

# Slough Borough Council

## Interim visit report

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| <b>Unique reference number:</b> | 54429   |
| <b>Name of lead inspector:</b>  | Emma Barrett-Peel, Her Majesty's Inspector                |
| <b>Visit dates:</b>             | 10 to 11 December 2020                                    |
| <b>Type of provider:</b>        | Local authority   |
| <b>Address:</b>                 | Observatory House<br>25 Windsor Road<br>Slough<br>SL1 2EL |

## 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 and apprentices 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

Slough Borough Council provides community learning and adult skills in Slough and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The service provides community learning and skills courses across both boroughs. At the time of the interim visit, there were around 630 learners studying a wide range of courses from pre-entry level to level 2.

Around a third of Slough's residents are White British and over half are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, over three quarters of residents are White British. The level of unemployment is low; however, it is rising and there are skills shortages in both boroughs.

### **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 described the review and restructure of the service they had undertaken prior to the pandemic. Leaders felt they had made substantial improvements to teaching and learning. As a result, staff were far more resilient and able to make rapid changes at the start of the pandemic to make sure they could continue teaching their learners.

Managers explained the challenges they had faced with high levels of unemployment in some sectors as a result of COVID-19. Many learners who would have progressed to retail or hospitality jobs, had been adversely affected by the vast reduction in the number of these jobs. Leaders and managers explained how they adapted the curriculum to help learners prepare for the increased number of jobs in care,

teaching and the community. They also spoke about how they worked with local organisations to help learners progress to jobs in the local media industry.

Leaders talked proudly about the changes they made to the service as a result of COVID-19. Staff explained how they worked with the job centre and local employers to design new courses for learners. They explained how the move to enrolling learners online had been successful and how they will continue to do this in the future. Leaders told us how remote meetings allowed staff more time to work on new initiatives.

Staff at the subcontractors spoke very positively about how leaders supported them throughout the pandemic. They explained how leaders had guided them on how to keep learners safe and organised regular meetings to discuss challenges and share good practice.

**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 and managers explained how they had continued to check the quality of teaching during the move to remote learning. They spoke about how they observed teachers' online lessons and concentrated on checking the quality of both learning and safeguarding. Managers talked about their work with subcontractors to help them adapt to remote learning and to check the quality of their teaching when working online.

Leaders and managers spoke about how they helped teachers plan their courses. They felt that these conversations helped teachers to decide what to teach. Teachers explained how they were now clearer about choosing which topics to teach and how these benefited the needs of learners. Leaders explained the changes they had made to careers advice to help learners decide on their next steps.

Teachers explained that although they initially found online teaching daunting, it gave them opportunities to try out different ways of working with learners. They talked about the benefits of 'flipped' learning where they give learners reading and resources before lessons to help them understand topics. Teachers felt that they quickly became adept at teaching online. They talked about how they adapted the order and content of the topics they taught to engage learners when working remotely. They spoke about how they added topics such as mock interviews to prepare learners for employment interviews. They explained how, although attendance at online lessons was generally high, a few learners had left courses because they struggled to use technology.

Learners understood that remote learning was convenient and safer during the pandemic. They talked about their tutors' skills in teaching online and how they could find and use resources easily. All the learners we talked with felt that their English has improved greatly because of their online learning.

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

Leaders explained how they had updated policies, procedures and training for staff and learners, to make sure they could attend lessons safely. Teachers welcomed the training leaders had provided and felt confident about teaching their learners safely.

Leaders described the increased risks to learners, which they identified as a result of the pandemic. Teachers explained how they used this information to adapt the curriculum, raise awareness of staying safe, and provide learners with the information they needed to be able to deal with and report concerns.

Learners we talked with explained what they had learned about keeping safe, particularly when online. They talked about how to avoid identity fraud and phishing, and the safe use of social media. Learners knew who to talk to if they had any concerns. They knew how to stay safe when they attended lessons.

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