

Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	50217
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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.

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

Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service (DACES) is part of Derbyshire County Council. DACES runs programmes for adults and young people across Derbyshire.

Many adult learners study English, English for speakers of other languages or mathematics. Others study vocational subjects or courses focused on gaining employment or improving mental well-being. The large majority of adults study at level 2 or below. Young learners study courses at level 2 or below. DACES offers apprenticeships. The large majority of apprentices work for Derbyshire County Council. Many study at levels 2 or 3 in business, health and care, or education and training.

At the time of the visit, there were approximately 1,500 adult learners, 80 full-time young learners, 80 part-time young learners (including those aged 14 or 15) and 120 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?

Early on in the first national restrictions, leaders planned for classes to move online. They prioritised online learning for young people on study programmes, adult learners close to completing qualifications and apprentices. Technically-confident tutors quickly began using videoconferencing to teach lessons.

Managers redesigned learning programmes due to the impact of COVID-19. The community learning programme now includes more health, well-being and resilience

courses. Some courses take place entirely online. This has opened up learning to those who cannot join face-to-face classes.

Managers ensure that, where appropriate, tutors alter curriculum topics. Childcare learners have completed more theory learning as currently they cannot access childcare settings. Apprentices working in schools study recent changes within schools' own curriculum topics. Their personal development learning has included more focus on mental well-being.

Many learners study via a combination of online and onsite lessons, although the approach varies according to subject. For example, learner numbers are smaller on upholstery courses so that all can undertake practical activities in person. Adults taking mathematics and English qualifications study remotely on alternate weeks so that all benefit from socially-distanced tutor support.

Managers visit virtual lessons. They provide guidance to develop tutors' digital skills, based on targets that they have agreed with them.

Leaders ensured that vulnerable young people were among the first to return to onsite classes. Managers and tutors identified that they had become more anxious and disengaged following a long period of remote learning. Their courses now include a greater focus on building resilience and social skills.

Managers work with employers and subcontractors to ensure that apprentices continue learning online and complete adapted end-point assessments. Employers report positively on support from DACES' managers and assessors. Their employees have made expected or better progress.

Leaders identify considerable digital poverty within the local area. They are implementing a strategy to provide more learners and apprentices with computer equipment.

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 focused on developing tutors' skills in online teaching, such as how they use virtual learning environments. This includes training for tutors with beginner-level digital skills as well as those that are more advanced. Managers hold frequent team meetings to share online best practice and tackle issues. Tutors say that digital training was gradual so that they did not feel overwhelmed. They value the peer support available to them.

Tutors teach lessons remotely using online quizzes, discussion boards and video materials. They also provide resources and feedback to learners virtually. Learning support assistants have adapted how they support learners with special educational

needs and/or disabilities. They work with these learners remotely using online worksheets and breakout rooms.

New learners and apprentices undertake a digital induction, which includes support for accessing online learning. In many cases, learners and apprentices have adapted well to digital learning. Adult learners use online discussion boards or breakout rooms to expand upon ideas with their peers. Those on introductory teaching courses can use technology more proficiently. Adults can access learning at a time suitable to them if they are unable to attend live lessons.

Managers and tutors found that young learners returned to lessons with gaps in their knowledge, particularly in English and mathematics. They use additional resources to help them catch up. Learners are participating well in their learning, although in a few cases they find remote discussions with their peers difficult.

Careers information, advice and guidance has continued throughout national restrictions. Careers coaches have created videos and blogs to introduce careers services to new learners. They visit lessons virtually to provide advice linked to specific subjects. Employers contribute to careers guidance by providing talks using videoconferencing. Some work experience activities for young learners continue to take place, such as outdoor gardening projects.

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

At the start of national restrictions, leaders and managers altered safeguarding referral procedures to reflect more remote teaching and learning. Tutors made frequent contact with learners and apprentices to check on their well-being and safety, particularly those that they identified as vulnerable.

Managers monitor incoming safeguarding referrals to identify changes in risks. In particular they identify an increase in the number of young learners whose mental health has suffered. Learning support assistants are vigilant about safeguarding concerns when working with young learners online and in class. Managers with responsibility for safeguarding have taken part in related training, such as COVID-19 psychological first aid.

Leaders and managers have devised online learning risk assessments and rules for netiquette. Learners and apprentices receive a variety of other safeguarding information, such as how to spot attempts to radicalise them. The local area police force has covered the risk of online exploitation with young learners.

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