

# Waltham Forest College

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130456

**Name of lead inspector:** Sue Hasty, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Visit dates:** 2 to 3 December 2020

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

**Address:** Forest Road  
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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 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.

### Information about the provider

Waltham Forest College is a medium-sized general further education college in East London. The college provides education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and provision for learners with high needs. At the time of the visit, 1,730 learners aged 16 to 18 were on full-time study programmes. There were 3752 adult learners attending the college. In addition, 307 learners study apprenticeship programmes. There are 149 learners with high needs. The college works with six training organisations in a subcontracting arrangement.

The borough of Waltham Forest is diverse, both ethnically and socially. Just under a half of residents are from a minority ethnic background. Around 97 languages are spoken by learners at the college.

### **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?**

From September 2020, leaders made arrangements for students to be taught face-to-face wherever possible.

Leaders explained how they responded quickly to offer courses that saw an increase in demand in September. Courses in hospitality, travel and tourism, and sport recruited less well than in previous years. Conversely, courses in access to health, nursing and midwifery, and construction and engineering were more popular. Consequently, leaders report that they have recruited more students on programmes for young people and adults than planned.

Teachers whose courses have fewer students receive training so that they have the skills to teach on other courses. Those from the teacher training team, for example, now work on courses for unemployed students.

Leaders recognise that unemployment is rising in the borough as a result of the pandemic. Because of this, leaders arranged for Jobcentre Plus (JCP) staff to work with unemployed young people on the college site. They offer careers advice and refer students onto training programmes which provide progression to employment.

Managers from JCP agree that leaders swiftly adapt course content to teach the skills and knowledge needed for local job vacancies. Managers set up short courses for unemployed students in interview skills so that they can confidently apply for jobs as work coaches and border force officers. JCP staff report that a high number of students gain employment directly from these courses.

Managers say that they carry out assessments of students' learning much earlier than before. Construction courses now run over two years rather than one. Practical tests take place nearer to the beginning of the course rather than at the end. In maths courses, students sit the first set of exams in December rather than doing them all in March. In health and social care, apprenticeship managers train care home staff to assess students' skills and knowledge in the workplace.

**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?**

Just before the first national lockdown, leaders surveyed students to find out if they had the technology and space to learn from home. They bought additional computers for those that did not have them. Managers and teachers also sent workbooks to adult students with limited information technology skills so that they could continue learning.

Leaders and managers acknowledge that new students on study programmes have gaps in their learning. This is because of the disruption to their education earlier in the year. These students complete an online course which includes topics such as study skills, English and mathematics, and essay writing. Managers and teachers also remind students about expectations of behaviour and attendance at college.

Leaders and managers explained that they invested in resources to equip teachers and students for online learning. In creative arts, for example, students have access to photoshop and video-editing software so that they can carry out practical tasks at home.

Teachers described how they have adapted their course to make it more suitable for online learning and to meet health and safety requirements. On electrical installation courses, teachers divide the class into two for safe face-to-face teaching of practical work. For courses that have potentially dangerous practical activities, such as hot waxing, teachers arrange for students to carry these out in the college in small groups. In hair and barbering courses, teachers demonstrate practical skills online so that students can practise them on family members. Students send in photographs and videos of completed work for teachers to mark.

Students say that learning online is mainly positive. They feel that they receive the support they need, and their questions are answered quickly. They say they would like more opportunity to discuss topics in online breakout groups.

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

At the start of the pandemic, the safeguarding team identified their most vulnerable students from existing records. Those most at risk had support to study in college during the national lockdown earlier in the year. Managers and teachers keep in contact with vulnerable students and their parents or carers on a daily basis. If students become a cause for concern, the safeguarding lead works with the local authority to arrange a home visit from a social worker.

The revised safeguarding policy includes a code of conduct for online teaching and learning. It covers guidance on dressing appropriately, selecting suitable backgrounds and rules for use of language.

Students say they receive training in e-safety during the 'Safer Learner Week' and in tutorial sessions. They understand the dangers of online bullying and when they should contact the police. They know how to block people online, how to recognise secure websites and to take care when sharing documents.

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