

Queen Mary's College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	145175
Name of lead inspector:	Montserrat Pérez-Parent, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Sixth form college
Address:	Cliddesden Road Basingstoke Hampshire RG21 3HF

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

Queen Mary's College is a large, sixth-form college in the borough of Basingstoke and Deane in north-east Hampshire. This is a prosperous area and Basingstoke is a commercial location. However, the borough has small pockets of economic deprivation. The college attracts learners from Basingstoke and the surrounding areas.

Queen Mary's College provides courses in a wide range of subject areas from entry level to level 3, including significant provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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 and managers report that they were quick to make live remote lessons available to students from the start of the first COVID-19 national restrictions. Students followed the same daily schedule that they would have had at college, which parents welcomed.

Leaders and managers supported all their students and teachers to continue to learn and work. They distributed laptops and licences for specialist software to students who needed them. They identified which students would benefit from attending college and kept the college open for them. Human resources managers contacted every member of staff and offered those who were struggling to work in their home environments the option of working from college.

Leaders were committed to supporting Year 13 students through their courses, so that they could continue to develop the knowledge and skills they would need for

their next steps. Leaders and managers started to prepare Year 11 students earlier for their transition from school to college. Teachers provided them with work on a weekly basis on the subjects they would be studying in September. Students took part in remote writing competitions and art exhibitions.

Teachers benefited from training and support on how to teach remotely from colleagues who already had experience in using the technology. Some teachers who had not used online teaching tools before have now incorporated them into their face-to-face lessons.

Leaders and managers changed the timetable so that students now attend each subject twice a week for longer lessons. Students spoke positively about these changes. They found that longer lessons helped them manage their time more effectively.

Leaders and managers worked together to find creative ways to continue with all aspects of work they supported prior to the pandemic, either remotely or safely onsite. They hold remote parents' evenings, continue to offer placements for trainee teachers and host children from a local nursery school for science sessions.

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?

Managers and teachers adapted the curriculum as a result of the pandemic. Teachers spoke about how they had changed the order of topics they taught so that students could complete their practical work once they returned to college. Teachers have adapted practical units in subjects such as sport, performing arts, science and art to ensure that students can work safely. For example, geography students have taken part in virtual field trips.

Staff talked about how they identified and filled gaps in students' knowledge. They described the changes they had made to assess the knowledge of new students in more detail. Year 12 students talked about how useful they found the information and support that staff gave them before they started at the college, which helped them know what to expect when attending college for the first time.

Teachers talked about how they supported students with special educational needs and disabilities by helping them access resources before lessons, so that they could prepare. Teachers explained how, when working remotely, anxious students found that using the online chat function gave them the confidence to ask questions.

Managers explained how they had continued to help students identify and prepare for their next steps. They held a virtual careers day in June and teachers supported students remotely with their university applications.

Leaders, managers and teachers felt proud that students' attendance and engagement had remained high throughout the pandemic. They reported that, while students studying level 3 programmes had coped well with remote learning, those on

entry-level programmes had found this more challenging. Staff spoke about how pleased students were to return to college.

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

At the start of the first period of national restrictions, leaders and managers provided teachers and students with refresher training on keeping safe online. This included being mindful of the backgrounds that teachers and students used when their cameras were on and to only use their college accounts when accessing remote lessons. Students were able to explain how to stay safe online when using social media and sending emails.

Tutors contacted their students on a one-to-one basis to check on their well-being while studying remotely. The frequency of contact varied depending on each student's individual needs, and for a few vulnerable learners this was daily.

Students spoke about the information they had received which had helped them understand how to return to college safely. They said that it alleviated their anxiety. Students who need more support can access the college's 'well-being hub'.

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