

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	55247
Name of lead inspector:	Cath Jackson, HMI
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Type of provider:	Local authority
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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

Wakefield Adult and Community Education Service is in the council's Regeneration and Economic Growth Directorate. It provides part-time adult learning programmes at two local authority education centres and 46 community partnership venues, including schools, voluntary settings and the health service. The service has approximately 600 learners, who study from entry level to level 3 on employability programmes, courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), English and mathematics, and vocational programmes. Approximately a third of adult learners are on family and community learning courses that do not lead directly to a qualification.

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 confirmed that their learners were unable to attend education centres and community venues when these closed in March, in line with lockdown requirements. Prior to lockdown, managers worked with staff to review resources, practise using new technology, and develop work packs of online learning materials so that learning could continue remotely.

Leaders believe that the pandemic has created positive opportunities for staff to adapt the curriculum to make it more flexible and to meet learners' individual needs. Teachers have created online and paper-based learning resources to complement or replace face-to-face learning where necessary, including resources for English and mathematics. Leaders consider that these additional resources and approaches will offset the risks of learners missing out on their studies in the event of any further

lockdown. They feel that the resources will be of benefit to adult learners across Wakefield who find it difficult to access classroom learning at set times.

Leaders and managers collaborate with stakeholders to support vulnerable people in the community. Managers trained stakeholders who work with new tenants to teach important life skills such as budgeting and independent living. Teachers and managers developed learning resources and activities around independent cooking skills for residents of care homes who were unable to attend community venues.

Managers described an increased demand for training in health and social care, and in information technology skills. They recognise that many learners face barriers to work and learning as they lack skills or confidence in using technology. Leaders have identified that they need more teachers of information technology and anticipate this need will rise as more people are made redundant and need to retrain.

Managers responsible for examinations have developed a contingency plan in case they are required to provide evidence for centre-assessed grades. They are confident that the processes they have put in place will support staff to record evidence of their learners' achievement using a consistent approach.

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?

Managers and teachers are positive about the training that they received in using online learning platforms. Teachers who felt less confident in using technology said that managers supported them well to develop their skills. Teachers describe using online learning platforms to teach elements of vocational courses such as accounting, and video conferencing for undertaking assessments in hair and beauty.

Staff have adopted a blended learning approach for vocational courses such as hairdressing, so that learners attend on alternate weeks. Teachers focus on practical work in the classroom with smaller class sizes to maximise opportunities for coaching learners and to maintain social distancing. Learners study the theory component of their course remotely.

On courses in ESOL, teachers use a blend of classroom learning for speaking and listening, and remote learning to develop reading and writing skills. Learners studying English and mathematics use work packs at home and receive support through telephone tutorials with their teacher.

Leaders are aware of challenges faced by learners who have limited access to computers to enable them to learn online. Managers and teachers work around this by delivering paper-based resources to learners' homes and holding weekly telephone tutorials with learners.

Managers feel that the changes they have made work well to meet the needs of learners with varied shift patterns or caring responsibilities. Teachers offer flexible times for learning sessions. For example, family learning can take place in the early evening for learners who work or have caring responsibilities.

Staff provide initial and ongoing careers advice and guidance to their learners to make them aware of the opportunities available. Learners feel that the advice that they receive is helpful.

Teachers keep in touch with learners who are at risk and provide them with information about sources of information and support. Learners with mental health issues described how the contact they received from their tutor had enabled them to complete their course.

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

Staff and learners complete safeguarding inductions before starting their courses, and learning venues follow safe procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This includes using a one-way system, wearing a face covering in communal areas, cleaning down workspaces and equipment, and maintaining social distance. Learners on hairdressing courses formed their own tutor group bubble and maintain social distance in the salon, with appropriate space between work stations.

Learners know how to stay safe online, including knowing how to recognise signs of cyber bullying. Teachers monitor social media platforms used for teaching and communication. Learners said that they feel safe in learning centres and when online. They know how to report any concerns to their teachers or the safeguarding team.

Leaders identified that, at the start of lockdown, they could have focused more explicitly on wider risks associated with the rapid expansion of online learning. They have now incorporated this into their risk-assessment processes.

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