

The Wiltshire Council

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 50245

Name of lead inspector: Steven Tucker HMI

Visit date(s): 17 - 18 November 2020

Type of provider: Local authority

Address: County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JN

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.

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

Wiltshire Council's family and community learning service provides access to services and adult learning programmes for those who are, or who are at risk of being, disadvantaged. Most courses in these programmes do not lead to formal qualifications. The courses aim to help learners of different ages and backgrounds reconnect with learning, gain new knowledge and skills, and progress to further learning, employment or volunteering. Before the COVID-19 pandemic all courses took place in community venues, schools or children's centres. Since March 2020 courses have been taught online.

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?

Managers decided to teach all courses online because many of the community venues they used previously are closed due to the pandemic. Leaders believe that moving courses online has actually encouraged more learners to enrol than if the courses had been offered in physical locations. Leaders are now deciding which courses will return to teaching in venues and when they will begin. They expect that they will continue to provide some courses online.

Managers have taken the opportunity to use the spring and summer periods to nurture partnerships. They have focused on finding out how they can best partner with other council services and organisations that work with people who have been

most disadvantaged by the pandemic. One of these new partnerships is giving people who face significant challenges in getting a job the chance to develop their confidence and resilience. They do this by learning new job-related skills at a time when they cannot take part in work experience. Leaders have also introduced courses for parents to help their children with schoolwork.

Managers have delayed the start of some courses that they have developed with partners because of the lockdown in November 2020. Managers are confident that these will be launched successfully in 2021. These include an initiative to take a mobile classroom to a travellers' site in the new year and another to help people with disabilities live more independently.

Leaders are supporting learners who do not have computer equipment by lending them a digital tablet and, when necessary, providing learners with access to the internet so they can attend online courses.

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?

When leaders made the decision to move all courses online, they asked tutors to adapt their courses and teaching techniques to suit this method of education. Learners report that the courses include a range of teaching methods, including regular assessment of their knowledge and understanding. Teachers tailor their courses to learners' needs by finding out what learners already know, and any difficulties they face, before the course starts. They have also changed the curriculum for some courses in light of changes caused by the pandemic. For example, a course that helps learners develop the skills they need for interviews now focuses on the skills learners need to apply for jobs and attend interviews online.

Tutors share their ideas about how to teach effectively online with their colleagues. They have more time to support each other and collaborate because they no longer need to travel to venues around Wiltshire.

Leaders monitor the quality and effectiveness of newly developed online courses. They recognise that there has been a period of rapid innovation and they need time to reflect on and consolidate all they have learned about tutors' approaches to online teaching.

For many learners, online lessons work well. Learners appreciate the fact that practical arrangements such as travel, and childcare are less of an issue because they can learn at home. They like accessing learning resources to develop new knowledge in their own time. Some learners who have social anxiety or disabilities feel that online courses give them more control over their learning and help build their confidence in using internet technologies. In contrast, some learners miss the opportunities to socialise and make friends through attending a course in person.

Some learners have found learning using online lessons difficult. They are grateful that tutors recognise this and provide extra tuition.

Tutors provide learners with information, advice and guidance about further courses and agencies that could help them achieve their goals.

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

Tutors have increased the time they spend talking with learners individually to check on their well-being and to find out if they need any additional support. As a result of these calls, they have referred some learners to other forms of support provided by Wiltshire Council and to agencies such as food banks.

Wiltshire Council has provided training to tutors on how to conduct themselves online. Tutors use this training to inform their approach to online teaching. For example, one tutor is conscious that online teaching allows them to see and hear what happens in a learner's home. By being sympathetic about each learner's circumstances, the tutor becomes more considerate in how they teach.

Tutors provide learners with information about how to keep themselves safe at the beginning of each course. Some learners do not remember this, and leaders feel that they could develop further the information they provide to learners about how to stay safe 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