

Grantham College

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.

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

Grantham College is a small general further education college located in the market town of Grantham. The college serves Grantham and the neighbouring areas of Lincolnshire. The college has around 700 learners aged 16 to 18, around 350 adult learners and 360 apprentices. Sixty-one learners are in receipt of high needs funding. Courses are offered from entry level to degree level in most subject areas. A range of full- and part-time courses are offered in most subjects.

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?

Prior to lockdown, leaders prioritised intensive training sessions on video conferencing packages for staff, students and apprentices. Teaching continued during lockdown with virtual classes and tutorials. Classes were recorded so that students could access them at any time.

Managers outlined that subject areas approached lockdown in different ways. They had frequent discussions with students with special educational needs and their parents about personalised learning plans. Examples of this included training for parents to use video conferencing for online sessions, workbooks being sent home or activities on the phone. Students on practical courses, like construction, were prioritised to return to campus once it opened. Surveys reveal that students and apprentices appreciate the actions that managers have taken and that remote learning has been well received.

Managers say that curriculum development continues to take place in the context of COVID-19. Classes are being taught on site but also live streamed, which gives adult

students flexibility on where they attend. Managers are planning retraining courses for students who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. They plan to offer these courses flexibly, with frequent start dates and online delivery.

Leaders and managers focused on ensuring that students without information technology equipment were not disadvantaged. They invested in laptops and Wi-Fi dongles for students who did not have access to them at home. Managers continue to survey students and staff to check that they have access to technology. Leaders recognise that in some cases access to technology is still having some impact on student participation.

Employers praised leaders and managers for the actions taken to support apprentices to study remotely. They said the support team and teachers were very flexible. For example, managers reorganised class groups to mirror apprentices' work 'bubbles' so they could return to practical sessions.

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 have altered the current curriculum as a result of COVID-19. Many students and apprentices have remote teaching included in their courses, so they know how to study in this way. Leaders and managers track participation through attendance to campus, virtual classes and work submitted. They report that attendance figures have improved slightly compared to last year.

Teachers have made changes to the order in which they teach their subjects. For example, in functional English there is more speaking and listening at the start of the course to encourage communication skills which have not been practiced as frequently. For students on Access courses, teachers prioritise study skills and remote learning as more classes are taught this way.

Managers are adding extra classes and increasing the availability of the study skills team to support students and apprentices after lockdown. Teachers are in the process of identifying students who have gaps in their knowledge as a result of lockdown. For example, some students with special educational needs require support with social interaction and mathematics.

Leaders and managers have made alterations to the careers programme. It is now online and includes up-to-date employment information. There is a focus on developing skills that might have been lost from increased remote learning, such as face-to-face communication.

Managers indicate that they are ambitious to continue developing a culture of using technology for learning. Staff have been collaborating with other colleges to develop this. For example, a project to develop teachers' skills for teaching in the classroom while live streaming it to students and apprentices at home is underway.

Leaders temporarily altered their approach to quality assurance. This was in recognition of the pressures staff found themselves under. They considered staff well-being and introduced new protocols for online working and frequent digital coffee mornings for staff, hosted by managers.

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

Leaders ensure that support services can operate on site and remotely to support students and apprentices. This includes learning mentors and additional learning support tutors who provide one-to-one support. They have continued to work in collaboration with external agencies to support vulnerable students.

Training for students and apprentices returning to campus has included education on COVID-19 from the newly appointed COVID-19 marshals. Leaders and managers said this ensures that they are aware of the risks. Students said that they felt safe on campus and know who to contact if they have a concern.

Teachers and students report that new protocols have been introduced which relate to remote teaching and learning. This covers video calls, a code of conduct for online learning and advice on staying safe, such as blurring out the background when on camera.

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