

Westminster Adult Education Service

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Local authority

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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

Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) is a division of the growth, planning and housing department of Westminster City Council. It provides adult learning programmes and apprenticeships for those living in the borough and from neighbouring boroughs. The provision is delivered from three main centres in the borough and up to 80 local community venues. The service offers courses that lead to qualifications and courses that are non-accredited, with approximately 8,000 learners annually. The majority of learners take courses in English or mathematics, with the remainder studying a range of vocational courses, including information and communication technology, creative and visual arts, hairdressing, make-up, fashion, childcare, health and social care and programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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?

Governors, leaders and managers report that WAES recognised the need to keep learners engaged in learning, adopting the term 'Log on and Learn' as the pandemic started in March 2020. Staff feel that high levels of team work were essential to engage learners and to enable staff and learners to upskill for remote working and learning. Staff state that all courses continued during the lockdown period. Leaders and managers saw attendance drop just before restrictions in March but report that attendance improved since lessons moved online.

Leaders and managers work with a range of stakeholders and partners, including Westminster Employer Service, and provide courses to meet the changing needs of residents in Westminster. For example, staff have established training for residents that leads to health and safety qualifications required for employment in the construction industry. Additionally, leaders are prioritising training for employment in

care homes. They explained how the changes they made to the courses they offer resulted in high recruitment in September.

Leaders and staff identify gaps in learners' knowledge and skills and provide support to deal with these. For example, tutors prioritise teaching computer skills to learners, in case further local restrictions are imposed. Learners say they value this support and now feel more confident when working on their course online.

Staff work with the parents and carers of learners with education, health and care (EHC) plans so that they can continue to access their learning. Teachers described how they have supported parents and carers to gain the skills they need to use online resources. This allows learners to continue to learn while they remain at home and helps them to maintain contact with their friends. As a result, learners say they do not feel so isolated.

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 draw on tutors' expertise to develop what they consider to be the most appropriate methods to teach the curriculum. For example, learners on entry level programmes have most of their programmes face to face. In accounting and mathematics, specialist software has been purchased to support learners. Managers ensure that all programmes have online learning integrated into them to prepare for potential future restrictions.

Tutors maintain frequent contact with learners to teach the curriculum and to check on learners' progress. They use video, telephone and online conferencing to teach and to check on learners' progress. Staff monitor the progress and engagement of learners through reviews of learners' work, learner forums, observations of online lessons and scrutiny of learners' attendance. Managers use this information to help assure the quality of education.

Learners with limited access to online learning can use course materials and seek support in other ways. For example, teachers send resource packs to learners with a stamped addressed envelope for them to return completed work to tutors. Learners on arts and ceramics courses receive canvases, paints and clay through the post so that they can continue to develop their skills.

Managers have set up 'digital champions' to support and encourage learners who lack confidence in getting online or using the electronic resources. Leaders and managers in organisations that work with WAES say that they have increased access to computers for those learners with limited or no access to one.

Staff believe they have benefited from the new training they have undertaken. They use this to improve their own computing skills and to devise new activities that help learners acquire new knowledge and skills.

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

At the start of their courses, learners receive information about how to keep themselves safe. This includes a link to online resources that staff share with learners that they can use on their mobile phones. Learners have access to information on staying safe, including how to stay safe online.

Learners receive information about a range of risks, including from radicalisation and extremism and those risks related to online grooming. They also receive guidance about being dressed appropriately when participating in online lessons. Learners can gain a qualification in staying safe online.

Staff phone learners who have EHC plans, and those who are vulnerable, weekly to check on their well-being. Learners value the effort that staff make to support them.

Staff receive training that alerts them to new risks arising from COVID-19. For example, staff offer volunteers who act as befrienders to those who are isolating. Staff explain that they are vigilant for signs of domestic violence. Staff work alongside the council's safeguarding team and explain that they refer learners to other services, such as adult social services, when appropriate.

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