

Bolton College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130495
Name of lead inspector:	Alison Cameron Brandwood HMI
Visit dates:	4–5 November 2020
Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Deane Road Bolton Greater Manchester BL3 5BG

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 in this period, including those 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

Bolton College is a medium-sized college located in the town centre. Bolton is a large, diverse borough that includes affluent areas and some of the poorest in the region. Approximately 5,400 learners and apprentices currently attend the college on courses from pre-entry level to level 5. Leaders provide courses in most subject areas for young people, adults and apprentices. Most popular courses are in preparation for life and work, and health and social care. Around 1,570 learners and apprentices study at level 3, with 1,820 studying at level 2 and 1,850 learners at pre-entry level, entry level and level 1. The college works with one subcontractor who provides education programmes to 60 young people studying musical theatre and dance courses.

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 introduced remote learning immediately following the start of COVID-19 restrictions in March 2020. Most learners could access learning online. Leaders identified learners and apprentices who did not have access to computers or the internet at home. They quickly distributed laptops, mobile broadband devices and paper-based workbooks. Leaders invited a small group of vulnerable learners to attend college, but only a few attended for a short time. Managers adapted how they communicated with learners. Learners on English for speakers of other languages courses keep in touch with each other and their teacher using social media.

Learners returned to face-to-face teaching in September for all lessons. In response to the continuing high COVID-19 infection rate in Bolton, leaders recently introduced online group tutorials and English and mathematics lessons to limit contact between

learners on different courses. Managers say that they feel much better prepared for any future restrictions. Staff are more confident should they return to online teaching.

Leaders adapted how they worked with apprentices and employers. They increased the number of reviews with apprentices to check on their well-being. Employers praised how staff keep apprentices engaged with a range of remote learning activities. In hairdressing, teachers present live cutting demonstrations remotely while apprentices practise on mannequin blocks.

Managers told us that developing learners' practical skills remains a concern. They have moved the order in which learners complete their practical units. Current learners on beauty therapy courses study facial treatments first. Childcare learners practise nappy-changing and bottle-feeding in a simulated environment at college. Leaders are discussing further solutions.

Leaders have maintained close working relationships with stakeholders. They have regular contact with their subcontractor, who has identified benefits to the changes they have made to courses during the pandemic such as smaller class sizes. Leaders work with the local authority to develop online courses, including in safe procedures for food hygiene.

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 modified the curriculum to meet learners' and apprentices' needs. Teachers prioritise the development of learners' digital skills. As part of their employability unit, learners with SEND learn about applying for jobs online and attending online interviews. Learners on teaching assistant courses learn how to use online video software to interact with their school. Teachers identify skills that learners have been unable to practise. In healthcare, teachers work with the hospital to film clinical practices such as taking blood so that learners observe these procedures.

Leaders and managers continue to assess the quality of lessons through lesson observations and drop-in lesson visits.

Leaders modify careers advice and guidance for learners to better prepare them for their next steps. In sport, learners attended an online session with trainers from a local gym. They learned how gyms were adapting to COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders introduce new qualifications to prepare learners for work under current restrictions, for example, a short course in COVID-19 safety on construction sites.

Leaders have found new ways to provide learners with work experience. In hospitality, learners run the college restaurant as a takeaway outlet. Leaders

developed a four-day virtual work experience event for 80 learners with a local engineering company. Learners worked on an anti-drone system project to learn about the concept, feasibility, planning and design of an engineering lifecycle.

Learners describe how glad they are to be back in college. While they feel able to learn online, they prefer the structure and normality of being back in the classroom.

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

Leaders felt well prepared in safeguarding learners and apprentices from the start of the pandemic. From the start of COVID-19 restrictions, staff contacted high-risk learners at least weekly and until their return to college in September. Staff continue to contact learners who are self-isolating. Counselling sessions are conducted using teleconferencing, video calls and face-to-face contact, depending on learners' preferences.

Leaders prioritised supporting learners' understanding of how to cope with potential mental health issues. They changed the tutorial curriculum to focus on learners' well-being. Learning development mentors use the information from well-being assessments to adapt to learners' support needs. Mentors have individual meetings with learners and refer them to external agencies if needed. Learners participate in well-being extra-curricular activities online such as 'colour and chill'.

Learners receive regular updates about online safety. Teachers identify specific risks for groups of learners. Learners describe how to keep themselves safe online by securing passwords, avoiding online communication with strangers and accessing lessons safely online.

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