

Bury College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130498
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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

Bury College is a large further education college, located in the centre of the market town of Bury. It offers courses from foundation to higher education level across most subject areas. Nearly two thirds of young people study at level 3. Around a third of adults study at entry level/level 1, with the same number studying at levels 2 and 3. It provides apprenticeships from level 2 to level 5 in the Greater Manchester region. The highest number of learners study A-levels, health and social care and construction. The college currently works with a subcontractor who provides mainly A-level courses for pupils at a local school. There are 155 learners who have high needs. At the previous full inspection inspectors judged the college to be good.

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 responded quickly to the disruption to learning caused by COVID-19 restrictions. Managers carefully reviewed what learning strategies were more effective because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders implemented a strategy to deliver most learning online. They quickly identified learners who did not have access to computers and provided them with the necessary resources. Leaders provided additional training to staff to enable them to become confident using information learning technology more extensively than previously.

Since the start of the autumn term, learners have been benefiting from a large proportion of their programme being delivered through face-to-face teaching. Leaders are confident that current plans will minimise the impact on learners should there be further disruption. For example, where possible learners are attending

college for fewer hours and some of the theoretical aspects of their courses will continue to be taught online.

Leaders say that staff have assessed learners' starting points carefully when they returned to college in September 2020 to identify any gaps in knowledge and skills. For example, construction learners were affected because they were unable to complete part of their practical work. Arrangements are now in place to help them catch up.

Leaders are managing significant changes in learner enrolments on a few courses. For example, as a result of the pandemic there is a significant rise in learners on health and care courses.

Employers told us how the curriculum was adapted for their apprentices who were furloughed. For example, apprentices on electrical courses concentrated on the theoretical aspects of their course. Employers explained how their apprentices' learning had continued online and with regular support from learning and skills coaches.

Where courses rely heavily on practical assessments, such as in childcare, staff at the nursery assess apprentices' practical skills for those who were in work. All stakeholders told us that learners and apprentices are receiving additional support to help them to catch up if they are behind in their work.

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 responded quickly to adapt the way they communicate with learners in order to ensure that they meet their needs. For example, learners had support sessions by telephone. Leaders have worked hard to develop a flexible curriculum so that staff and learners are prepared for any future disruptions.

Teachers are confident that their revised initial assessment identifies accurately learners' starting points. They recognise that this has never been more important, particularly for those apprentices returning to learning and work after a period of furlough. For example, it was identified that hairdressing apprentices needed focused sessions on colour correction.

Managers and teachers have amended the sequencing of the curriculum to ensure that practical skills are now taught earlier in the programme. For example, hairdressing learners remotely access teachers' demonstrations of how to perm hair, prior to practising their skills on their own at home.

Teachers and assessors use a variety of methods to teach learners online. Knowing that they are supported and encouraged by senior leaders and managers to deliver innovative teaching has helped them to overcome any fears they may have had.

Staff have provided a wide range of support to learners during the COVID-19 restrictions. For example, teachers posted workbooks to learners studying English for speakers of other languages who did not have access to the internet. They provided them with pre-paid envelopes to post their work back so that they could receive feedback and continue to make progress.

Teachers are very proud of themselves as well as their learners. They feel that they have had a responsive and resilient attitude during the pandemic. Teachers have created a culture of support and camaraderie for one another in their continued efforts to assure the quality of the curriculum.

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

Leaders identified many learners who were potentially vulnerable at the time when the college was only open to some learners due to COVID-19 restrictions. Staff contacted these learners and provided weekly support to ensure that they stayed safe.

Staff at the college work closely with the local authority to monitor learners who are children looked after. For example, learners who became homeless were referred to the local authority for rehousing and college staff arranged food parcels.

All staff have continued to receive frequent safeguarding training and updates. Teachers said that they had benefited from a range of safeguarding-related support in recent months, including training in teaching online safely.

Those learners and apprentices who we spoke to said they felt safe while at college and when working online. They know who to contact if they have concerns about their safety or well-being. Parents of learners who have high needs were reassured by the steps the college took to keep returning learners safe and well.

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