadth of highly relevant wider development topics, including health, wellbeing and technology. Apprentices use these to the benefit of their communities, such as leading initiatives for increasing participation of girls in sport.

Apprentices develop a strong contextualised understanding of fundamental British values and cultural diversity. They are diligent and enthusiastic when they support children in specialist settings to thrive by, for example, championing topics such as the rise of social media misogyny and providing strong mentorship for young women.

Leaders carefully embed careers education into the curriculum, tailored to apprentices' needs and their stage in education. Tutors are proactive in ensuring that apprentices understand their next steps and career goals and are highly ambitious for apprentices.

Apprentices have not experienced any bullying or harassment but are confident to raise concerns to provider staff. Apprentices value highly the care that staff provide for them.

What it's like to be a learner and/or an apprentice at this provider

Apprentices experience a highly inclusive, well-designed and purposeful programme that supports their progress from their starting points through to sustained employment. They rapidly acquire new knowledge and skills. Apprentices apply their learning highly effectively in the workplace to the great benefit of the children with whom they work. They demonstrate resilience and adaptability, particularly in complex and challenging situations. Apprentices thrive, grow in confidence and provide significant value to their respective workplaces.

Apprentices extend their learning beyond the requirements of their programme through a series of expert masterclasses. Through these sessions, they explore a range of topics in depth. They further enhance their inclusive practices and the support they provide to children in their care at work, who often have complex needs.

Apprentices develop a strong, contextualised understanding of protected characteristics, fundamental British values and cultural diversity. They gain a detailed understanding of safeguarding and take these responsibilities seriously in their workplaces and their lives.

Apprentices are very positive about their training. They are very well prepared for the careers they are pursuing in educational settings. Apprentices are motivated, committed to succeed and inspired by the high-quality experts teaching them. Apprentices contribute positively to their workplaces and communities, taking on additional responsibilities and promoting wellbeing initiatives.

Apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds or with additional needs very quickly improve their confidence, self-belief, independence and ambition. They learn in a highly supportive environment, feel safe and take pride in their achievements, often overcoming prior barriers, such as low attainment or disengagement from education.

Apprentices' individual needs, including education health and care plan objectives, are carefully considered by staff, and apprentices receive expertly tailored support to help them succeed.

Next steps

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should continue to strengthen all aspects of provision in order to have a transformational impact on all apprentices' achievements and future careers.
 - Leaders and tutors should better prepare the small proportion of apprentices who require functional skills qualifications to succeed at their first attempt at the examinations.
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About this inspection

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with leaders, staff, apprentices, employers and other stakeholders during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the provider:

Sporting Futures Training (UK) Ltd (trading as ESF Apprenticeships) is an independent learning provider based in Stevenage that provides apprenticeships. Apprentices work in a range of educational settings across England. At the time of the inspection, there were 477 apprentices, of whom 50 were aged 16 to 18. Twenty-six apprentices were working towards achieving English and/or mathematics functional skills qualifications. The majority of apprentices were studying apprenticeships at level 5, including operations manager and specialist teaching assistant. Seventy-seven were on level 3 teaching assistant and 81 on level 7 senior leader. There were small cohorts on level 2 community activator coach, level 2 early years practitioner, level 3 event assistant, level 3 early years educator and level 4 sports coach.

Director of apprenticeships: Jo Pountney

Lead inspector:

Rebecca Perry-Tomlinson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Rochelle Saneria, His Majesty's Inspector

Christina Christou, Ofsted Inspector

Lucy Whitwood, Ofsted Inspector

Lee Jamieson, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 12 May 2026

Number of learners

Total learners

477

Apprenticeships

477

Percentage of learning aims successfully achieved

Apprenticeships overall achievement rate

| Year | This provider | National average | Compared with national average |
|---------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 | 71 | 65 | Close to average |
| 2023/24 | 67 | 60 | Close to average |
| 2022/23 | 69 | 55 | Above |

Apprenticeships pass rate

| Year | This provider | National average |
|---------|---------------|------------------|
| 2024/25 | 100 | 98 |
| 2023/24 | 100 | 98 |
| 2022/23 | 100 | 97 |

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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