

# Activate Community and Education Services

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	59144
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Suzanne Wainwright, HMI
<b>Visit date(s):</b>	14–15 October 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Address:</b>	The Bracknell Centre Bracknell Ave Southdene Kirkby Merseyside L32 9PW

## 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

Activate Community and Education Services (Activate) is a charity that provides specialist education services for young people who have a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. At the time of the visit, 52 learners aged 19 to 24 years old attended the centre. Approximately two thirds had complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Activate received its first directly funded contract in 2014. It offers day provision for learners for three days a week, 37 weeks a year. Activate specialises in developing an individualised programme of study for learners with a particular focus on communication, increased independence, and skills building for life beyond education. Learners follow a 'futures pathway' or a 'choices pathway'.

### **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 have focused on providing as much continuity for learners as they can. They provided laptops and other computer equipment to help staff and learners work from home. Staff produced learning resources, including videos, that are available on a video-sharing service. These complemented the physical resources that staff delivered to learners' homes.

Leaders continue to focus their curriculum development on learners' individual education, health and care plans. During the period when providers were only open to some learners due to COVID-19 restrictions, learning activities were linked to learners' abilities. However, leaders identified that activities were broader than if learners were in the centre. Leaders took the decision to review all learners' starting points, including returning learners, to assess the impact of their not being able to attend learning for a period of time. They recognise that, until this process is completed, the curriculum is not yet as individualised as they would want. A few

learners will need an extended assessment period as they were required to self-isolate.

Leaders continued to provide specialist therapies and other resources for their learners. For example, learners who needed hydrotherapy sessions could access a dedicated hot tub at the centre. External therapists created videos that parents and carers could use with their young people, particularly for physiotherapy. These actions ensured that learners continued to receive the specialist support they needed to access the curriculum.

Leaders purchased two log cabins with Liverpool City Region COVID-19 support funds. They intend to use the buildings as a café and a farm shop so that learners can access meaningful internal work experience when they are unable to attend external work placements due to local restrictions.

Leaders worked closely with a number of stakeholders, including the membership organisation for specialist colleges, the local community, local authorities, awarding organisations, parents and social care settings. Through these relationships, they shared and received methods and processes of how best to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in a specialist setting, including risk assessment.

**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?**

Prior to the pandemic, all learning at the centre was face to face. At the start of COVID-19 restrictions, teachers felt that they needed to be more innovative in the development of resources to better support learners' individual needs while they learned at home. Teachers developed their technical skills quickly and produced additional individualised resources to support online learning. For example, learners mirrored the work they did in the food bank by stacking food at home. Others created rockery features in their home gardens.

Staff experienced a mixed response from parents and carers in how much they supported their young person to continue their learning. All staff recognise that it was difficult assessing learners' progress when they were not in the centre. A few parents recorded achievements and learning using video footage. However, staff received no information from other parents. Despite the centre remaining open to learners for all but one week during COVID-19 restrictions, parents' own anxieties meant that many learners did not initially return to the centre for their learning.

Leaders implemented weekly telephone calls to learners and their parents to ask about their well-being and to check whether they needed further resources. Most parents and carers engaged with these conversations and found them supportive.

Learners continued to receive careers guidance through telephone and online video calls during COVID-19 restrictions. Staff have resumed face-to-face careers guidance. They support learners to think about their interests, aspirations and next steps.

Learners who were new to the college in September 2020 attended virtual familiarisation events. Using the video-sharing service, learners experienced targeted virtual tours of the centre. Learners were given resources to help them associate with specific rooms in the centre, for example finger lights and balls for the sensory room.

Leaders told us that they will be using classroom observations to assess the quality of teaching and learning, to monitor learners' progress and to identify good practice that can be shared.

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

Leaders explained that their focus was on helping learners to return to the centre safely. This included adaptations to the building. All staff were trained in personal care and percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) feeding to limit the number of new staff on site. Staff, learners and visitors follow stringent COVID-19 infection control processes. Learners told us that these stop them from 'getting poorly'.

Safeguarding staff explained how they deal with safeguarding concerns or disclosures. A few undertake specialist training, for example Makaton safeguarding training.

Leaders introduced a COVID-19 'social story' for learners that helps them to understand why they might have to stay at home. Staff help learners to overcome barriers to following rules. For example, they put a 'wind-up fish' in the basin to ensure that learners put their hands in water to wash them.

Very few learners access online learning unsupervised. At the start of the pandemic, leaders met with parents and carers to help them to understand parental controls on digital devices.

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