

# The David Lewis Centre

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 131860

**Name of lead inspector:** Suzanne Wainwright, HMI

**Visit date(s):** 21 to 22 October 2020

**Type of provider:** Independent specialist college

**Address:** Mill Lane  
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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

David Lewis is a specialist residential college of further education supporting students with a wide range of complex needs, including moderate to severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, disabilities and challenging needs. A high percentage of students have significant medical needs. Students study at the college on a residential, weekly boarder or day basis. The college is part of David Lewis, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The college provides a wide range of courses from entry level to level 1 and recruits from 28 local authorities in England and Wales. The college is based on one extensive site in rural Cheshire.

### 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 took the decision to close the college a week earlier than they needed to in order to plan how they would protect their vulnerable students. They sent study packs home with their day students, which they supported through online learning methods. Leaders continued to provide learning in residential houses. They believe that their detailed preparation, using social stories and visual aids, ensured that students settled back into their new college environment successfully.

Leaders say that they support teachers to deliver the curriculum innovatively. They have developed outdoor learning spaces where students learn about horticulture, such as growing vegetables, and orienteering, photography and art. Leaders allow teachers to be flexible with the timetable to meet the needs of students. For example, they can swap classroom-based lessons with sports lessons if students need to burn off energy before settling into learning. During the period when the college was closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, students provided content for a weekly newsletter. They took photographs of the activities they completed while at home, for example

baking and designing t-shirts. This helped enormously with their mental health because they could see their friends.

Leaders said that having a specific classroom for each group-based 'bubble' has led to teachers displaying students' work on classroom walls. Classrooms better reflect the interests of the students and their teacher. The new ways of working, for example socially distanced meetings, online learning and reduced support levels due to restricted numbers in classrooms, have increased most students' independence.

Staff say that arrangements for those students moving to their next steps are challenging. Most students can only access their intended destination via a video recording. This leads to greater anxiety because they cannot start to recognise faces at their new placement easily.

Leaders have worked closely with external organisations, particularly the membership organisation for specialist colleges, as well as other stakeholders. They have shared ideas and used these networks to validate the actions they chose to take.

**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 say delivering the curriculum has been a challenge. Before the pandemic, most students went off site for work experience. Students now learn about work-related activities in the classroom. They cook simple snacks and take money for the food they sell. Students develop their communication skills by taking orders for food over the telephone. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, teachers say students' understanding is currently limited because they cannot practise what they learn theoretically in practical work placements.

Leaders adapted the curriculum during the time that students were not in college due to COVID-19 restrictions. For example, not all students were able to use online learning methods effectively, due to their complex learning needs. A few students found it difficult to mix college activities with being at home. Teachers adapted resources to help these students participate in learning, for example through sensory activities. Leaders and teachers ensured that they communicated regularly with parents and carers so that students had a structure and routine to their day.

Teachers have reviewed students' baseline assessments and reset their individual targets. Teachers say that students are making good progress against their new targets. A few targets are based on students being able to understand how to keep themselves safe, such as with enhanced handwashing and using hand sanitisers.

Teachers say that they have had some training on using technology to deliver learning. Leaders review lesson plans, the targets that teachers set students and students' work.

Leaders are not yet monitoring the quality of teaching, due to restricted numbers in classrooms.

Teachers feel that the closure of the site resulted in students losing confidence, for example in their independent living skills. Teachers are working hard to rectify this. They have put plans in place to revisit previous learning.

Students and parents and carers feel reassured by the new arrangements at the college. Since students returned, attendance and engagement has been high. Staff say that students are pleased to be back with their friends and teachers.

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

Leaders completed risk assessments around the vulnerability of their students. These identified that specific risks were students' lack of contact with others, being more exposed to online content and a concern that free school meals were not available to those who needed them. They provided accessible information about online safety and had structured communication channels with parents and carers. They made direct payments to parents and carers who needed support in providing meals for their young people.

Students understand how to keep themselves safe in a way that is appropriate for their needs. They say that they feel safe and know who to contact if they are scared or upset. Where leaders identified concerns, they held 'best interest' meetings with appropriate agencies.

Leaders ensure that the group-based 'bubbles' have their own entrance and exit routes to college buildings to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. They used video footage to familiarise students with the new arrangements before they returned to the college.

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