

The Sheffield College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130531
Name of lead inspector:	Ken Merry HMI
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Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Granville Road Sheffield S2 2RL

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 Sheffield College is a very large general further education college that recruits learners and apprentices from across the city of Sheffield and the wider Sheffield City Region. It has four main sites in the city. The college provides education and training to approximately 5,400 learners aged 16 to 19 on study programmes. Approximately 2,700 adult learners and around 1,800 apprentices have been enrolled so far this academic year. The college has subcontracting arrangements with 34 subcontractors for the delivery of apprenticeships, adult learning programmes and study programmes.

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 believe that they have been able to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic successfully. They explained that the introduction of a pandemic continuity plan and several working groups early in spring 2020 meant that they were able to make a smooth transition to remote learning.

Leaders and managers have invested heavily in computer equipment and software for learners to use. Where appropriate, they have used discretionary support funds to provide laptops and Wi-Fi dongles so that learners are able to access online learning sessions.

Leaders have decided that remote learning will continue to be a key part of their teaching and learning strategy throughout this academic year and beyond. They have supported staff to develop their skills and confidence in delivering remote learning through an extensive programme of professional development. Leaders

hope that, as a result, staff will become more innovative in their approach to remote learning as their practice develops.

Leaders understand that learners have suffered from mental health and well-being challenges throughout the pandemic. They believe that they have provided a large amount of effective support for learners over the last few months. This has included frequent telephone calls to check on the welfare of the most vulnerable learners. However, they recognise that many learners are still in need of continuing support.

Leaders and managers explained that they maintain strong relationships with employers and other partner organisations. Leaders recognise that the local labour market is changing and that learners may find that many traditional routes into employment or apprenticeships, such as in construction, are no longer available. As a result, staff make sure that learners receive appropriate support about alternative opportunities. For example, a new entrepreneurial skills course offered in partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce encourages learners to consider self-employment opportunities when planning their future.

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 are very appreciative of the regular communication that senior leaders provide about the college's response to the pandemic. They support the decisions that leaders have made regarding the new ways of working. They adopted quickly the use of online learning to enable learners to continue with their studies. As a result, learners and apprentices have continued to develop their knowledge and skills throughout the pandemic.

Teachers believe that most learners engage well with remote learning. They monitor learners' participation closely and act when learners do not engage. Teachers ensured that they supported learners during the early part of the period when colleges were only open to some students due to COVID-19 restrictions, to help them to become comfortable with the new way of learning. They explain that this has been particularly important for learners with high needs and those with social and emotional needs.

Teachers provide support for learners to enable them to continue with their studies by identifying the gaps in their knowledge. They have carried out assessments early in the new term to establish learners' prior knowledge and skills. Where they identify gaps in learners' knowledge, they plan to use activities that get learners back on track quickly.

Leaders and managers have empowered teaching staff to review their curriculum and plan teaching and assessment to meet the needs of learners and apprentices. Teachers have organised timetables so that learners come into the college for practical, skill-building sessions in subjects such as construction and hairdressing.

Learners and apprentices complete remote learning activities in their own time to supplement their face-to-face sessions.

Staff have changed their approach to careers advice and guidance to ensure that learners receive the support they need. They provide advice and guidance remotely using a range of different technologies. For example, they provided virtual tours and video calls to prospective learners.

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

Leaders and managers have put in place a range of systems to ensure the safety and well-being of people when in college buildings. For example, they have introduced a COVID-19 charter and created subject-specific 'bubbles' for face-to-face teaching sessions. Leaders are pleased with how learners have adapted to the new protocols.

Leaders prioritised support for learners already known to be vulnerable during the period when colleges were only open to some students due to COVID-19 restrictions. Tutor mentors and support staff frequently contacted those in need and referred learners and apprentices to external support services where necessary.

Leaders and managers support learners to stay safe online. Learners confirmed that they have received additional support from teachers about how to stay safe online, including protecting themselves from online bullying and looking after their personal identities. At the start of the COVID-19 restrictions, staff advised learners and apprentices on how to behave during online sessions and what type of background they should use in video calls.

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