

The Trafford College Group

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130519
Name of lead inspector:	Alison Cameron-Brandwood, HMI
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Type of provider:	General further education 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

The Trafford College Group was formed in April 2018 when Trafford College and Stockport College merged. The college has three main sites at Altrincham in south Trafford, Stretford in north Trafford and Stockport. Approximately 12,500 students and apprentices attend the group on courses from pre-entry level to degree level. Leaders provide courses in most subject areas for young people, adults and apprentices. Most popular courses are in construction, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and health and social care. Around 2,300 students and apprentices study at level 3, with 4,677 studying at level 2 and 5,502 at pre-entry level and level 1. The group works with six subcontractors who provide education programmes for young people and adult learning courses.

In April 2019, the college had a monitoring visit to review the progress made since the merger. Inspectors judged the college to be making significant progress against each of the four themes.

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 moved quickly to introduce online learning, following COVID-19 restrictions. They accelerated the implementation of their digital strategy, prioritising the roll-out of resources and training to upskill staff and learners. Leaders say that the new digital environment allows them to act swiftly to bring together key people across campuses to address technical or curricular issues. Staff skilled in digital technology support their peers in delivering lessons online. Staff feel supported to implement online teaching and can access additional training. Leaders quickly put in place measures to support learners and apprentices who did not have access to

computers. They assessed learners' digital skills and loaned out laptops. Learners who cannot access Wi-Fi can work in college.

Learners and apprentices attend college every week on partial timetables, to ensure they have a regular 'touch point' with staff and other learners. Leaders and managers adjusted the curriculum to meet learners' needs. For example, adult learners on trade union courses found the transition to online learning challenging. They have received additional digital skills support and can attend their course online or in college.

Leaders are planning solutions to overcome the limited workshop time for learners on practical courses. Staff are using the outcomes from the early assessments of learners enrolled on higher-level courses to identify those who need additional support.

Leaders continue to work closely with partners, including subcontractors, during the pandemic. Subcontractors say that they appreciate the opportunities to discuss delivery plans with college leaders. Parents of young people told us how well the summer taster courses increased new students' confidence. Employers appreciate the flexible way the college worked with them to support furloughed 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?

The curriculum has been adapted to meet the needs of learners. Catering teachers create group sessions for learners to share videos and photographs of meals produced at home. Staff are assessing gaps in learners' knowledge and making changes to the order in which topics are delivered. For example, computing teachers have prioritised the teaching of scripting for web design as the software is not accessible outside college. A few learners with high needs and vulnerable learners attended college throughout COVID-19 restrictions.

Managers and staff feel that learners value the one-to-one online sessions with their tutors. Learners were initially anxious about moving to online training, but they are enjoying their learning and feel they are productive. Leaders feel that many learners are missing the face-to-face social aspects of college.

Leaders have developed a mix of face-to-face, online and telephone support for learners with SEND, which has been received positively.

Leaders and managers assess the quality of lessons, both online and face-to-face, through drop-in lesson visits. They track learners' attendance and the quality and timeliness of their marked work. Leaders feel this has improved their oversight of the quality of the provision and ensures rapid intervention where courses are not performing to the standard expected.

Leaders and managers have amended careers advice and guidance to focus on the current job market. For example, hospitality staff discuss careers in food production and manufacturing, butchery and bakery. In travel and tourism, learners are receiving additional advice on accessing university courses as an option for further study until the travel industry recovers.

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

Learners know how to participate safely when learning online. Their training includes the use of cameras during online meetings, electronic meeting etiquette, and password management.

Managers amended the school to college transition programme, which now includes supporting learners' mental health. The arrangements for learners with education, health and care plans involved online and telephone contact with learners and their parents, and conducting reviews remotely.

Leaders continue to work collaboratively with partners during the pandemic to identify and support vulnerable learners. At the start of COVID-19 restrictions, leaders set up a 'college kitchen' and, with the help of the local authority, the college provided 400 food packages to learners. Community partners deliver a wide range of enrichment activities to learners, including confidence-building and resilience training.

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