

Greater Brighton Metropolitan College

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 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

Greater Brighton Metropolitan College (GMBC) is a large general further education college serving the city of Brighton and Hove, and the towns of Shoreham-by-Sea and Worthing. It was formed in March 2017 by the merger of City College Brighton and Northbrook College. The college has around 3,000 learners aged 16 to 18, 4000 adult learners and 1000 apprentices. 96 learners are in receipt of high needs funding. A range of full- and part-time courses are offered from entry to degree level. The college has five sites, two in Brighton, two in Worthing and one in Shoreham. College leaders work with four subcontractors for apprenticeship and adult learning courses.

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 their plans to put in place remote and online learning prior to COVID-19 restrictions. These helped staff to quickly move teaching and learning online. They discussed their plans for making remote learning available to suit students' other commitments.

Leaders told us that staff have developed their skills and confidence, which has enabled them to transfer teaching to the virtual learning environment (VLE). Managers encourage teachers to share innovative practice with colleagues so that they can better support students and adult learners. They have invested in laptops

for staff and students and tools for the VLE, such as 'breakout rooms', that enhance group teaching.

Leaders and managers have planned a timetable that supports online, remote and classroom-based teaching. Teachers have prioritised the development of the skills students need to study remotely. Employers value leaders' proactive actions to ensure apprentices and students can continue learning

Leaders report students with additional support needs have adapted well to and enjoy learning remotely. Teachers provide the few students who do not have the skills or resources to access learning remotely with paper-based homeworking packs. They are encouraged to attend college, where they benefit from support from learning assistants.

Leaders discussed the impact and restrictions COVID-19 have had on teaching courses. For example, public services students are not able to participate in planned visits and activities that provide opportunities to experience the range of employment opportunities, such as the fire and police services. Staff have adapted activities to create opportunities for team working. Art and design students have benefitted from guest speakers who share ideas and experiences that motivate students.

Leaders continue to meet daily to monitor the number of notified positive COVID-19 cases by campus. They act to mitigate further transmission through isolation and remote working for students and staff.

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 described how managers have used learning points from the first COVID-19 restrictions to inform the planning for learning this year. They were able to take into consideration any gaps in knowledge or skills and identify teaching strategies to encourage learners' positive attitudes to learning.

Leaders discussed how teachers planned teaching to support the development of essential skills for students. Staff work with students to agree actions based on their skills gaps. Art teachers use group sessions to develop students' practical and study skills such as print making and evaluation.

Managers told us how teachers have reviewed and identified different teaching methods, including the use of remote learning. Teachers have focused on the development of students' digital skills, which helps them to access teaching and provide peer support when working from home.

Leaders and managers have adapted the layout of practical workshops to allow greater spacing. Staff prioritised the return of students and apprentices who needed to complete assessments when the college reopened. In anticipation of further

restrictions, managers and teachers amended the order in which they teach topics to prioritise the teaching of practical skills early in the course.

Leaders, managers and teachers discussed how students benefit from careers advice and guidance through the tutorial programme. Students learn about career and training options and how to prepare for and attend a virtual interview.

Teachers value the support and encouragement they receive from their managers. They are confident their teaching strategies, resources and support meet students' needs.

Teachers recognise the impact of remote learning on students' and adult learners' development of social and communication skills, and the effect this has on their confidence and resilience. They are placing greater emphasis on supporting students when planning and teaching remotely.

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

Leaders, managers and students described the COVID-19 procedures put in place to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and students. These include student 'bubbles', one-way systems and hand sanitising stations. Students report the procedures introduced by staff have helped to make them feel safe in college.

Leaders discussed arrangements for partnership working with feeder schools, providing access to safeguarding information for new students. This ensured the smooth transition of students and continuity of support.

Leaders described the impact of COVID-19 on students' and apprentices' mental health and well-being. They struggle with the frequent changes in rules and the restrictions on their lives.

Students value being back in college and having a routine. They had missed social engagement and face-to-face interactions with their peers. They understand the arrangements made by leaders to keep them safe, including how to stay safe online by observing agreed protocols such as appropriate use of social media.

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