

Southampton City College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130696
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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 students 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

Southampton City College is a small general further education college serving the city of Southampton and neighbouring areas. The college provides a wide range of post-16 education and training that is focused on career preparation and career development, including: 16 to 19 study programmes, in a variety of vocational areas, adult learning and apprenticeships. The vast majority of the college's learners come from areas of the city with higher-than-average levels of deprivation.

Two thirds of learners study vocational courses at levels 1 and 2. At the time of the visit the college had around 1,000 16- to 18-year-old learners, 1,100 adult learners and 400 apprentices.

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?

Senior leaders described how in March, as the national Covid-19 restrictions became likely, they started to pull assessments forward and focused on these in the last few weeks before lockdown. They made the decision to move to online learning and continue to teach and assess learners to enable them to make the best progress possible. During the summer they prioritised assessments for apprentices and for learners in curriculum areas where assessments had been delayed.

Senior leaders explained how they worked closely with Southampton Education Forum, a citywide collaborative group with representatives from all schools and colleges and from the local authority. The forum had access to support and advice from the director of public health and from the National Health Service infection

control specialists. This resulted in city-wide guidance being issued, which every school and college followed. This ensured a consistent and unambiguous message went out to all parents, staff and learners.

Leaders described how the main adaptations they have made to the curriculum are those made to the structure of assessment across a number of curriculum areas. They have worked with awarding organisations to adapt assessments within their guidelines and requirements. The structure and sequencing of the curriculum in some vocational areas has also been adjusted. For example, in motor vehicle they have brought forward the practical teaching and learning activities and assessments to mitigate against the impact of future restrictions.

During the restrictions managers continued to track the progress of apprentices who were furloughed, which at the height of the pandemic was nearly half of all of their apprentices. Managers told us that the most significant barrier for apprentices, as a result of the pandemic, was the delay to their end-point assessments.

Careers advice and guidance has continued for all learners. When face-to-face meetings are not possible the careers team meet with learners remotely.

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 spoke about the way they have prioritised face-to-face teaching as a result of the current COVID-19 restrictions. They have prioritised students on study programmes and apprentices to attend college. Some adult courses are being taught online or using a blended approach. Foundation learners have also been taught using a blended approach to alleviate anxieties and confidence concerns.

Managers describe how they adapted and changed their schemes of work and curriculum due to the pandemic. Learners on a counselling course had the units changed to include a unit about online and telephone counselling. Staff spoke of how they adapted their approaches to teaching and how learners have become better independent learners and reflective practitioners as a result. Where learners did not have the technical skills or ability to study remotely, teachers have been proactive in teaching them to access remote learning as part of their induction.

Staff spoke highly of the training they have received. Initially this was to ensure that they had the skills and confidence to teach and assess online. However, training has continued at the termly teaching and learning conference where they further develop these skills.

Staff report that the lack of external work experience opportunities due to the pandemic have been replaced by an employer-led project. Foundation learners have lost some of their confidence and soft skills because of lockdown. Managers explained how learners have large gaps in their mathematics and English knowledge

that they are trying to fill. All managers described how learners have a lot of anxiety about examination preparation and techniques as they did not have the opportunity to sit formal examinations due to the pandemic.

Leaders describe how they complete observations and learning walks physically and online to see what progress learners are making and identify areas which teachers need to improve on.

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

Throughout the national Covid-19 restrictions, learners who had been identified as vulnerable or at risk and those with education, health and care plans were contacted weekly by the student support and learning support teams. These learners were also invited to attend college during this time. Learning managers and attendance officers monitored all learners and where learners were not logging on to their online courses they received text messages and phone calls to check on their welfare and to encourage them to continue their studies.

Staff and learners received support and training to keep safe when teaching and learning online. Learners can recall aspects of their online safety training and can explain why this is so important. Learners also understand the safety measures and precautions which leaders have put in place and are happy to adhere to them as they know they are keeping them all safe.

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