

Barnet and Southgate 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 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

Barnet and Southgate College is a medium-sized general further education college serving around 7,000 students, predominantly from the London boroughs of Barnet and Enfield. The college has four main sites in High Barnet, Southgate, Collingdale and Edmonton Green. Most students are on full-time study programmes and adult learning programmes. A small proportion of learners are on apprenticeship programmes. The college works with one subcontractor to deliver English for speakers of other languages programmes for adults. The college also has a small provision for students in receipt of high-needs funding.

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?

Just before the national restrictions, leaders and managers pre-empted the need to change to a combination of onsite and online teaching to ensure that their learners continue to make progress. They provided their staff and learners with the necessary information, training and access to technology to learn online. The college remained open for those who preferred face-to-face support from their teachers, such as vulnerable students and those with high needs. Leaders and managers report an increase in learner numbers in some curriculum areas, such as employability skills, due to this flexible method of teaching.

Leaders and managers recognise the impact of COVID-19 on specific subject areas and employment sectors. Around 90 apprentices who worked in the manufacturing sector have been put on a break in learning due to being furloughed. Staff helped a few apprentices to find new jobs as their employers closed down. They adapted the curriculum to address the changing needs of all learners. For example, in addition to mathematics and English training, they also provide resilience training and digital skills training to prepare unemployed learners to meet current employer needs. College staff continue to develop their course offer to meet the increased demand for trained workers in health and social care, security and construction.

Stakeholders, such as the sub-contractor, employers and local authorities, report that the college works with them to develop a wide-ranging local offer. For example, staff have developed a training programme with the local council to train unemployed learners for specific job roles in public service. Staff offer a variety of courses to support young learners who are not in education, employment or training. During the restrictions, staff also provided support and space for vulnerable young people from other providers who had to close. Stakeholders describe the college as an organisation that is keen to build strong relationships with their local communities.

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?

In most curriculum areas, learners attend knowledge-based sessions online and come into college for practical work. Teachers in practical subjects have made changes to their curriculum to help learners and apprentices practise their skills as much as possible from home. In sports, teachers encourage students to record videos of themselves training their clients to demonstrate competence in practical skills. In construction, apprentices watch and learn how to carry out external wall installation during virtual work experience days.

College leaders work closely with staff to identify the impact of curriculum changes on their learners' progress and well-being. Some students say that they prefer to learn face-to-face. Staff have responded to the feedback from A-level students and changed their curriculum model so that they now attend college. They have taken steps to ensure that disadvantaged learners have access to the online curriculum. Students who experienced digital poverty can attend the college and access Wi-Fi outside of their planned classes. Staff also supply laptops to learners who do not have the right technology at home.

Teachers use assessments at an earlier stage than previously planned to identify gaps in learners' knowledge and skills. Staff interview students with high needs about their end of course plans as soon as they start, rather than waiting for the end of term. This enables the staff to identify suitable support for these learners at the end of their qualification. Learners who have fallen behind attend additional support sessions taught by their teachers and subject experts, such as mathematics and English learning coaches.

Learners continue to receive careers advice and guidance from a specialist team and from their teachers. During virtual open days and at face-to-face sessions, students receive information on different courses and the jobs they could lead to. Staff provide extra support to learners on their worries about universities in the light of the pandemic.

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

Staff report an increase in safeguarding referrals and mental health concerns among learners due to the pandemic. They carry out early assessments and regular one-to-one sessions to identify potential risks and plan for suitable interventions. Staff have brought forward multi-agency and annual review meetings for students with high needs and care leavers.

Staff work with external organisations, such as local police officers who delivered workshops for learners on the dangers of drugs and knife crime. They updated induction activities to focus on mental health and resilience. Information on how to raise a concern is available online and advertised on posters around all campuses. As a result, learners are aware of who to contact if they have any concerns

Learners feel that leaders have done all they can to make the college a safe environment for them. They are clear on what they need to do to keep safe online and at the college.

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