

The Education Training Collective

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 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

The Education Training Collective is a large further education college group serving the communities of Stockton, Redcar and surrounding areas. It was formed in August 2018 through the merger of Stockton Riverside College and Redcar and Cleveland College. The college group has sites in Stockton, Billingham, Redcar and Thornaby. At the time of the interim visit, the group provided education to approximately 2,260 learners on study programmes, 1,960 learners on adult learning programmes, 1,000 apprentices, and 200 learners who have high needs.

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 believe that they have been able to respond successfully to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They explained that their pre-existing emergency response action plan meant that they were able to move swiftly into alternative ways of working, including online meetings and remote learning.

Leaders have supported staff to develop their teaching practice to enable them to deliver remote learning sessions. They created a technology innovation group (TIG) that considers and promotes ideas about online learning and the use of information learning technology. Staff use the TIG to highlight and share practice that they find to be helpful.

Leaders recognise that staff, apprentices and learners have faced significant challenges to their mental health and well-being throughout the pandemic. At the start of national COVID-19 restrictions, leaders identified quickly their most vulnerable learners and ensured that they provided them with frequent support and care. They continue to provide support to those who are in need.

Managers have found it difficult to secure work-placement opportunities for learners due to organisations limiting the number of non-essential visitors that they can allow on site. In response, they have revised the structure of some courses so that learners complete their theoretical studies earlier in their programmes than in previous years. Learners will be able to engage in work placements when organisations can accommodate them.

Employers and other partner organisations are positive about senior leaders' response to the challenges of the pandemic. They believe that relationships with college staff are at least as strong now as they were at the start of COVID-19 restrictions. Many partner organisations are optimistic about future collaboration to address local skills gaps.

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 communicated with teaching staff about the expectations for teaching and learning in this academic year early in the summer break to give staff time to adapt to the new circumstances. Teaching staff have received guidance about which learning activities can be carried out face to face and which can be done remotely.

Teachers have adapted their timetables in response to the different demands of learners' programmes. They recognise that for subjects where learners need to develop vocationally relevant, practical skills, it is difficult for them to do so effectively at home. As a result, learners who need to develop these skills have most of their lessons face to face.

Leaders stated that attendance and engagement this academic year are positive. Staff found that learners' attendance at online sessions during the pandemic did not decline. They tracked and monitored learners' engagement and attainment throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. Apprenticeship staff established a new electronic portfolio that has supported apprentices who wanted to continue their learning while they were furloughed from work.

Staff believe that learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities have been supported well. This is a view that is echoed by senior leaders in the local authorities who fund places at the college. Learners who require specialist care or specific resources are timetabled to attend college frequently.

Staff have adjusted their approach to the careers advice and guidance that they provide to prospective learners. They provide individual advice and guidance remotely using video calls, and have held virtual open days. Where safe to do so, they have offered potential learners individual on-site tours to demonstrate the college's specialist facilities.

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

Leaders and managers have put in place processes to ensure the safety and well-being of people when in college buildings. These are based on risk assessments devised for the pandemic.

Leaders ensure that learners and apprentices are aware of the risks that they may face when they are online. Teachers recognise that learners need additional support to understand how to work with technology for professional purposes rather than social purposes.

Leaders put in place additional support for learners identified as being at risk before the start of COVID-19 restrictions. They established the best communication methods with learners and their families, based on information about each learner's home situation. They made frequent contact with learners and provided necessary support based on risk.

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