

# West Nottinghamshire College

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	130777
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Helen Whelan, Her Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	General further education college
<b>Address:</b>	Derby Road Mansfield Nottinghamshire NG18 5BH

## 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

West Nottinghamshire College is based in Mansfield and Ashfield, and provides education and training to over 6,500 learners from the local area with a small number of courses delivered nationally. Courses are available in all subject areas from entry level through to higher technical education. At the time of the visit, 3,130 students were on education programmes for young people, there were 2,109 adult learners, 1,064 apprentices and 154 students with high needs.

The college works with nine subcontractors to provide adult learning to around 350 learners. Its higher technical education activity is focused entirely within engineering and construction following the transfer of the vast majority of higher education provision to Nottingham Trent University in September 2020.

### **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 started to address the potential impact of COVID-19 from February 2020. They prepared staff, students and apprentices to move to online teaching and learning. Laptops were provided to students who needed one and teachers were trained to use online platforms, so they could continue teaching.

Teachers taught a full timetable throughout the restrictions and monitored students' participation in each lesson. Managers used this information to plan interventions where students were not making progress. Students returned to face-to-face teaching from June to complete assessments and catch up on their studies. This was phased according to students' needs and level of participation during the restrictions.

In some sectors, such as hair and beauty, construction and engineering, a significant number of apprentices were furloughed. In others, most notably health and social care, apprentices found it difficult to study due to working extra shifts. Managers were flexible in responding to new working arrangements and kept apprentices in learning.

Leaders describe the considerable work undertaken with young people in local authority care. Students were allocated a coach who made daily contact with them, prioritising those most at risk of isolation. Leaders ensured students had the technology they needed, and wi-fi hubs were installed in supported accommodation venues.

Managers ensured all students had a welfare check when they returned to college. Most students are happy to be back. A few report increased anxiety related to further national and local restrictions. A specialist mental health coordinator has been appointed.

Quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors continued throughout the restrictions. Subcontractors received support on reviewing risk assessments and adapting their quality assurance arrangements and training for staff.

Employers speak highly of their relationships with college staff who they see as accessible and keen to adapt to their needs. Local leaders value working with the college leadership team to develop a skills strategy to serve the needs of the community.

**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 provided teachers with a substantial amount of training to help them teach online. This involved a two-week block of training followed by weekly drop-in sessions, individual support for teachers and video resources.

During the restrictions, teachers used imaginative approaches to teach practical skills, such as having students host 'Come Dine With Me' dinner parties for their families. As this did not fully replicate the training they would have received at college, leaders moved quickly to bring students back on site.

Teachers taught throughout summer to address any gaps in students' learning. New students, who had missed a significant period in school, started their courses at the beginning of September 2020. New A-level students commenced their studies in August. Much teaching has moved to a model where just over half of all students attend half their lessons at college and half online. The remainder study onsite full time.

Managers use subject 'deep dives' to assess the quality of teaching. These include observations of teaching, reviews of students' work, discussions with teachers and employers, reviews of assessment feedback and target setting. This results in actions that are incorporated into the quality improvement plan.

Improving the quality of provision has not been affected substantially by the restrictions. However, some plans to improve the curriculum have been temporarily affected because employers are not currently recruiting apprentices.

Managers are aware of the challenges faced in sourcing work placements. They are developing students' employability skills through establishing over 20 learning companies. These involve students in commercial activities to develop their industry-specific knowledge and skills. Managers have made connections with leading employers across Europe. For example, a robotic manufacturer in Turin taught a session to staff and students, and the construction and engineering department are working with Osnabruck College in Germany to share good practice.

Careers advice and guidance continued online throughout the restrictions and is now provided through tutorials, face-to-face and online interviews.

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

Leaders have continued to operate what they regard as well-established safeguarding procedures and have updated these in light of COVID-19 guidance.

Training was provided for students about online safety. Students could recall this and said they felt safe studying remotely. Teachers recognised the need to look for alternative ways to identify potential safeguarding concerns when students were learning online. Projects such as media students filming 'A Day In The Life' during lockdown allowed teachers to check on well-being, embed COVID-19 safety messages and develop practical skills.

Leaders report they have continued to meet their statutory obligations relating to safeguarding. Relationships with local authorities are said to be even stronger than before the restrictions and leaders recognise the need to work closely with external agencies to support vulnerable students.

Students know who to contact if they have concerns about their safety and value the support they receive on well-being.

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