

# North Kent College

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130725

**Name of lead inspector:** Ann Monaghan, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Visit date(s):** 25 to 26 November 2020

**Type of provider:** General further education college

**Address:** Oakfield Lane  
Dartford  
Kent  
DA1 2JT

## 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

North Kent College is a large general further education college serving the surrounding towns of Dartford, Gravesend and Tonbridge as well as more rural areas in Kent and parts of south London. In August 2020, the college acquired most of Hadlow College and West Kent and Ashford College.

The college has around 4,746 learners aged 16 to 18, around 958 adult learners and 625 apprentices. Three hundred and thirty-four learners are in receipt of high needs funding. Courses are offered from entry level to degree level with a range of full and part-time courses offered across all subject areas. The college works with one subcontractor. There are four main campuses at Dartford, Gravesend, Hadlow and Tonbridge.

### **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 quickly set up a 'COVID-19' planning group to prepare for the emerging challenges from March 2020 onwards. Since September, their main aim has been to keep provision open to all who can get to the sites safely. They have also developed capacity for any subsequent restrictions or individual self-isolation needs.

Leaders and managers have reviewed their curriculum offer. They have implemented a range of measures to resolve learners' knowledge or skills gaps arising from the pandemic. For example, they have introduced an additional academic skills unit on many courses to meet the needs of younger learners who missed much of their final term at school.

Managers outlined how they have worked to enhance support for learners with education, health and care plans to meet the emotional needs caused by the pandemic. These learners are now more confident to attend and participate at college.

Managers provided examples of how they have worked to maintain a professional focus within their vocational specialisms. For example, many have invited in 'virtual' guest speakers so that learners can still hear from industry experts. Travel and tourism teachers use simulation activities so that students can still 'visit' famous landmarks and locations.

Managers have prioritised the development of digital skills for all staff and they have worked with teachers to also promote this focus in all subject areas for learners. Staff appreciate the importance of digital skills as essential life skills, as well as being important for higher level study and employment.

Leaders referred to their recognition of the importance of staff well-being and outlined a range of activities and support that is helping staff to be positive and resilient. These include frequent staff newsletters as well as more 'fun' and relaxing activities such as yoga, dance and a VE Day afternoon tea.

### **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 described how they quickly changed their teaching methods from face-to-face to remote to support their learners during the pandemic. They provided a wide range of training to meet teachers' differing needs. Managers completed virtual learning walks to review the quality of teaching and offered support and training where needed.

Managers described the steps they took to make sure learners and apprentices were able to continue their studies during the summer term. Teachers changed the order in which they taught their topics so that they could teach new knowledge and practical skills. They gave examples of how land-based learners learned the theoretical aspects online and then attended the college in the summer months to complete the practical elements.

Managers explained how online learning has benefited many learners. They described how learners now have greater confidence in working with technology and have become more reflective learners. Teachers used a variety of assessment methods during the COVID-19 restrictions to check what learners could remember and do. For example, sports learners completed football drills in the garden or local park for their siblings and recorded this as evidence.

Managers described how teachers were proactive in finding the right online learning methods for their own subjects. A fishery teacher explained how he used his own aquarium to teach a particular topic, and a carpenter used a video to demonstrate the correct and incorrect way to fit a door frame. Learning support assistants also changed the ways they worked with learners to meet their needs.

Staff have continued to provide careers advice and guidance to learners. They have adapted careers events so that learners can still hear from a range of employers. Staff have held 'employer days' virtually so that learners can listen to employer talks and directly ask questions.

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

The senior team reviewed and updated its safeguarding policy to include additional risks arising from the pandemic. The team continued to work with local agencies as well as using national guidance to inform its practices.

In September, leaders ensured that all staff discussed the newer risks for learners and apprentices as part of their annual safeguarding training. During the induction period, the safeguarding team prioritised learners' mental well-being so that tutors were picking up early concerns arising from isolation and anxiety and following up with support.

Learners say that staff are very visible around the college and this helps them to feel safe. They are confident about their online safety as tutors often discuss this with them and learners share personal experiences to learn from each other. Staff have worked with 'Deaf Hope' to support deaf learners with a range of workshops focusing on keeping safe, domestic abuse and social media safety.

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