

The Sixth Form College Farnborough

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Sixth form 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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

The Sixth Form College Farnborough is based on one site in Farnborough, Hampshire. It became part of The Prospect Trust multi-academy trust in September 2017. At the time of this visit, 3,997 students study on education programmes for young people. Of these, the provider receives funding for 12 students with high needs. The large majority of students study A-level courses, with approximately one third following mixed academic and vocational programmes and approximately one tenth following vocational programmes, all at level 3. The college offers 33 A-level courses, the largest cohorts are in psychology and mathematics. They also offer 11 vocational courses, the largest of which are criminology and business. The college provides GCSE English and mathematics for students who need to retake these qualifications. The 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?

At the start of the national Covid-19 restrictions, leaders ensured that all staff and students had access to digital technology to teach and learn from home; they distributed over 200 laptop computers and many Wi-Fi dongles. Teachers were trained to teach remotely, and personal tutors continued their pastoral work with students remotely. After the May half term, the most vulnerable students were invited into college and were supported by their tutors and subject teachers.

Leaders started the autumn term a week early so that they could plan a two-week half term. The first week of this break was a focused catch-up week for students who had been identified as at risk. Teachers provided targeted teaching to these students to fill any gaps in their learning and develop their study behaviours.

Leaders have adapted the curriculum to enable students to retain face-to-face lessons and to mitigate any possible issues arising from a Covid-19 outbreak. For example, they changed the structure of the timetable so that all lessons are delivered in a three-hour block and they placed year 12 and 13 students in separate 'bubbles'. Some provision has been moved online to reduce the number of student bubbles, for example the Extended Project Qualification.

The careers service supports students remotely with progression activities centred around a short television show that they make each week. Enrichment is being reintroduced via online societies. Leaders report that work experience opportunities have been difficult to realise and so they have encouraged teachers to increase links to careers and include opportunities for remote guest speakers wherever possible. For example, law students have had a virtual session with a barrister.

Senior leaders report that on the whole students are ecstatic to be back among their friends and getting on with their work. Leaders believe their 'business as usual' approach has helped add some sense of normality and stability to the lives of many students.

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?

Teachers felt well prepared for the move to online teaching during the national Covid-19 restrictions. Those who were new to the technology say that managers put the right training in place to prepare them well to teach online lessons confidently and safely.

In preparation for the Autumn term, curriculum managers standardised schemes of work, with common homework. Managers explain that this allows them to organise cover more effectively if staff are absent and for a smooth transition to remote teaching and learning if this were necessary. Teachers have planned and standardised assessment too, in case this is needed for centre assessment grades.

Teachers assessed students during the first four weeks of term to identify gaps in their knowledge from the previous year. They identified that the biggest gaps were in content that first-year students had covered independently during the restrictions. To mitigate this, teachers covered the topics in which students had gaps first and have introduced more frequent consolidation checks during the year.

Managers and teachers have adapted lessons to keep everyone safe while undertaking essential activities. For example, in performing arts, students use visors

(instead of masks) so that they can still see each other's facial expressions. Teachers report that the use of electronic resources and the new ways of teaching using technology are making learning more accessible for all students. For example, students who are shielding have been able to access resources online. They can also access live lessons from home and virtually "sit" next to their friends. The college is also trialling a virtual robot which sits in the classroom, a student at home can manipulate it and zoom into the whiteboard or ask questions, as if they were in class.

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

During the national Covid-19 restrictions, teachers and personal tutors worked together to identify students struggling with the restrictions. They increased the amount of one-to-one sessions they had with students to more easily assess how well students were coping academically, socially and mentally, and get them the support they needed. For example, experiences of homelessness and domestic violence meant that students reached out to the college and received the support and help they needed. Throughout this period, students were offered remote counselling and support for their mental and physical health and study tips for working from home.

Staff and students are trained in how to stay safe when using technology for remote teaching and learning. Students talk about the changes leaders have made and the processes that have been put in place to ensure the buildings are safe during the pandemic. Students say they follow the guidance given and feel safe.

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