

Kendal College

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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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

Kendal College is a small general further education college located near the southern part of the Lake District in the county of Cumbria. It provides education and training for approximately 3,400 learners. Just over one third of learners are aged 16 to 19 and are on full-time courses, just over 600 are apprentices, and the remainder are adult learners. The college provides courses from entry level to level 5 in a range of subject areas. The largest subject areas are: health and social care; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); hospitality and catering; creative and performing arts; and construction. The vast majority of learners attend the main college campus. Those on creative arts courses study at the arts and media campus in the centre of town. Kendal College does not work with any subcontractors.

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?

Senior leaders and managers prepared in advance for the COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions and were able to act swiftly when this happened. They immediately implemented a strategy to move all teaching online, with minimal disruption to learning. Managers had already identified those learners and staff who did not have access to computers and quickly provided them with the appropriate equipment.

Leaders ensured that the college remained open for vulnerable learners, those learners whose parents were key workers and for learners who could not access online learning from home in rural areas. A few learners attended the college regularly during this time. All learners returned to full-time teaching at college in September 2020.

During the period of COVID-19 restrictions, a number of learners were unable to complete their practical assessments. Leaders arranged for these learners to attend college in the summer term. Learners studying plumbing completed their gas assessments, and accountancy learners accessed specialist software to complete practical work. Since returning to on-site lessons, managers have prioritised practical assessments for learners studying hair and beauty so that they can achieve their qualifications.

Managers and tutors worked together to design a curriculum that is challenging and reflects the changes in industries affected by COVID-19. For example, tutors adapted the performing arts curriculum to include modules such as film and television, rather than theatre. This better prepares learners for future employment in these areas.

Senior leaders work with a number of stakeholders, such as the local enterprise partnership, Cumbria County Council and a wide range of employers. They responded quickly to requests that meet the changing business needs of local employers. They now provide bicycle mechanic apprenticeships. This need has arisen as a result of increased bicycle sales because of a reduction in public transport in rural areas of Cumbria during the COVID-19 restrictions.

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?

Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, tutors received intensive training to develop their online teaching skills. This meant that they were able to adapt quickly and confidently as soon as the need arose. Hospitality and catering tutors uploaded videos of themselves cooking an omelette so that learners could copy this at home. Motor vehicle tutors shared interactive videos of the internal combustion cycle with learners.

During the pandemic, managers and tutors kept in close contact with learners and apprentices, including those who they considered to be vulnerable. This enabled them to closely monitor learners' welfare and progress. Tutors quickly identified those learners who could not access online learning at home due to poor WIFI in remote rural areas. Alternative arrangements included the delivery of paper resources and the use of telephone tutorials meant that learners could continue to make progress towards their qualifications.

Throughout the period of COVID-19 restrictions, leaders and managers carried out virtual learning walks in their continued efforts to assure the quality of the curriculum. They supported and encouraged staff to deliver an online curriculum that meets the needs of learners, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

In anticipation of further restrictions, tutors taught practical skills early in the programme. In science, learners studied microscopy and titration and technical theatre learners studied lighting and sound operation.

Tutors willingly share ideas and support each other, and this has helped build their digital skills and confidence. They are very proud of what they have achieved through a collaborative approach and are determined to continue this.

Learners and apprentices are very pleased to be back in college. They appreciate the support that staff have given to them during the pandemic.

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

Throughout the pandemic, leaders and managers have made mental health and well-being a priority. Tutors contacted learners regularly to check they were safe and to see how well they were progressing. Managers and tutors developed a well-being site which students, parents and carers can access to find help with matters such as emotional resilience and depression.

Both staff and learners received training on how to use digital resources safely. They learned about the importance of the use of backgrounds and dressing appropriately.

Since returning to on-site lessons, leaders have taken practical steps to make staff, learners and apprentices safe in college. They completed risk assessments for those staff and learners who have been shielding. Managers developed curriculum-based 'bubbles'. Portacabins are being used as extra classroom spaces so that learners can maintain the correct social distance in lessons. Staff and learners feel safe and less anxious as a result of these changes.

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