

Paddington Development Trust

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 58194

Name of lead inspector: Mike Finn, Her Majesty's Inspector

Visit dates: 6 to 7 November 2020

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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 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

Paddington Development Trust (PDT) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The training department of the trust provides education to 84 adults, the majority of whom are unemployed. Almost all students study vocational childcare courses at level 3, with a small number taking a programme at level 4. The trust integrates the teaching of information technology and English within the childcare courses. PDT operates from two local community venues in London.

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?

Managers took the decision to move from face-to-face to online teaching within two weeks of the COVID-19 national restrictions starting. This minimised the impact on students' learning. Staff spent two weeks preparing online sessions and resources. They also issued enough laptops to ensure that every student can access online lessons.

Managers have given students more choice about when they attend lessons. For example, students who are parents can choose lesson times during the day or in the evening. They can then continue their studies alongside supporting their children. Tutors also provide opportunities for students to attend the learning centre if they find it difficult to work at home.

Managers recognise the challenges associated with organising work experience. Assessors cannot always make visits to childcare settings due to restrictions. Managers have responded to this by asking supervisors to write witness statements about students' performance on work experience. Tutors use these statements as part of their assessment on workplace skills.

Managers in the training division of PDT work with other areas of the organisation to provide students with support. For example, if students are struggling financially, they can apply for help, to enable them to buy clothes for wearing at job interviews.

Due to the impact of the pandemic, tutors allow students extra time to complete their programme if they need it. This is because tutors slowed down the pace of courses when moving to online learning.

Managers told inspectors that moving lessons online has enabled staff to recruit students outside of the local area. This has helped them to achieve recruitment targets, despite the COVID-19 restrictions.

The chief executive, managers and tutors now meet more frequently. They discuss the impact of the pandemic on the curriculum and students, agreeing on how to respond to changes.

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?

Following the decision to move lessons online, managers provided tutors with training to adapt to the different ways of teaching. For example, tutors receive training in using online quizzes to check what students have learned in lessons.

Managers continue to monitor the quality of teaching as they have done previously. They give tutors feedback to support them to improve their online teaching skills.

Tutors and managers monitor students' progress through meetings and reviewing assessed work in portfolios more frequently than before the pandemic. Tutors now use electronic portfolios to set work and provide feedback to students. If students fall behind with their work or do not understand topics, tutors provide extra help through online tutorials.

Tutors recognise the need to adjust lessons, so they work better online. For example, they have shortened lessons so that students do not need to be online for long periods of time.

Tutors continue to teach childcare topics in the same order as before the pandemic. They feel that this is the most appropriate sequence for students to build knowledge. They also continue to offer extra support for students for whom English is an additional language. This support is now offered in online meetings.

Learners continue to receive online careers advice and guidance in the same way as before the pandemic. Tutors focus on the development of workplace skills practised in the work placement setting and through feedback from supervisors.

Managers and staff recognise that there have been positive outcomes to the changes that they have made. Students enjoy their online learning and appreciate being able to learn at times that suit them. Managers report that attendance is similar to before the pandemic, and in some cases better.

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

Students new to PDT receive an induction that includes topics about online safety, such as the importance of creating secure passwords. However, managers recognise that they need to revisit online safety topics with existing students more frequently.

Tutors use weekly meetings with managers to discuss any concerns related to students' welfare. They informed inspectors that if concerns emerge, they work with agencies to provide support.

Staff have become more mindful of risks that have increased due to the pandemic, such as domestic violence. Students feel supported by their tutors and feel able to talk with them about any worries they may have.

Students feel that online lessons operate safely. For example, they need to use a password to be able to enter the online classroom.

Staff give students who are attending lessons at centres information about how to keep safe. This includes information about the importance of frequent handwashing and wearing face coverings.

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