

West Thames College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 130447

Name of lead inspector: Steve Lambert HMI

Visit dates: 13–14 October 2020

Type of provider: Further education college

Address: London Rd
Isleworth
Middlesex
TW7 4HS

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 students and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and 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

West Thames College (WTC) is a medium-sized general further education college with two main sites in the London Borough of Hounslow. WTC offers a broad curriculum in most subject areas for full- and part-time learners and includes full-time provision for pupils aged 14 to 16. The majority of learners study on full-time 16 to 19 study programmes. Adult learning programmes include English for speakers of other languages, access to higher education and skills for employment programmes in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. There is a small apprenticeship programme in logistics. Programmes for learners with high needs include supported learning for moderate learning needs, vocational learning and supported internships.

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 and managers continue to offer broadly the same curriculum as before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They explain that they worked quickly to move their teaching online. Since September, they have evaluated on a programme-by-programme basis how to teach subjects. Some students are back at college full time. Others have half their lessons in classrooms with their teachers and the other half online. However, many of these students attend their online lessons in the library where they can access support if they need it.

Leaders work with a range of local authorities and with employers in industries that have been affected by the pandemic, such as aviation. They are evaluating with their stakeholders the impact of the pandemic and adapting the curriculum offer to meet

skills gaps. For example, they are developing a programme to meet the needs of new employees in small- to medium-sized enterprises.

Staff report that they received training on how to teach safely and effectively online just before the college closed. Leaders and managers have established procedures for supporting staff and students with any issues they experience with using information technology (IT). Staff describe how they provide information on safety and well-being to students through workshops at the start of term and through ongoing tutorials.

Staff say that students continue to follow the routines of expected behaviour from when the college was closed, which results in attendance being high. They believe that this is a result of the students wanting to continue with their education and valuing the efforts that staff make to enable this to happen. Leaders and managers continue to invest in additional online resources. They believe that students are more able to work independently as a result of online learning. They have put in place additional resources to provide support for students who have fallen behind.

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?

Leaders and managers feel that teaching was already effective, and that the move to online learning has further accelerated the continuing development of effective on-site and online learning. This has complemented existing classroom practice. Teachers report an increased confidence in using technology in lessons. They describe how they feel able to try new approaches to teaching for the benefit of students.

Teachers have adapted how they teach their courses. For example, in subjects such as hairdressing, engineering and construction, they now teach the practical skills students need at the start of the course. They then teach students the theoretical aspects of their course through online lessons.

Staff report that they monitor closely learners who have education and healthcare plans. Attendance for these learners is high, and all their lessons are in person at the college. Staff provide one-to-one support to help learners to bridge any gaps in learning and to monitor their well-being needs.

Staff recognise that work experience for students is a challenge. They are putting in place revised plans with employers to offer work experience opportunities for their students. This has included virtual tours of the Globe Theatre, virtual work experience with mentors from employers and masterclasses online from specialists within the performing arts sector, such as a theatre wig-maker.

Managers have added extra online lessons to help students prepare for their forthcoming English and mathematics examinations. Students have access to the learning resource

centre and can receive the support they need. Leaders and managers have adapted their approach to quality assurance. They use a combination of observations of online lessons and staff and student feedback to identify and share good practice. For example, students report that some courses were not suited to online learning. Leaders responded by putting measures in place to enable students to study their course in the college. Staff continue to provide careers advice and guidance to students and support them with applications to higher education.

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

Staff explained how they have enhanced the support available for students as a result of the pandemic. This includes increased access to counselling services for students who feel anxious about returning to college.

Staff report that they have maintained frequent contact with students since the start of the pandemic. This support continues, and students receive weekly phone calls to check on their well-being. Staff say that they maintained close links with external agencies when the college was closed to ensure that any concerns about students were followed up promptly. They have created virtual 'common rooms', which are part of the college's IT system, that enable students to meet with their friends in a safe online space.

Students spoke confidently about how to keep themselves safe online. They spoke about the information they received on using online facilities when using technology at home and in the college.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020