

Green Labyrinth

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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

Green Labyrinth is an independent learning provider acquired by NPTC Group of Colleges in 2018. It is based in the centre of Swindon. At the time of the visit, 68 young learners between 16 to 19 years of age (up to 24 for learners with education, health and care plans), with social and personal barriers to learning, were studying level 1 or 2 courses. These courses re-engage the learners with education and prepare them for employment, further education or training. Twenty-five learners in receipt of high needs funding study on programmes designed to support them to gain employment.

Thirty-eight apprentices, most of whom are based in the local area, are studying a range of apprenticeships at levels 2 to 5 in business, management and digital marketing.

Most of Green Labyrinth's 105 adult learners attend courses in beauty and holistic therapies or sports massage, and have loans from the government to study.

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 explained that they were well advanced in implementing an online learning strategy before the pandemic started. They have established a virtual learning environment to meet the needs of learners and the local community. Leaders have worked with stakeholders, such as the local enterprise partnership, to align their courses

to the priorities for economic development. These include advanced manufacturing, digital and information technologies. Employers commented that the change to online learning allowed for flexibly timed learning within the working day, which benefitted their employees and the business.

Leaders risk assessed each learner on a study programme so they could provide targeted support for academic and/or pastoral concerns. They provided additional individualised support for learners with education, health and care plans. They secured funding to provide laptops for learners who are looked after by the local authority.

Leaders recognised that most young people on study programmes did not enjoy online or remote learning. They prefer a structured, face-to-face, classroom-based environment, not least because of the opportunities for social interaction. Even so, leaders told us, almost all of these learners engaged with the provider, including online or remote learning during lockdown. The attendance and progress made by anxious learners were higher online than in classroom-based provision.

Leaders are conscious that learners studying beauty therapy are less familiar with information technology and required more support to use the online learning systems effectively. For these learners, staff focused on providing knowledge-based learning online. They developed a range of sector-specific health and safety practices and guidance for learners. Staff encouraged the learners to develop their practical skills at home using practise heads and hands.

Leaders recognise that their development of online and other forms of remote learning has the capacity to improve further. Nevertheless, they feel that they and their learners are now better prepared to cope with any further changes and challenges caused by the pandemic.

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?

Teachers said they responded quickly to the pandemic by moving to teaching learners online. Leaders provided teachers with basic training in the use of technology. Their aim is to integrate online and classroom-based learning programmes more effectively. Leaders plan a comprehensive training programme to develop teachers' confidence further in designing and teaching courses online.

Leaders and managers found that the mental health and well-being of learners suffered during lockdown, particularly those on study programmes. Leaders appointed learning mentors to provide them with a dedicated counselling and support service. They have extended the induction period for new learners, so staff can better assess their needs and starting points, including in English and mathematics. Staff comment that they have built strong relationships with their learners during this period.

Managers report that they have used the assessment of learners starting points more effectively during the pandemic to identify gaps in each learner's knowledge and plan sessions to meet their needs.

Learners could explain how their online learning links to practical sessions and/or their working environment. Adult learners are encouraged to complete their theory learning at home, which is then discussed during their weekly practical sessions.

Learners can talk about the progress they have made in developing their skills while learning online. Digital marketing apprentices speak about their increased knowledge of coding and analytics, and how these are used to market products using social media.

All younger learners have access to individual career planning sessions. Adults and apprentices discuss career choices with their teachers and assessors, but leaders are considering providing more formal career planning options.

Managers are using quality assurance methods they used prior to lockdown and adapting them to meet the requirements of training online. These include reviewing learners' online portfolios, holding meetings with teachers to check learners' progress and observing online sessions.

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

Leaders keep staff informed about safety and safeguarding matters through frequent briefings. Learners and staff understand what they need to do to keep themselves and others safe.

Learners are taught about e-safety and how to stay safe online. This includes topics such as recognising safe websites, avoiding scams and knowing how to protect their identity. Teachers regularly discuss safeguarding and 'Prevent' topics with study programme learners to cement their understanding. However, leaders recognise that although adult and apprenticeship learners discuss these topics at induction, they would benefit from further review.

Senior leaders have increased staffing in the safeguarding team to expand their support for the most vulnerable learners. The team explained that they have effective communication with external agencies and this gives them access to up-to-date information. The designated safeguarding lead has regular training to help maintain a good understanding of the current safeguarding issues affecting young people and adults.

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