

Community College Initiative Ltd

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 144787

Name of lead inspector: Penny Fawcus, HMI

Visit dates: 25 to 26 November 2020

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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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 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

In 2017, Community College Initiative Ltd registered as an independent specialist college. It provides education for young people in Essex, with complex social, emotional, health and learning needs. Learners study vocational and life skills pathways in their local area. The college offers flexible programme start dates throughout the year.

The college develops individual learning programmes in community settings. These include the home, workplace, leisure facilities, charities and further education providers. At the time of inspection, 28 learners were on individual learning programmes. These programmes ranged from pre-entry level to level 2, with most at entry level.

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 told us they continued to provide an education for learners during national restrictions. They wanted to maintain contact with learners and provide a familiar routine, despite the pandemic.

Leaders did not have to make a significant move to online learning. Their main curriculum focus has been on developing learners' practical skills and knowledge. At the start of national restrictions, staff delivered boxes of home-learning resources to learners. They call this 'Skills on Wheels'. Leaders say this 'Home Skills Challenge' will be a permanent feature of the curriculum moving forward.

Leaders enhanced communication with parents and stakeholders during the restrictions. Stakeholders and parents say that leaders take part in frequent, open and positive meetings. They work together to support the transition of learners in and out of their programmes. Leaders told us learner referrals have increased. They have needed to recruit more staff during the pandemic. Leaders reviewed learner risk assessments and education, health and care plans because of the COVID-19 risks.

Leaders told us that community venues closed overnight at the start of the pandemic. This restricted their ability to provide social interaction and work placement for the learners. Leaders have relied on outdoor venues, such as the Wilderness Foundation. Here, learners can learn outdoors and interact socially with their peers in a COVID-secure manner.

Leaders meet every month with tutors to review caseloads and for tutors to raise any concerns they may have for learners. These tutor conferences continued throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders say they are key to monitoring standards and learners' progress. Leaders check lesson plans to ensure that learners can meet their education, health and care plan targets.

Leaders have also used the tutor conferences to check on staff well-being. They encourage staff to work from home because of the nature of the county-wide provision. Leaders provided mental health first aid training and digital skills training for staff during the pandemic.

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?

Staff worked together to develop a meaningful curriculum for home learning. They call this their 'Home Skills Challenge'. Each learner had 30 different activities mapped against their personal and curriculum targets. Parents and staff reviewed the completion of the tasks set.

Leaders told us that many learners lack motivation to take physical exercise. Leaders invested in outdoor games resources such as hoops and balls to encourage physical activity. Leaders considered learners' home situation, hobbies and interests when developing a personalised curriculum. For example, those who enjoyed cooking used a barbeque to cook outdoors with their tutor. Another such activity set by teachers was encouraging learners to walk with a purpose. For example, walking to take photographs of their surroundings and make a calendar.

Leaders say that the closure of community settings and work placements continues to be a challenge. These restrictions limit their ability to develop learners' workplace skills. Staff say they focus on learners developing enterprise projects to try to mitigate this lost opportunity. Leaders told us about learners making bracelets and

bird boxes. They marketed products through social media platforms and outdoor stalls.

Staff describe how learners have developed resilience and confidence during the pandemic. Learners who find communication challenging have taken part in virtual online meetings to pursue a hobby or interest. For example, virtual online training with the Angling Coaching Initiative to learn fishing skills.

Teachers report no adverse impact on learners' attendance, progress and participation. They say that closer communication with parents has been an added benefit of the national restrictions. Tutors report that progress has been more challenging for the few learners in residential care, who do not have immediate parental support with activities.

Leaders report little change to careers advice and guidance through the pandemic. Leaders work with the local authority to support each learner to plan their future and develop their workplace awareness in preparation for their next steps.

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

Leaders told us that COVID-19 restrictions caused an escalation in learners' anxiety. Staff made sure learners understood the importance of restrictions and how to keep themselves safe.

Learners told us how they keep safe in college, such as using hand gel and social distancing. They were able to explain key features of keeping safe online, including use of passwords. They know who to go to if they have any concerns about their safety.

Leaders say they have strengthened the safeguarding elements of online learning. They have provided guidance to parents and learning support assistants about working online, such as taking photographs of learners' work and uploading these.

Leaders told us that learners have developed coping mechanisms for dealing with change. Learners can articulate their individual coping strategies for managing their anxiety. Leaders state that learners are now more open about their own mental health because of the national focus on this topic during the pandemic.

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