

Itchen College

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Sixth form 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

Itchen College is a medium-sized sixth-form college on the east side of Southampton and is one of three colleges in the city. The college offers academic and vocational courses at entry level and at levels 1, 2 and 3. Most students are aged 16 to 18. Over three quarters of the students study at level 3. The proportion of students in Southampton who make better than average progress in their studies, including in English and mathematics, at key stage 4 is significantly below the national rate. Participation rates in higher education locally are among the lowest in the country. Rates of unemployment in Southampton are slightly higher than the regional and national rates. About three quarters of the population locally are qualified to level 2 and about three fifths to level 3.

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?

Leaders and managers described how they have supported students to continue to learn throughout the period when providers were only open to some learners due to COVID-19 restrictions. They arranged training so that teachers were able to deliver online learning for students. Where some students were not able to participate in this type of learning, for example, level 1 students or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, staff delivered appropriate resources to them and worked closely with parents and carers.

Leaders and managers told us that they have had to implement changes to their teaching as a direct result of the pandemic. They have considered any gaps in learners' knowledge, the missed skills that need to be developed and how they are going to meet specific criteria for some qualifications. Geography students are currently not able to make field trips to collect samples, and care students are unable

to complete work experience. Leaders said that careers advice and guidance activities have resumed now that all students are back on site.

Leaders and managers told us that they are determined to make sure that the impact of students' breaks in learning are minimised. They reported that the vast majority of students are enjoying being back at college and benefiting from face-to-face learning alongside online learning to support their classroom sessions.

Students have now returned to full-time, face-to-face teaching. Staff told us that they are confident that, given another period of COVID-19 restrictions, they are secure in being able to revert to online teaching with immediate effect. Staff and students all said that students are highly motivated since their return to college.

Leaders commented on the extra costs associated with additional transport and safe practices. When considering the local economy, leaders reported that they expected a sharp rise in students needing financial 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?

All staff reported that the pandemic has simply accelerated a process that had already begun. Teachers were already moving toward the use of an online learning platform: the pandemic has forced their hand to make its effective use more widespread much more rapidly. Leaders described to us how they quickly adapted training programmes to accommodate the changes in the modes of delivery. This has taken the form of individual support, whole-staff training over extended periods and the continuation of their 15-minute forums.

Staff told us how there has been an increase in the sharing of good practice. They think that the changes that have been made to the curriculum structure and delivery are permanent and positive. Among the whole college community, one of the greatest concerns currently is the lack of any clarity about what next year's examination season holds.

Leaders reported that the work that they do with those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the community has been supported by the increase in online learning. These students would not normally come to college and are more inclined to engage with online technologies.

Teachers stated that they have targets relating to how they are supporting students to get back on track with learning. They said that these are monitored and actioned as appropriate by their line managers. Teachers and students described what they see as the benefits of moving to online assessment.

Leaders reported that they are still concerned about access to appropriate equipment outside college for students. This could be the lack of a smartphone or other

equipment, or no or poor Wi-Fi at home. These concerns are particularly significant for some of the more vulnerable community-based students, such as those who are NEET.

College leaders have lent out equipment. They said that this has in some cases been difficult to retrieve and that this has financial implications.

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

Leaders and managers reported how they have made sure that all staff and students completed suitable training and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety. They described how staff and students also completed online safety training.

Managers explained how students identified as being at risk prior to and during Covid-19 restrictions were supported by the student support team. Those requiring counselling continued with this remotely on a weekly basis.

Managers told us that tutors made weekly welfare calls to their students to make sure they were coping both with their work and the Covid-19 restrictions. Students received frequent emails and updates to support them and remind them of ongoing risks.

Leaders and managers described how they have made sure that students understand fully the need for restrictions and changed behaviours. They explained how these messages are reinforced through regular assemblies and tutorials and that staff monitor restrictions very carefully.

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