

Trinity Solutions Academy

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	142673
Name of lead inspector:	Ken Merry, HMI
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Address:	Condercum Road Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 8XJ

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

Trinity Solutions Academy, which is part of a multi-academy trust, opened in January 2016. It shares a site in the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne with Trinity Academy Newcastle and Trinity Post-Solutions Limited. Its aim is to enable vulnerable and disadvantaged learners who have significant barriers to learning to re-engage with education and enter employment. The campus has specialist vocational learning environments, including a farm and motor vehicle and construction workshops.

At the time of the visit, there were 78 learners aged 16 to 19 on study programmes; of these, eight were in receipt of high-needs funding and 16 were enrolled with a subcontractor where they were studying hairdressing, barbering and beauty therapy.

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 consider that they have responded well to the challenges posed by the pandemic. They understand the support needs that their learners now have, particularly those with specific educational needs. In a recent survey, leaders found that over half their learners reported an increase in anxiety and stress in their everyday lives. As a result, leaders have introduced activities and interventions to help those who need extra support to manage their mental health.

Leaders believe that they managed the transition to remote learning successfully. They perceive this alternative way of working as a positive development that they will adapt and keep moving forward. Leaders have planned when to use remote teaching to make it most effective. For example, they have decided to teach English and mathematics classes online so that they can reduce the number of learners who have to be physically present in their buildings.

Leaders identify that the biggest challenge that they face this academic year is ensuring that learners make enough progress in English and mathematics. They know that a large proportion of learners have significant gaps in their knowledge and skills in these subjects. They have put plans in place to close these gaps.

Leaders consider that the opportunities for their learners to move into employment are likely to be limited due to the local economic situation, particularly in the construction industry where, historically, a large proportion of learners have secured employment. As a result, they have adjusted the curriculum to focus more on the development of skills that will be of value in a range of vocational contexts.

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?

Staff have received support to develop their skills in using online learning to meet the needs of learners. Teachers have become more confident and familiar with using online resources and see the flexibility of online teaching as a positive feature. When teachers have had to self-isolate, they have continued to teach their lessons from home using video-call technology. Leaders have put measures in place to review the quality of online teaching.

Following the COVID-19 restrictions, learners were anxious about coming into the centre and using public transport, particularly if they had a vulnerable family member. As restrictions lifted, staff offered the opportunity for learners to come into the centre individually or to have video calls. In an attempt to ease concerns, leaders gave learners video tours to show the safety procedures that had been introduced. Since September, all learners have returned to face-to-face learning in the centre.

Teachers feel that many learners were negatively affected by the lack of a routine during the COVID-19 restrictions. They reported that learners are more engaged and motivated to learn since returning to the centre and are responding well to the mix of face-to-face and virtual learning.

Staff build careers education, information, advice and guidance into the curriculum. They give subject-specific advice to learners in vocational groups. As the career opportunities that are likely to be available to learners are changing, staff have taken steps to provide learners with guidance and activities about a wider range of options, including self-employment. Learners studying land-based subjects have taken part in the FaceTime a Farmer initiative to find out about possible careers that they might pursue in the future.

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

Staff maintain close links with the local authority and social services, which enables them to provide appropriate support to learners with safeguarding concerns.

Learners follow guidance to mitigate the risks of the pandemic, including washing their hands more frequently and maintaining social distancing in lessons.

Leaders are aware of the risks posed to learners when they are online, such as online bullying and being encouraged to send inappropriate images to friends. They work with learners to ensure that they understand the risks. They recognise the need to reinforce learners' awareness, particularly when learners' actions are not in line with the advice and support that they have been given.

Learners understand how to keep themselves safe online and in their everyday lives. They can identify whom they would contact if they did not feel safe.

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