

Kettering Borough Council

Interim visit report

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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 (SEND). 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

Kettering Training Services (KTS) is a service area of Kettering Borough Council. It offers apprenticeships and education programmes for young people.

Apprentices follow framework and standards-based apprenticeships at level 2 and level 3 in business administration, public services and customer service. Two subcontractors teach fashion and textiles, and print and printed packaging apprenticeships. Many of the young people studying at KTS have significant barriers to learning. They work towards qualifications in English, mathematics, work skills and enterprise from entry level to level 2.

At the time of the visit, there were 24 apprentices on courses at level 2 and level 3. A cohort of 11 learners aged 16 to 18 were about to start a full-time course.

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 have altered the order of topics taught, due to the pandemic. For example, apprentices who are on furlough complete learning in a different order to better meet their circumstances. Leaders expect that the forthcoming group of young learners will have increased anxiety levels. Their curriculum now includes additional support for those anxious about returning to learning. Leaders and managers have also introduced a 'blended' approach to this course that includes some remote learning. They aim for this to develop learners' digital skills.

Leaders have upgraded computer facilities to improve the access to ICT-based and remote teaching. They have also provided training for staff in using online platforms, for example videoconferencing tools for live teaching and online portals for assessing and storing learners' work. Leaders are working to ensure that learners and apprentices have the appropriate hardware to learn remotely.

Leaders and managers have increased the amount of pastoral support for apprentices. Assessors have used this to encourage reluctant apprentices to continue with their studies, and to support apprentices back to work following furlough. They are planning for this level of pastoral support to continue into the future.

Leaders and managers have made alterations to careers guidance. This has become more detailed and personalised for young learners as a result of the pandemic. For the new cohort, they plan to include a focus on the post-lockdown jobs market. Apprentices receive advice on how they can work towards their career aspirations through their current job roles.

Leaders have continued to work with external partners to meet the needs of learners and apprentices. For example, they work with the local authority to identify potentially vulnerable young people in the area who would benefit from their full-time courses. They are also supporting employers who are currently reluctant to take on new apprentices.

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 are using well-established approaches to evaluate how successfully teachers teach the curriculum. These include frequent progress checks on individual apprentices and learners, as well as contact with parents and employers to understand their views. Leaders are revising the KTS lesson observation process to include remote teaching and learning. They have identified a need for a greater focus on the effectiveness of online assessment.

Teachers report that they have recently developed their knowledge of web-based learning technology. They understand how this technology can support young learners with SEND, and are starting to apply this to teaching sessions.

Those subcontractors whose staff have developed their use of online learning platforms report a richer learning experience for apprentices. In cases where subcontractors have not used online learning tools, staff report issues with apprentices not submitting work on time. Both the provider and subcontractors report that apprentices have missed face-to-face interaction with peers during the pandemic. Managers are introducing online group support sessions.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, teachers have communicated more frequently with apprentices via telephone and videoconferencing. Assessors report that this has led to useful continuous dialogues about apprentices' progress, rather than relying on monthly meetings. For example, assessors are able to provide learning materials to apprentices in a timelier manner. They have also worked with employers to produce improved learning plans. This has led to better contact with employers who were previously less engaged with apprentices' progress.

Managers have worked with awarding organisations to make changes where COVID-19-related restrictions have made it difficult to assess apprentices' progress. For example, staff have used more professional discussions to aid assessment. Managers report that apprentices have progressed through their studies as they had expected. A few have completed additional work and have progressed at a faster rate.

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

The designated safeguarding lead works closely with the local authority on safeguarding. This includes a focus on new and emerging safeguarding risks that have appeared during the pandemic. Teachers and assessors report that they are aware of new issues and share relevant information with learners and apprentices.

Learners and apprentices undertake safeguarding training at the start of their course. During classes, teachers have increased their emphasis on safeguarding risks and repeat key messages more frequently. For example, they focus on online risks such as suspicious emails and online grooming via safer internet days.

Teachers and assessors state that they pay close attention to potential safeguarding risks during their communication with learners and apprentices. They look for changes in behaviour that may indicate a safeguarding issue and say that they investigate whenever they have concerns.

Staff have received training on the safe use of technology during live teaching and tutorial sessions.

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