

Mantra Learning Limited

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Andrea Machell, Her Majesty's Inspector

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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 and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Mantra Learning Limited is an independent learning provider based in the North West of England and was established in 1968. Mantra operates from sites in Greater Manchester, Warrington and Greater Merseyside. It provides training for apprentices, trainees, workplace learners and employability learners. It specialises in training related to employment in the logistics, automotive and contact centre sector industry.

Mantra provides apprenticeships in motor vehicle, logistics and business. It also provides traineeships for learners who wish to progress on to an apprenticeship. At the time of the interim visit, there were 181 apprentices, more than three quarters of these are on level 2 courses, 18 learners on traineeships and 847 adult learners on courses funded by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

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?

In February 2020, leaders reviewed their teaching and learning strategy in anticipation of restrictions being put into place due to COVID-19 restrictions. They completed an evaluation of the curriculum and their staffing structures. This resulted in leaders adapting learning programmes to incorporate a mixture of live online learning and remote online learning. This ensured that learners and apprentices could continue learning irrespective of COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders and managers put in place training to support teachers to confidently teach online. For example, automotive teachers now use an interactive tool so that learners can look under the bonnet of a virtual car to identify any faults. Leaders monitor

online interactions between teachers and their learners and apprentices. They monitor their progress using online tracking systems.

Leaders work closely with employers and other partners to develop the curriculum and support learning. For example, leaders worked with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to identify what skills adult learners need to access available jobs, and then they adapted the curriculum accordingly.

Leaders appreciate the current flexibility of the adult funding budget. This enabled them to put on new courses for adults, for example in fork lift truck driving, which helps them get them a job.

Senior leaders' responsive and flexible approach has helped them to provide a wide range of valuable training for adult learners and apprentices in the Greater Manchester region.

Most learners and apprentices appreciate the changes made to their learning programmes. Adult learners who work feel that the flexible approach allows them to better balance their learning with work and personal commitments.

Leaders say that one of the difficulties they face is the reduction of driving tests available because of restrictions put in place due to COVID-19. This means that apprentices and learners cannot complete their course, because they need to obtain a large goods vehicle driving licence.

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 teachers made changes to the curriculum to meet learners' changing needs. For example, managers introduced child friendly sessions for learners and apprentices who were on furlough and at home with their children. They put together packs for different age groups to engage children during their parent's online learning sessions.

Teachers changed the curriculum content for traineeship learners because they could not do sufficient on-site work placements during the restrictions. They now complete level 1 courses in warehouse, storage and automotive to give them an insight into the sectors they might work in.

Leaders and managers check the quality of the curriculum by reviewing recorded lessons. They share best practice during weekly development sessions which teachers say are helpful. Teachers have set up breakout rooms where adult learners can practise interviewing each other. Teachers review the recorded interviews and provide feedback to learners.

Managers carried out assessments of learners' digital needs at the start of the pandemic. They negotiated with partners to use their capital grants to purchase digital devices for

learners. Leaders put in place support tutors to help adult learners with technical issues and digital skills development. They worked with employers to provide digital resources for apprentices.

Teachers regularly check the progress that learners are making. They put in place one-to-one sessions if learners need additional support. For example, automotive apprentices are guided to complete further online activities on specific topics, such as tyre tread depths, so they can deepen their understanding. Learners can access extra learning sessions in functional skills.

Apprentices and learners receive careers advice and guidance at the start of their programme and on an ongoing basis. Adult learners get help with applying for jobs when they finish their course. In English lessons, teachers use career progression routes as a topic for speaking and listening.

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

Leaders have placed a high priority on ensuring the safety of learners and moved to online learning prior to the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions. Teachers have received updated safeguarding training and regular briefings.

Learners and apprentices receive support to help them access online learning safely. They get detailed information regarding safeguarding throughout their course. Learners say they feel safe and understand their individual responsibilities.

Tutors have increased their one-to-one contact with learners. They risk assess learners' support needs, including those who have high needs. Increased contact has enabled learners, including those who are more vulnerable, to be more open about their struggles and get enhanced support.

Staff monitor the well-being of learners and are aware of increased levels of anxiety, including financial pressures as Christmas approaches. They have noticed higher levels of concern among their learners. They have supported learners to find housing and have provided food parcels for those struggling financially

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