

Mercedes-Benz UK Limited

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Employer

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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 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

The Mercedes-Benz apprentice academy has been in place since 1995. Mercedes-Benz Cars UK Limited (MBCUK) offers apprenticeships in parts operation specialist, retailer, retailer team leader, light vehicle technician, heavy vehicle technician and customer service specialist to its franchised retail dealership network across England, Wales and Scotland. Development coaches visit the dealerships to review apprentices' progress and assess their work. Apprentices attend block release technical training at a purpose-built training centre in Milton Keynes. There are currently 494 levy-funded apprentices following standards apprenticeships. MBCUK 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?

Leaders described the impact of being a national employer and having to take into consideration the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on their apprenticeship provision in different regions. They explained how they used their regional knowledge to ensure that apprentices could continue their learning safely. Leaders and employers explained how they had extended the role of workplace mentors to help apprentices practise their knowledge and technical skills in the workplace.

In preparation for the March COVID-19 restrictions, leaders assessed the progress of apprentices in order to prepare skills and knowledge training plans. Leaders worked with employers to ensure that apprentices had resources that enabled them to take part in remote learning throughout lockdown. They provided apprentices and their employers with detailed training plans which explained the assignments, activities and tasks they needed to complete.

Employers told us they valued the introduction of remote learning for their apprentices. They explained how the reduction in travel to the training centre had reduced their costs. Apprentices benefited from having increased time dedicated to their learning during furlough.

Leaders discussed the secondment of apprentices affected by site closures to other sites within a dealership. They explained the importance of providing apprentices with careers information, advice and guidance, enabling them to make informed career choices.

Apprentices who were made redundant in the last six months of their apprenticeship benefit from sponsorship from MBCUK. They explained how the payment of accommodation and travel costs to the training centre enabled apprentices to complete their apprenticeship.

Leaders explained the benefits of their work with external groups and how they shared their approaches to overcoming the challenges of the pandemic. For example, they shared strategies for recruiting apprentices and interpretation of guidance that enabled them to work with employers to support furloughed apprentices back into learning.

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 explained how staff had adapted their teaching methods to ensure that apprentices could continue to make progress during the COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders and managers described the training which staff completed to help them teach remotely. Trainers spoke positively about how well they had adapted to this new way of working.

Leaders and managers met frequently with trainers during COVID-19 restrictions to make sure they knew what progress apprentices were making and their support needs. Mentors complete workplace observations and provide feedback to apprentices and their trainer. Trainers use this information to update apprentices' knowledge and skills plans, which supports the development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Trainers worked together to adapt resources and teaching methods to meet the needs of apprentices. They described an increase in the pace of apprentices' learning because of the introduction of remote teaching. Leaders reported that apprentices' attendance and participation in remote teaching sessions have remained consistently high throughout the restrictions.

Leaders and managers reviewed the quality of teaching during the closure of the MBCUK academy and associated dealerships. They completed virtual lesson visits to

identify best practice. They supported staff to improve their skills where needed. Trainers shared good practice at their weekly meetings.

Leaders described how remote learning had benefited most apprentices. They explained how this new approach had given staff greater confidence in the use of technology and had helped apprentices to develop research skills. They recognised the challenges of developing apprentices' technical skills during COVID-19 restrictions. They told us how they had adapted their learning programmes to take this into account. Apprentices spoke about how they had become more confident about using remote learning to improve their skills.

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

Trainers explained how they had identified vulnerable or at-risk apprentices prior to the COVID-19 restrictions. They continued to hold frequent reviews with apprentices to help them identify concerns and intervene when necessary. They gave examples of how they had worked with employers to help apprentices return to the workplace.

Leaders explained how they had revised their safeguarding procedures. They described how they had improved the ways that they identify and record concerns, which had led to quicker interventions in safeguarding and welfare concerns.

Leaders updated all key policies and procedures to include COVID-19 safe working and learning practices. Managers, trainers, and apprentices understand the inclusion of behaviours for remote learning in the code of conduct.

Trainers discussed how they developed 'hot topics' during the COVID-19 restrictions to help apprentices keep safe. For example, apprentices learned how to identify fake news and to understand the dangers of false rumours associated with COVID-19.

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