

Blackburn College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130736
Name of lead inspector:	Andrea Machell, HMI
Visit dates:	30 September – 1 October 2020
Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Harrison Centre, Fielden Street, Blackburn, Lancashire BB2 1LH

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 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

Blackburn College is a large general further education college at the heart of the multicultural community of Blackburn with Darwen. The majority of learners and apprentices are from the most economically deprived local areas. Leaders provide further education courses in 14 sector subject areas as well as apprenticeships, employer training and higher education programmes. The college has no subcontracted provision. The highest number of learners are in health and care, business and retail. Just over 50 per cent of young people study at level 3, 25 per cent at level 2 and the remainder at level 1 or below. The vast majority of adults study at entry level to level 2. There are 129 learners who have high needs. At the previous full inspection, inspectors judged the college to require improvement.

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

Early in the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, leaders set up a crisis steering group to support the continued delivery of the curriculum by moving learning online. They ensured that learners had access to computer equipment, learning resources and tutor support.

Where necessary, leaders have adapted the curriculum to meet changing circumstances. For example, health and social care learners on cadet programmes who have not been able to access a work placement receive virtual talks from ophthalmic and physiotherapy specialists, explaining what it is like to work in these sectors.

As soon as it was safe, managers arranged for learners on practical courses, such as hairdressing and construction, to return to college to complete training and assessments to prepare them for their next year of study.

Managers feel that they have successfully adapted careers, advice and guidance since the lockdown so that it is more closely linked with the curriculum area.

Senior leaders state that they provided staff with a variety of training throughout the period when the college was only open to some students due to COVID-19 restrictions. This involved training on how to ensure that learners were safe, including the most vulnerable. Senior leaders explained how they have supported and encouraged teachers to manage online learning with confidence. The teachers we spoke to told us that they were very proud of this achievement.

Senior leaders worked with a range of stakeholders and partners, including the local authority, Jobcentre Plus, schools and employers to ensure that learners and apprentices had frequent contact and support during the COVID-19 restrictions. Employers feel that their staff had been appropriately trained by college staff to be able to observe and video record apprentices demonstrating their skills in the workplace. The local authority was very appreciative of the support it received from college leaders, particularly the principal, to identify vulnerable learners in the borough who needed additional support.

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 learners?

Leaders and managers explained how they responded as soon as the COVID-19 restrictions were announced to adapt existing processes in order to ensure that they met, and continue to meet, the needs of learners and apprentices. Leaders and managers carry out virtual and actual learning walks in their continued efforts to assure the quality of the curriculum.

Teachers told us that they have adopted a relentless and consistent approach in order to support learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN) and high needs. For example, every learner and apprentice was allocated a member of staff as a key contact. Adult learners on English for speakers of other languages courses received translated instructions to help them understand how to access online learning from home.

Learners with high needs accessed learning online with the presence of learning support officers to help them. Key contact staff worked closely with parents of learners with high needs to ensure that they made progress towards their targets during the COVID-19 restrictions. Work was also sent home for those who struggled with online learning.

In anticipation of further local restrictions, managers and teachers have amended the sequencing of the curriculum to ensure that the practical skills are delivered early in the programme. This is as a result of lessons learned during the summer term COVID-19 restrictions, where learners studying sports were unable to complete their practical assessments in sports halls and gyms because they were closed.

Teachers explained how they have made important changes to the assessment of learners' and apprentices' starting points because of the pandemic. They use the outcomes from the assessments to identify gaps in learners' skills and knowledge which has informed what topics need revisiting and in what order as well as target individual support.

Teachers are confident that they have a variety of flexible approaches to enable them to continue to deliver the curriculum. For example, teachers have provided prosthetic limbs for beauty therapy learners so that they can practise manicures and pedicures.

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

Given the limitations on face-to-face communication during the COVID-19 restrictions, staff have extended the use of the safeguarding and mental health hub and have ensured that learners know how to work safely online.

Those learners and apprentices who we spoke to said that they felt safe and know who to contact at the college if they have a concern for their safety. They all reported high levels of support from college staff. They say that they understand the importance of keeping themselves safe when working online.

Staff feel that they know which learners need additional support from them and/or external agencies. Teachers communicate with parents and carers to check the safety and well-being of vulnerable students.

As part of their induction, new learners have received training on key safeguarding themes. Leaders told us that where learners have disclosed safeguarding issues, staff work with their previous school to offer them the right support.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020