

Melton Vale Sixth Form College

Interim visit report

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| Unique reference number: | 145158 |
| Name of lead inspector: | Helen Whelan, HMI |
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| Type of provider: | Sixth form college |
| Address: | Melton Vale Sixth Form College Burton Road Melton Mowbray Leicestershire LE13 1DN |

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, leaders, staff and learners.

Information about the provider

Melton Vale Sixth Form College is a 16–19 academy that opened in 2017. The college offers A-level courses in a broad range of subjects (25 courses) and a smaller number of applied general/vocational courses (six extended certificates, each equivalent to a single A-level). At the time of the visit, the college had 469 students aged 16–19 and received high needs funding for two of these students. Two hundred and seventy-five learners are currently studying in Year 12 and 194 in Year 13. The college is part of the Nova Education Trust.

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 produced a policy and communication strategy to deal with COVID-19, which students and parents contributed to. The use of technology for teaching and learning is seen as key to the college's ethos and a desire for students to be equipped with the digital skills they need in their future studies and employment. An online learning platform has been used for several years and leaders and teachers developed this further during lockdown. Leaders add daily messages to the online platform and courses have their own areas where teachers set students work.

The A-level curriculum is unchanged following COVID-19 but leaders have introduced two more vocational courses to support the needs and interests of students. Leaders note that many students benefit from the option of blending academic and vocational courses.

Leaders identify the needs of students through a pastoral system that provides individual tutorials at least once every three weeks. These tutorials revealed that many students

have showed great resilience during the pandemic while others have suffered mental health issues. Leaders have therefore appointed a learning development coordinator to support students' well-being and employed a counsellor for one day per week.

Leaders are pleased at how teachers and students have embraced technology to develop learning. Teachers use the online learning platform to provide quizzes to test students' knowledge and understanding. Several teachers use image capture devices to record and upload model answers and demonstrate how these would be marked. Leaders make use of a video sharing platform to present assemblies and briefings to students, who appreciate being kept informed.

Leaders say their biggest challenge is knowing whether examinations will take place in the summer or not. They are aware of how unsettling this is to many students.

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?

During lockdown, students followed a structured programme of activities that mirrored their college timetable. Teachers had significant latitude in deciding what to teach for their courses. Leaders strongly believe that, as subject experts, teachers should be trusted to make the best choices for their students. Leaders made the decision not to include 'live' learning sessions. This ensured the safety of students and staff and avoided the issues with unreliable internet connectivity.

Teachers are conscious that a very small number of students did not attend or participate as well as they might during lockdown. In their view, this is largely because these students struggled with their mental well-being. Teachers clearly know these students well and provide individual support for them.

Leaders are providing additional lesson time now that students have returned to college. This time is used to help students who need to catch up and regain their confidence. Teachers report that students are eager to be back in the classroom and many are now more appreciative of the benefits of face-to-face teaching and learning.

Leaders are aware that new students may have missed elements of their GCSE studies. To ensure that students have the key knowledge they require, teachers have provided a transition booklet that includes the important GCSE knowledge they should have mastered. They always use the beginning of a new academic year to assess the suitability of students for their courses and this has taken on particular significance this year.

Careers advice and guidance was provided by staff remotely through lockdown. Students had individual careers interviews and access to online tools and materials to support them with career planning.

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

Leaders are mindful of the risks which students have faced because of the pandemic and prioritised the safety of their students. The college's safeguarding policy was updated, a new online referral system for teachers was introduced and students' welfare was frequently assessed.

At the start of their course, new students are introduced to the college's online learning portal and given guidance about how to report concerns. Year 13 students describe receiving training on various safeguarding themes, including online safety and safe relationships, through their tutorial programme.

Students know how to keep themselves safe online. Leaders are keen to build on this knowledge and develop students' digital literacy and social media etiquette in preparation for university and employment.

The designated safeguarding lead reports receiving regular safeguarding updates and ensures that teachers are also kept well-informed of safeguarding matters.

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