

Horizons College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	147610
Name of lead inspector:	Kathryn Rudd, HMI
Visit date(s):	4–5 November 2020
Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Segal Centre Stratton Road Swindon Wiltshire SN1 2PN

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

Horizons College is a subsidiary of the Brunel Special Educational Needs Multi-Academy Trust. Horizons College has two learning campuses, each located in Swindon, Wiltshire. The college provides specialist education, therapy and support for young people between 16 and 25 years of age with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. At the time of the visit, Horizons College had 79 students, all studying personal development and vocational courses from pre-entry level to level 2. The college works with 39 local employers and provides supported internships for 14 students.

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 acted after the first national lockdown to address the immediate issues which students and their families were facing, including social isolation, and in some cases food poverty. They provided students with work packs, sent out food vouchers and regularly contacted students and their families to check on their well-being.

After this initial period, leaders told us that they reviewed their curriculum to improve the focus on students' education, health and care plan targets. They adapted their curriculum to focus on five core subjects, including fitness, English and mathematics skills.

The vast majority of students now attend college, either full or part time. Most study individualised timetables which include a blend of online and face-to-face learning. Some students who are clinically extremely vulnerable receive all their learning online.

Leaders value the support and direction given by their membership and parent organisations. These organisations help them navigate government and local guidance, develop new ways of working, and plan for future improvements.

Leaders maintain regular contact with students' families by sending them college updates and information about government initiatives. Leaders have bought information technology for some students, so they can access learning at home. Therapists provide families with assistive technology training and support. Leaders are aware that the training is more difficult when students live in residential homes, as therapists often have to repeat training due to staff changes.

Leaders highlight the positive changes they want to sustain after the pandemic. These include ensuring that students continue to develop valuable daily living skills while working from home and strengthening their family relationships. Leaders recognise that some students have become more engaged with learning while working online.

Leaders plan to use their new knowledge of effective online and face-to-face learning methods in the future to develop individualised learning programmes.

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 have extended existing quality assurance arrangements to check that new 'blended' programmes meet students' requirements. These include online observations of teaching and therapy sessions. Leaders check whether specific activities are relevant and age appropriate and also consider family circumstances as a result of COVID-19. For example, they check if online cookery sessions reflect students' individual tastes, cultural requirements and potential food poverty issues. Leaders have also invited external peers to review their curriculum changes and provide feedback on how they can improve further.

Leaders highlight concerns about gaining suitable work experience for students because of the pandemic. Work experience staff are in close contact with employers and have devised new approaches to help students understand their employment options. These include video calls where employers show virtual tours of their work places. Staff have also set up new, student-run enterprises, including making and selling bath products. Students attend virtual one-to-one careers meetings, which help them consider their career options and any changes required in light of COVID-19 restrictions.

Staff report that they continue to develop and improve the curriculum during the pandemic, particularly to embed the work of the relatively new therapy team. Therapists report that they now set student's targets in partnership with teachers and contribute to schemes of work. Speech and language staff check that appropriate communication strategies are embedded in planned learning activities.

Staff report that alongside the specific training they have received to deliver learning online, they have also worked together as a team to share their knowledge. After recognising how well students engaged with competitive online activities, staff set up individual challenges and art competitions for students.

Students gave examples of what they had learned online and how they use these new skills in their everyday lives. For example, checking their change in shops and uploading documents to produce a college newsletter.

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

Leaders say that student and staff well-being is at the forefront of everything they have done during the pandemic. Students value the regular support from teachers.

Staff have designed activities to help reduce students' anxiety. These include producing video tours of the campus, developing social stories which help students understand how to keep their distance, and the college nurse teaching students how to wash their hands. Some students find having their temperature taken difficult and therapists are working to help them overcome their sensitivities.

Students can explain online safety issues, including what grooming and extremism mean and who to speak to if they have any concerns. Teachers tell us that they often revisit these topics to reinforce students' understanding.

Safeguarding leaders have the appropriate training and state that they know their learners well. They do not make decisions in isolation but know how and when to refer cases to external authorities for action.

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