

LTE Group (The Manchester College)

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Paul Cocker, Senior HMI

Visit dates: 11 to 12 November 2020

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 students.

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

Learning Training and Employment (LTE) Group is the parent group for The Manchester College. The group also includes a university centre, an offender learning provider, a corporate training and development company, and a training provider specialising in apprenticeship training. This visit focuses on the college's provision. Currently, the college teaches 5,082 learners aged 16 to 19, 5,015 adult learners and 466 learners with high needs. The college offers a broad range of courses from entry level up to level 5 in both academic and vocational subjects.

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 and managers say that in preparation for the current academic year and following COVID-19 restrictions, they quickly realised that they would need to significantly adapt the curriculum. They foresaw that both the order in which the curriculum was taught and the method that tutors use to teach their students would need to change. As a result, they designed, communicated and implemented a framework of principles that all staff followed. Leaders feel that this approach was pivotal in the development of successful face-to-face, online and remote learning.

Leaders and managers have put in place a range of development activities to support tutors to plan and teach students throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. They feel

that this support has helped tutors to put in place effective face-to-face, online and remote learning.

Leaders use the results of six-weekly curriculum reviews and student support boards to ensure that the curriculum is regularly adapted to meet students' ever-changing needs. For example, they identified a lack of opportunity for music students to experience audience feedback. As a result, they have organised online gigs and invested in technology to replicate crowd participation in preparation for students' practical assessments.

College managers work closely with employers and external agencies to develop the curriculum and opportunities for positive destinations for students when they leave the college. They have worked closely with 'Manchester Jobs for Manchester People' to provide job placements for adult students. Students have worked in scientific laboratories in Greater Manchester in administration roles following the exceptional growth in testing brought about by the COVID-19 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?

As soon as the COVID-19 restrictions were announced, leaders and managers provided staff with intensive training to help develop their skills and confidence to deliver online teaching. They provided a variety of support in the form of workshops, telephone helplines, drop-in sessions and buddy systems to support staff. This support has continued into the new academic year, and tutors are live streaming lessons and use virtual break-out rooms.

Leaders have supported staff to develop a curriculum that they believe to be engaging and innovative. Employers in the motor vehicle industry attended on-site lessons to support automotive students using electric vehicle technology. In anticipation of further restrictions, senior managers ensured that the curriculum was appropriately adapted to allow learning to continue. Music students attend on-site classes to work on their practical musicianship and to perform as an ensemble. They attend online classes for music theory and to learn about employment in the music industry.

Throughout the pandemic, leaders and managers carried out virtual learning walks to assure the quality of the curriculum. They supported and encouraged staff to deliver an online curriculum that meets the needs of students, including those with special educational needs and high needs.

During COVID-19 restrictions, managers and tutors kept in close contact with students, including those whom they considered to be vulnerable. This enabled them to closely monitor students' welfare and progress. Tutors quickly identified those students who could not access online learning at home. Alternative arrangements to

support these students included the delivery of paper resources so that students could continue to make progress towards their qualifications remotely.

Tutors say that they are not afraid to take risks in their quest to deliver high-quality, innovative and engaging teaching. This is because they have the support and backing of their managers. They are very proud of what they have achieved and how they have supported each other throughout the pandemic.

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

Senior leaders developed a detailed strategy to keep students safe during the time the college was closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Staff contacted students regularly to check that they were safe and to discuss their well-being. Senior leaders received regular updates on safeguarding concerns and monitored the impact of their actions.

All staff have continued to receive frequent safeguarding training and updates. Tutors said that they had benefited from a range of safeguarding-related support in recent months, including training in teaching safely while using online learning platforms.

Leaders and managers identified many students who were potentially vulnerable at the time of the COVID-19 restrictions and since. Staff contacted them to discuss their support needs. Leaders say that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of students who are at risk. For example, there has been an increase in students suffering different types of abuse, including domestic violence, and in those suffering from mental health and well-being concerns.

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