

# St Helens College

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130488

**Name of lead inspector:** Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones HMI

**Visit dates:** 18–19 November 2020

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

**Address:** Water Street  
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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

St Helens College is a general further education college. It was formed in December 2017 following a merger between St Helens College and Knowsley Community College. The college consists of five campuses. The largest is the town centre campus in St Helens which delivers approximately two thirds of the provision. The Knowsley campus provides around one quarter of delivery. The remaining provision is at the Technology campus in St Helens and the IAMTech campus in Huyton, which deliver engineering and construction courses, and the Kirby campus, which provides programmes for adults. The college provides courses from entry level to degree level. At the time of the visit, 2,458 16- to 18-year-old students, 2,366 adult students and 523 apprentices attended the college. There are 137 learners 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?**

Leaders told us that teachers adapted very quickly to alternative methods to face-to-face teaching following COVID-19 national restrictions. They moved swiftly to online and remote teaching, supplementing this with paper-based resources. Leaders supplied students who did not have access to IT equipment with computers and portable wi-fi devices, so that all students could access online teaching. Students currently take part in a mixture of face-to-face and online teaching.

Managers have reviewed and adapted the order of the topics they teach. Courses now include practical activities and assessments earlier. Although work experience activities are planned, they are delayed until spring 2021 when leaders hope that students will be able to safely attend external work placements.

Employers value the support that managers and staff provide. For example, the apprenticeship team has worked closely with them to increase the flexibility of apprenticeship training for apprentices who are key workers or have been furloughed.

Leaders have worked closely with employers and the Liverpool city region combined authority to develop new courses that are responsive to changes in skill needs. For example, twelve-week programmes in preparation for work in the care, engineering and digital sector are being developed to support jobless adults back into work.

Leaders have worked hard to address logistical issues at the college. Students have been placed into class 'bubbles' and, for example in hairdressing and beauty therapy, are placed in small 'sub-bubbles' for practical work and assessments.

Leaders have used the small-group tuition funding to provide catch-up sessions for students who have got behind with their work. Approximately 8,000 hours of additional tuition have been allocated across subject areas.

Leaders feel that as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, they have developed new and more effective ways of working. For example, they now use video conferencing for meetings and staff briefings. This means that staff from across the five campuses save time by not having to travel to a central site.

**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 and managers have continued using their quality processes. They use learning walks to evaluate the quality of teaching and complete audits of learning plans. Support is given to teachers on how to improve sessions. For example, incorporating group work into online sessions and structuring activities to give students time away from the computer.

Leaders have provided staff with training on online teaching and using online learning resources. Staff who are highly skilled in using these have shared their expertise with less confident peers.

Teachers are using online learning, such as live streaming, when they must self-isolate. For example, students with high needs are supported by learning support assistants in the classroom while the teacher teaches from home.

Managers have adapted courses to include COVID-19 guidance for specific industries. For example, in hairdressing and beauty therapy, students complete a qualification in COVID-19 safety in salons.

Teachers identify gaps in students' knowledge through frequent checks. For example, in English and mathematics, checks are completed at the start of each topic. In mathematics, teachers test students' understanding of multiples and factors before moving on to fractions. Students receive individual support and attend small-group tuition sessions to fill gaps in learning.

Managers have implemented adaptations to the end-point assessment for apprentices. For example, in dental nursing, students take part in professional discussions and employers complete witness testimonies in place of direct observations.

Challenges during the pandemic include students starting jobs they had been offered. For example, 15 travel and tourism students had been recruited by a large airline operator for an immediate start on completion of their course. Due to the pandemic, these job offers are now on hold until summer 2021.

Careers education and guidance continued throughout national and local restrictions through online tutorials. Since students returned to college in September, advice from teachers enables students to discuss plans to achieve their chosen careers.

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

Leaders place high priority on students', and particularly vulnerable students', mental health and well-being. Managers and the safeguarding team ensured that during national and local restrictions they contacted students frequently and made home visits where necessary.

Leaders and managers explained the support and encouragement that they have given to students to support good mental health and well-being. For example, students have taken up running, gardening and volunteering at local food banks to reduce their feelings of social isolation and improve their well-being.

During local and national restrictions, teachers identified students and parents/carers that were at risk. Leaders say they worked closely with external agencies to provide support for students and their parents/carers. For example, they worked with mental health charities, alcohol concern agencies and social workers to provide extra support.

Teachers ensure that students are made aware of online dangers such as identity and financial theft. Students recognise risks when using remote gaming and online dating sites.

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