

Hoople Ltd

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Richard Deane, 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 those 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, learners and stakeholders.

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

Hoople Ltd (Hoople) is a public-sector-owned company created by Herefordshire Council and Wye Valley NHS Trust. It is based in Hereford. Hoople holds contracts with the government to teach study programmes. There are 24 learners on a study programme, which has a focus of supporting learners who have high needs. Learners complete work experience, functional English and mathematics, employability qualifications and a vocational qualification at level 1.

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?

At the start of the COVID-19 restrictions, leaders recognised that they were unable to continue with face-to-face learning. They discussed how they moved swiftly to supply learners and staff with the appropriate devices and software needed to teach remotely. In addition, they ensured that learners, parents, and staff received the training needed to operate safely the devices for learning online.

Leaders accepted that teaching sessions needed to change because – when studying remotely – learners struggled to concentrate sufficiently. Leaders encouraged teachers to adapt the curriculum by running shorter sessions and supplementing activities with homework to check learners' understanding. Teachers also moved to whole-class, small-group, and individual sessions. This meant that learners were able to communicate freely, so teachers could check on their physical and mental well-being.

As soon as restrictions were lifted, leaders re-opened in June 2020 with all learners returning to a COVID-secure environment. Leaders discussed how they used the situation to strengthen learners' citizenship curriculum, so that they understood the importance of personal hygiene, social distancing, and their roles in keeping themselves and others safe.

Leaders noted that the disruption slowed learners' progress in English and mathematics, and consequently, learners needed more time to consolidate their knowledge. The local authority agreed to extend learners' programmes by six months to help them catch up. Also, because of a lack of work placements, leaders say that learners were unable to develop their practical skills sufficiently. As a result, teachers planned activities, such as running a tuck shop, to help learners develop relationships with customers, understand stock rotation, profit and loss, and build their resilience.

The local authority recognises leaders' efforts in adapting quickly to learners' individual needs and ensuring that – in spite of the restrictions – they have been able to continue to learn new knowledge and skills.

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 discussed how they monitor the quality of teaching by observing sessions, talking to learners and reviewing their work. They say that they discuss learners' progress with teachers weekly, reviewing daily reports on learners' work and behaviour. They note that teachers often observe and support each other, sharing ideas on how to adapt teaching activities, reflecting on how well learners engage and develop their understanding as a result.

Teachers realised quickly that they had to do more than just use presentations when teaching online. They recognised that – in addition to online activities – learners needed homework to enable teachers to check learners' understanding. Teachers also posted work to a few learners who did not like using digital tools.

Teachers explained that they had moved to planning teaching for individuals rather than whole-class activities. This ensured they challenged learners to develop high-level skills such as progressing from understanding money to online banking. Also, they could focus more on learners' specific career goals, for example, helping a learner who wanted to work in warehousing to gain their forklift-truck licence.

During the restrictions, teachers say that they checked learners' understanding and progress routinely. They used a range of assessment methods including, questioning, short assignments, and independent practical activities followed by group discussions. For example, teachers used pictures of pizza making for learners to discuss and reflect on the recipe and cooking process. Learners with high anxiety and who were less confident learning online received one-to-one telephone sessions to consolidate their understanding.

Teachers say that they often provide learners with information and support about future careers. They help them develop essential skills, such as writing a CV, searching for jobs, and job applications. Learners register with the National Apprenticeship Service, and recently a learner moved into an apprenticeship in childcare.

Leaders and teachers say that attendance has been consistently high.

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

Managers outlined how they work closely with the local authority, managing safeguarding enquiries and supporting families. They provided those families whose circumstances had changed during lockdown with food parcels and financial assistance.

Managers explained that they had followed government COVID-19 guidelines to re-open, and that learners were able to explain how to avoid catching or spreading the coronavirus.

Teachers say that they provide learners with pastoral care both online and by telephone through weekly group, and one-to-one meetings, to monitor their well-being. They use an agreed script to cover key topics, such as nutrition, sleep, and checking learners' communications with others. Teachers work on a three-week cycle, allowing learners talk to different tutors, if needed.

When prompted, learners were able to explain clearly how to keep themselves safe in their communities and online. They understood the potential risks posed from radicalisation and extremist behaviour, and who to contact if they were worried for themselves or others – including talking to staff and parents.

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