

# South Staffordshire College

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 135658

**Name of lead inspector:** Bev Ramsell, HMI

**Visit date(s):** 13–14 October 2020

**Type of provider:** General further education college

**Address:** Rodbaston Drive  
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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

The college has four main campuses located in the south of Staffordshire. Several outreach centres provide community learning and skills courses. The curriculum includes courses in all sector subject areas, apart from humanities. Courses are available at foundation level through to higher education in many of these areas. At the time of the visit, the college had 3,749 learners. Most learners were aged 16 to 18, with the remaining being adult learners. In addition, the college had 694 learners studying mainly standards-based apprenticeships.

### **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?**

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, senior leaders reported some positive reactions, such as an accelerated move to online learning and an online enrolment process. They explained how they took the decisions to purchase equipment, like internet dongles and high-performance web cameras, for the live streaming – or recording – of sessions. They also recognised the impact of 'digital poverty': learners' lack of access to a computer or to the internet. As a result, they introduced a loan scheme. Currently, 130 laptops are on loan to learners.

Senior leaders recognise the positives of online learning. Yet, they are also aware that the majority of learners prefer a mix of face-to-face teaching and online learning – a 'blended learning' approach. As a result, they have structured a curriculum they believe will prepare learners for any future site closure, but also will support social interaction. Managers described the implementation of blended learning, including a process used to protect the curriculum delivery against further restrictions. For

example, construction and veterinary nurse curriculum sites are both closed for a two-week isolation period. Staff were able to switch the curriculum immediately to theory teaching online, to avoid disruption to learning.

Senior leaders identified that communications with staff during the closure of the college were vital. Managers described how regular Tuesday updates supported them and their teams with messages of support and important information. They also stated how the human resource department sent regular positive messages and well-being guidance throughout the closure.

Stakeholders, such as the Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and the local Jobcentre Plus, have worked with leaders to reconfigure the adult education provision to focus on the unemployed or those on long-term furlough. For example, they have launched a 'Step into work' programme with a local employer, providing warehousing, logistics, construction, retail, and cleaning courses.

### **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 reported that, as the initial college closure occurred, learning moved completely online. Teachers used a variety of teaching methods, such as live streams, digital platforms and interactive presentations. For example, motor vehicle learners used online vehicle simulators to diagnose faults. Teachers and learners could interact on this platform to discuss learning.

Managers and teachers described the level of support they received for the delivery of digital learning. Staff had access to equipment and guidance from digital learning technologists and teaching and learning coaches. They also developed a platform called 'BITS', so they could share best practice across the organisation.

Managers explained that the majority of teaching is now through a blended learning method. Teachers have revisited the order in which they teach topics. For example, in hairdressing some practical elements are now taught at the start of the programme. They said this is helping them to prepare in case of a further closure.

Leaders explained their focus on assessing learners' knowledge and skills, to identify any strengths or gaps in learning. For example, there has been a four-week review of learning at the start of the academic year. This resulted in a 'right course' interview, to make sure learners are on the appropriate course and level to support their career objectives.

Leaders and teachers told us that attendance has generally been good. Learners received regular contact from personal tutors, mentors and support workers, while there was no access to the college facilities. Leaders identified vulnerable learners early and put in place specific interventions to support their individual needs.

Managers recognise the challenges that lay ahead with work experience and shared concerns about future employment opportunities in sectors such as travel and tourism, and hospitality, as a result of the pandemic.

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

Senior leaders shared the risk assessment process used to prioritise learners who were identified as being more vulnerable. For example, all learners with education, health and care plans, and children looked after, were prioritised for contact to check on their well-being. Senior leaders explained how they have continued to work with external agencies and stakeholders and kept up to date with safeguarding issues.

Teachers stated how learners are aware of the process for the safe return to on-site learning. They explained that learners receive information through the enrolment processes, induction and tutorials. They referred to an increase in safeguarding training, which included e-safety and cyber security for both teachers and learners.

Learners told us about the range of physical measures that are in place across the college campuses. These include hand sanitation points around the college, and guidance on wearing face coverings in communal areas – in addition to signage promoting social distancing. Learners stated that they felt safe.

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