

# Central Bedfordshire College

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130598

**Name of lead inspector:** Michael Worgs, HMI

**Visit date(s):** 5–6 November 2020

**Type of provider:** General further education college

**Address:** Kingsway  
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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 students 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

Central Bedfordshire College is a general further education college. It has a main site in the town of Dunstable, another in Leighton Buzzard and a further four satellite campuses in the local area. At the time of the visit, 1,636 learners were on education programmes for young people. There were 748 adult learners, 132 apprentices and 113 learners in receipt of high-needs funding.

The college recruits most of its learners from the most deprived areas of Central Bedfordshire and Luton. The college works with SSG Services to deliver a very small number of short programmes for unemployed adult learners in the community.

### **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 feel that their early preparation for Covid-19 restrictions allowed learning to continue as normal, with little disruption. Staff changed their curriculum plans for January 2020 to focus on most of the key concepts of learning. Teachers prioritised face-to-face delivery of theory or practical sessions to suit the curriculum needs. As a result, prior to the Covid-19 restrictions each curriculum area had six weeks of course resources available for learners on the virtual learning environment.

Managers promote the use of Microsoft Teams for online teaching. They use the newly introduced education technology champion role to help teachers to provide

learning online. As a result, managers suggest that teachers and learners have improved their digital skills.

Leaders say they are concerned about the digital poverty issues that affect their learners. They have loaned over 65 laptops to learners. They recently purchased further resources such as dongles to help learners to participate in online learning. As a result, they have been able to retain and motivate a large proportion of their learners.

Leaders feel that the Covid-19 restrictions have had a significant negative psychological impact on staff and learners. They therefore created virtual communities to improve the welfare of staff and learners. They used their internal social media system to create workshops and social events online. This has helped to build staff morale and keep learners motivated.

Leaders believe they made the appropriate strategic decision to return to face-to-face teaching in September 2020. They have used an in-depth assessment strategy to ensure that learners get on the right course. They use information from learner surveys and staff forums to plan the curriculum. As a result, they feel that learners are quickly developing the appropriate knowledge and skills they need.

Employers value the close relationship with the college. This has enabled them to work with leaders to overcome barriers to learners resulting from the pandemic. For example, employers provided alternative work experience placements for learners who are furloughed. They have worked with the college to put in place a virtual work experience programme.

**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 say they check and quality assure progress that learners make using progress review boards and curriculum assessment boards. Staff actively engage with these processes and adapt their curriculum plans to meet the needs of learners. As a result, leaders feel that most learners are on the right programmes and are making good progress.

Managers use different methods to review how teachers implement the curriculum. They use course reviews, standardisation meetings and weekly curriculum meetings to discuss concerns and share resources. As a result, managers recognise that the workload of their teachers has increased significantly due to the pandemic. Managers work with staff to find sustainable and permanent strategies to maintain the curriculum in preparation for any future local restrictions.

Teachers say that although their increased workload has been challenging, they understand their professional obligation to support their learners. They feel that the

experience so far has helped to build their own personal resilience in dealing with the pandemic. They have developed improved digital skills. They are better able to teach and assess via online platforms. As a result, most teachers have become an advocate for blended learning. They would like to continue a mixture of face-to-face and online teaching after the pandemic. They see the value in creating good-quality online resources and interacting with their learners in new digital ways.

Managers say learners have access to a wide range of careers advice and resources to support their next steps. Managers have provided more virtual means for learners to interact with employers and external organisations. For example, they have provided virtual information and guidance sessions for all learners. They ran virtual employer sessions with various companies and a virtual open day with universities.

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

Leaders say they have a strong safeguarding system in place. They provide help through the curriculum and welfare teams. Leaders have redeployed staff from other areas to help the curriculum teams track attendance and perform other curriculum activities.

Leaders are proud of the support they provide for the large number of vulnerable learners they have on programmes. For example, they have 48 children looked after currently receiving weekly additional help from the welfare team. As a result, these learners have remained on programme and are thriving.

Learners say they feel safe. They know how to keep themselves safe when travelling to college for face-to-face teaching. They frequently receive safety information from the college and use the safety guidance on the college website to keep themselves safe.

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