

Blackpool and The Fylde College

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Information about the provider

Blackpool and The Fylde college is a large general and further education college. It was judged Outstanding in 2013. The college offers a broad range of vocational routes, including aerospace, maritime, automotive, energy and health and social care, to support learners into employment and further or higher education. The college has three campuses, the main site in Blackpool, Lancashire engineering HQ in Fylde and the nautical campus in Fleetwood. The college has invested significantly in learning infrastructure in the last ten years. The college has over 1,100 employees and a normal annual turnover around £55m. Over 16,000 students study at Blackpool and The Fylde College, enrolled on a range of learning programmes from entry level to level 7. Around 1,800 employers engage with the college.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of students and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders believe that the college was in a strong position to further increase the levels of online learning during the period when the college was only open to some students due to COVID-19 restrictions. They believe significant investment in digital technology and infrastructure supported the delivery of online learning. Teachers and managers described how they have improved their digital skills through a programme of staff development called 'powerup'. Staff feel that this has enhanced the learning culture and created a sense of camaraderie among staff.

Leaders and managers feel that the continued participation and feedback of staff and students are vital in maintaining a productive learning environment. Since March 2020, leaders hold daily online keep-in-touch staff meetings to provide updates and share good practice in online teaching and learning. They monitor the online activity and face-to-face participation of students and staff very closely.

Leaders and managers updated college delivery plans and adapted the curriculum in January and February, prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, to ensure that priority was given to the completion of practical lessons and activities, because the theory components could be delivered online. Managers described how the curriculum plans for 2020/21 were revisited and many courses were redesigned.

Leaders have implemented new systems so that students can continue their learning if teachers are absent with COVID-19 symptoms. Students and teachers have been placed into curriculum-based 'bubbles' so that teachers who have COVID-19 symptoms can deliver lessons online or use alternative teachers.

Employers and partners say that they work closely with leaders and managers. They appreciate the open and honest communication, particularly around the current local COVID-19 restrictions, and how these may affect the college, employers and stakeholders.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of students?

Leaders explained how they use virtual learning walks to monitor students' progress and to assess the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders and teachers feel this has helped them to improve their online teaching and to share good practice. Students said they feel they are making progress and enjoy online learning.

Teachers feel that an extended student induction period has helped them to identify and use students' starting points to plan and adjust the curriculum. For example, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and students with high needs, have frequent online one-to-one discussions with staff to identify specific support.

Teachers are trying new ways of teaching and assessing for online and face-to-face lessons. Online tasks and assessments are used to develop students' initial knowledge of a topic, and the face-to-face sessions reinforce and develop students' deeper understanding.

Teaching methods have been adapted to support students' practical skills development at college and at home. For example, in plastering, students photograph rendering in their locality, analyse these photographs during online sessions with their peers and link their findings to practical on-site activities.

An increased variety of methods are being used to check for gaps in students' knowledge. For example, students use videos to record and reflect on their work, and teachers use these to provide feedback on how to improve

Students' requests for careers advice and guidance have significantly increased. Leaders believe that virtual open days and summer schools have supported students to make informed choices about their current courses. For example, in health and

social care, students took part in a careers and skills session with specialist practitioners prior to enrolment.

Leaders explained how well-being is an important aspect of staff and student life. Online well-being sessions help students to develop resilience and coping techniques. Students who enrolled at the college for September 2020 were involved in college life during the summer through activities such as virtual open days and taster days.

How are leaders ensuring that students are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Leaders adapted and revised safeguarding procedures during the pandemic. They prioritised working with the most vulnerable students. Digital resources, such as laptop computers, were issued, students identified as being at risk were visited at home and meal vouchers were provided to students in need.

During COVID-19 restrictions, staff continued working with external partners, ensuring that students were aware of online risks, such as bullying, gambling and identity theft.

Leaders and managers told us that mental health and well-being are given high priority. They introduced online social time so that students and staff do not suffer from social isolation.

Leaders and managers believe that they have taken practical steps to keep students safe in college. They have developed curriculum-based 'bubbles', restricted access to public areas, implemented the use of specific entrance and exit routes to college buildings and designed class layouts to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

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