

Summerhouse Equestrian and Training Centre LLP

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	54664
Name of lead inspector:	Kathryn Rudd, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	Bath Road Hardwicke GL2 2RG Gloucester

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

Summerhouse Equestrian and Training Centre LLP (SETC) is based in Gloucestershire and in the north west of England. SETC provides apprenticeships, traineeships and adult learning on its own account and through three subcontractors based in the north west and the north east of England. At the time of this visit, 76 apprentices, 46 trainees and 91 adults studied on a range of courses. Most apprentices study equine and childcare apprenticeships. The majority of adults study beauty therapy, nail technology, or health and social care programmes. Trainees study military preparation or early years courses.

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 recognise that learners have had different experiences during the pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions depending on their place of work. Leaders have reacted accordingly. For example, while equine apprentices continued to care for horses in stables, their assessors taught them theory online instead of being present in employers' yards. In contrast, the beauty industry shut down for a long period and learners could not access learning centres or work placements. Leaders of the beauty therapy course established a virtual learning platform to teach all practical and theory training online.

Leaders worked closely with all learners' employers so, wherever possible, learners could continue developing their practical skills. Early years leaders increased the amount of travel expenses available to trainees so they could travel to placements further away from their homes.

Leaders and managers contacted learners regularly by telephone to check on their well-being. This was particularly important for learners who were concerned about their future career prospects. Beauty therapy trainers provided guidance on alternative options, such as setting up a home beauty salon rather than seeking employment in an existing business. Assessors steered apprentices to careers advice in relevant organisations, such as the British Horse Society.

Leaders report that they strengthened quality assurance arrangements with subcontractors just before COVID-19 restrictions and adapted these systems in line with curriculum changes. Leaders have recently established new online teaching observation procedures and professional discussions with trainers. They also contact learners to check on the quality of their learning experience.

Subcontractors highlight that many learners have not only achieved their vocational qualifications, but also improved their digital skills during the pandemic. Learners have been able to use these skills in their personal lives, such as using video-conferencing systems to stay in touch with their friends and family.

Leaders value how well staff teams have pulled together and supported each other through the 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?

Leaders introduced remote working arrangements for learners who did not have access to computers at home. These included workbooks and regular phone calls. For example, beauty therapy staff sent learners home-learning kits containing the resources needed to complete their practical assignments. Trainers encouraged learners to use materials they could readily access at home, such as using honey in a facial scrub. Leaders of early years programmes bought and loaned out laptops so that learners could continue their courses.

Staff worked hard to engage and motivate learners when they were away from the classroom. Learners on military preparation traineeships were encouraged to use running applications to maintain their motivation and keep fit for when Army recruitment recommenced. Beauty therapy staff offered evening and weekend learning sessions to fit around learners' childcare commitments. All trainers and assessors ensured that they contacted learners regularly, some on a daily basis, to check on their progress and find out whether they required additional support.

Staff highlighted the positive changes they want to continue after the pandemic. This included more blended learning programmes so learners, particularly adults, can fit learning flexibly around their other commitments. On equine courses, trainers plan to continue online English and mathematics training as learners find it easier to concentrate at home rather than in their busy work environments.

Staff received training on the use of online learning platforms and how to structure teaching and assessment online. They used this knowledge to teach learners how to use different software, providing them with hints and tips, such as how to use dictation and keypad shortcuts. Trainers and assessors also talked about the industry-specific COVID-19 training they had received and how they passed this new knowledge directly onto their learners. All staff had received mental health training to support their own and their learners' well-being.

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

Leaders worked with their subcontractors to identify potential risks to learners as a result of the pandemic. They update their risk assessments regularly to take account of changes to government or membership organisation guidance.

Leaders have established new COVID-19 procedures to make learning centres safer. All the learners we spoke with knew these procedures and felt safe learning with SETC and its subcontractors.

Staff have increased their own knowledge of online safety. They have completed courses about how to teach safely online, attended COVID-19 mental health training courses and watched TED talk videos about the use of algorithms online.

Learners spoke confidently about how to use the internet safely. They knew whom to contact if they had any concerns. In online beauty sessions, trainers have introduced a hand signal system that allows learners to inform others they are in danger. In equine sessions, learners discuss how to keep their social media posts private.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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