

The Autism Project – The CareTrade

Interim visit report

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Visit date(s): 30 Sep 2020 to 1 Oct 2020

Type of provider: Independent specialist training centre

Address: 119 London Road,
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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 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

The Autism Project is part of the CareTrade Charitable Trust. It is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, based in Southwark, London. CareTrade has run employment-based provision since 2010. The Autism Project was developed from that provision. It became listed as an approved provider in August 2016. It offers day provision for young people with autism spectrum disorder, aged between 18 and 25.

All the learners follow a preparation for employment programme. This includes functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics, where required, and employability training. Second year learners also attend a job club. The work placements are mostly in local hospitals. The project receives learners on placements that are funded by eight local authorities, and all learners have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

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?

A high proportion of learners' time is normally spent on work placements at local hospitals. At the start of restrictions, these placements could not continue. For this reason, and to avoid learners using public transport, leaders closed the training centre until September. Because work placements are still not possible, leaders and staff have adapted the curriculum by adding lessons in business enterprise, through which learners develop their ability to work in a team and use their knowledge of English and mathematics. They aim to reintroduce the external work placements in January 2021.

In the move to online teaching, leaders and managers supported learners who did not have access to computers at home. They purchased laptops and other accessories for these learners so that they can continue to study. Leaders have

installed software tools which allow staff to share resources and access information, such as registers and safeguarding files, remotely.

Leaders hold frequent team meetings to review and plan the curriculum. They feel they offer a flexible approach to meeting learners' needs. They change how they teach the curriculum to meet individual learners' needs when there is a requirement to do so. For example, speech and language therapists hold sessions online to ensure that learners receive the therapeutic input they require. Staff believe this approach helps meet learners' outcomes that are recorded on their EHC plans.

Staff organise a variety of online well-being support for learners who struggle with being stuck at home. These activities include quizzes and social gatherings via computers or mobile phones.

Due to the small size of the training centre, learners alternate between one week on site and one week of online lessons from home. Learners expressed that they prefer to be in the classroom rather than have lessons online.

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?

Teachers recognise that in the move to online lessons, learners missed the practical work experience element of their programme. They now introduce new activities as part of the curriculum so that learners continue to gain the knowledge and skills they would normally get through work placements. For example, they set learners tasks in baking and cleaning at home to help develop their work-based skills.

Teachers and job coaches recognise that the online learning lessons do not suit all learners. For these learners, they send out paper copies of workbooks and tasks. Teachers review the work with learners over the telephone and provide feedback.

Teachers use workbooks that they have designed to check learners' progress. They assess those learners taking English and mathematics qualifications to check if they have retained their knowledge over the lockdown period.

Teachers and job coaches appreciate the time they were given by managers to develop their online lessons, although they say they had no training in this. Teachers include activities in their online lessons with the aim of developing learners' confidence and team building skills.

Leaders maintain an oversight of how teachers and job coaches support and teach learners online. They meet weekly to discuss the activities learners experience and join teachers in online lessons. Leaders feel that learners have engaged positively with completing homework tasks online and state that learners remain on track with their learning. However, teachers say they have a backlog of assessments that they need to complete in person with their learners.

Job coaches include careers advice and guidance lessons in their online curriculum. They carry out remote job-search activities and workshops on writing a curriculum vitae with learners. Learners practise answering questions in mock interviews carried out by the trustees and job coaches. Staff have also moved their EHC plan review meetings to be online and include parents in these meetings.

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

Leaders and managers have made training available for staff on COVID-19 guidelines. They have also worked with staff to produce straightforward guidelines for learners. Managers and staff carry out risk assessments to help learners transition safely to coming back in to the training centre.

Learners explained the information that their teachers taught them about staying safe online. They recalled some of the potential risks from working online and how to keep safe. They spoke of learning about topics including cyber bullying, extremism and scam emails.

Staff inform learners about how to keep safe when in the training centre and when using public transport. As a result, they know about wearing face masks or shields when in communal areas in the training centre and on buses and trains. They are aware of hygiene requirements, such as frequent hand washing.

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