

# Plymouth City Council

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	53927
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	Local authority
<b>Address:</b>	Hyde Park House Mutley Plain Plymouth PL4 6LF

## 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

Plymouth City Council offers courses through their adult learner service, On Course South West (OCSW), and through a network of specialist subcontractors. OCSW was previously an independent subcontractor but was transferred back into direct council control in August 2019.

OCSW and subcontractors deliver mostly adult and community education. This provides local people with personal, social and professional foundation skills to help improve their life chances. This includes people who may need help to find employment, housing, learning to speak English or recover from addiction. Learning centres are commonly based in areas of deprivation across the city. Young people's programmes are provided by the YMCA through their Discovery College based in Plymouth. This involves a small number of 16- to 18-year-old learners.

### **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?**

Senior leaders have identified how long-term unemployment could impact negatively on people's lives as one of many likely consequences of the pandemic. Consequently, they are working closely with local employers and organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus, to put on new courses to improve the economic and social well-being of the Plymouth population. They are maintaining their targeted support for vulnerable adults and younger learners.

Leaders and managers have redesigned the curriculum to counter the sudden change in people's circumstances due to the pandemic. They now offer around 50 courses online and free of charge. These give existing learners additional learning opportunities and access for people who cannot afford course fees. Leaders secured funding to buy laptops to loan to learners to enable them to participate in learning.

They have supported partners offering practical learning initiatives to specific groups, such as asylum seekers. Managers are also providing courses for people who want to undertake higher-level learning.

Once leaders considered it safe, they reopened a few classrooms to learners who found it more difficult to learn online. For example, learners who live in hostels attend lessons at the Shekinah Mission and learners who are asylum seekers go to English language classes at Open Doors International Language School. Where it is appropriate for the curriculum and learners, staff use a blend of classroom teaching and online activities. Leaders anticipate and are planning for more 'blended' learning in future. Discovery College's 16- to 18-year-old learners have recently returned to learning face-to-face at the college.

Leaders have developed the curriculum to continue to meet the varied needs of the communities they serve. For example, Shekinah Mission's staff are planning new courses to develop learners' outdoor skills, such as dry stonewalling, and to enhance their mental health and well-being.

**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 now teach most lessons online with only a few courses delivered in COVID-adapted classrooms. Learners and teachers are able to interact directly during live computer-based sessions. Subsequently, learners can access all the teaching resources and links used during the session to refresh their knowledge of its content.

Leaders have developed their ability to track how well learners are learning and building their knowledge and skills. They have implemented a centralised system to store, monitor and share up-to-the-minute information on each learner's progress. This includes information from all the service's subcontractors. Teachers are using this system to share teaching materials and strategies with colleagues.

Managers have provided teachers with the training to teach classes online. Teachers told us they now feel confident about adapting their teaching in response to the changes and challenges caused by the pandemic. They are developing and teaching new courses, including GCSE science. Staff now use online initial and diagnostic assessments to identify new and returning learners' starting points. Learners say they receive relevant information, advice and guidance so they know what to expect when they start learning.

Learners' attendance at courses and their learning have not suffered during the pandemic. For example, community-based learners who found it difficult to attend learning centres regularly due to a lack of childcare find it easier to attend more sessions online. Attendance of 16- to 18-year-olds at classroom-based sessions has improved. This is because the sessions provide a structured and ordered experience in young lives disrupted by the pandemic. Older learners have gained new digital

skills and then used them to connect visually with family members, often for the first time since lockdown.

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

Leaders told us how they have risk-assessed and modified how they provide online and face-to-face learning to keep learners safe during the pandemic.

Managers have introduced new codes of safe conduct, attitudes and behaviours to be followed by all learners and staff during online classes and in classrooms. During lockdown, and subsequently, staff have kept in direct touch with 16- to 18-year-old learners on at least a weekly basis. Overall, teachers say they feel safe and able to teach, learners feel safe and able to learn and leaders feel safe and able to lead.

Leaders working with asylum seekers have produced videos in multiple languages to help learners stay COVID-safe. They are providing individual learners and teachers with practical coaching and training in the safe use of technology.

Learners can access an extensive range of frequently updated safeguarding-related information. Most learners that we spoke to recall the safeguarding aspects of their induction.

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