

# Stoke-on-Trent College

Interim visit report

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Bev Ramsell, HMI
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	General further education college
<b>Address:</b>	Cauldon Campus Stoke Road Shelton Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire ST4 2DG

## 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

Stoke-on-Trent College is a medium-sized general further education college based across two campuses: Cauldon campus and Burslem campus. At the time of the visit 1,446 learners were on education programmes for young people, 2,286 learners were on adult learning programmes, 552 apprentices were following apprenticeship frameworks and standards-based programmes, and 52 learners were in receipt of high-needs funding. Leaders offer courses in most subject areas. Courses are offered from level 1 to level 4, with most learners on study programmes at level 3 and below. Nearly half of all adults are studying at or below level 1. Most apprentices are on level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships. The college works with two subcontractors, one for the teaching of performing arts qualifications and the other engineering-based qualifications.

### **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 described how they prioritised learners' return to college and the processes involved, to ensure that the college was COVID-19 safe. They explained how they created a COVID-19 working group, which consisted of managers and staff from across the college. Through this group, they identified the most vulnerable learners and learners who needed to complete practical assessment to return first, such as level 3 learners studying hairdressing. They explained the implementation of the safety measures, and the recruitment of additional security staff, to make sure everyone complied with the procedures.

Managers discussed the range of activities used to support learners with careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG). These included virtual visits from industrial experts, face-to-face visits from partner universities, and one-to-one sessions with college career advisors and teachers. However, leaders shared concerns with access to CIAG for current Year 11 students. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all CIAG for this year group is virtual. Only 60% of households in Stoke-on-Trent have broadband. As a result, some students may not be able to access the information they need, to make an informed choice for their next steps in September 2021.

Leaders report a flexible approach to support staff working at home. They have set expectations for staff to take regular breaks and have accepted irregular hours of work to help staff to meet family obligations. They told inspectors how they have developed a culture of well-being and reassurance through regular communications and support meetings with staff. Leaders have seen a reduction in staff sickness, which they believe is a result of these interventions.

Stakeholders explained the move to online learning and the flexible approach the college took to enable apprentices to continue with their studies. They spoke about the creative ways tutors taught online to make sure learners stayed engaged. They discussed weekly meetings that are used to review learning and matters such as health and well-being.

**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?**

Teachers discussed how they established learners' starting points. They explained how they reviewed learners' knowledge and skills through activities such as quizzes, interviews with teachers, and observations of learners' practical work. They told inspectors how they had introduced an assessment of learners' mental health, which has helped them to understand learners' full support needs. They described the additional one-to-one help that learners received to enable them to catch up.

Managers and teachers explained a number of ways in which they check the quality of teaching and learning. These include reviewing schemes of work to look at the order of teaching, observing teaching sessions virtually and physically, and the monitoring of learners' progress through tracking systems. They explained how the sequencing of the curriculum had changed. For example, in hospitality practical assessments had been brought forward, and in public services they had been put to the end of the academic year to allow teachers to focus on theoretical knowledge.

Teachers explained how they stayed in touch with the most vulnerable learners. They described regular phone calls and contact from mentors, which sometimes involved parents. They told inspectors how learners were invited to twice-weekly 'tea and chat' sessions, which were run by college counsellors.

Teachers identified the lack of access to digital technologies as one of the main barriers to learning online. They said that during enrolment they ask what equipment learners have access to at home. Where necessary learners are then supported with laptops and Wi-Fi dongles, for example. Where they identify issues with digital literacy, learners gain priority access to the learning resources centre, which has remained open throughout the pandemic.

Managers stated that attendance to classes had either stayed the same or, in some areas, they had seen an improvement. They said learners had missed the social interaction and were keen to be back in college.

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

Learners explained that, prior to returning to campus, they were sent information and reviewed virtual site tours. They stated that this was reinforced by discussions with tutors, where they explained the use of masks in public areas, hand sanitisation points, one-way systems, and details of cleaning for desks and keyboards in classrooms. They identified who they would talk to, should they need to, and particularly highlighted the roles of peer mentors and the student council in supporting them.

Leaders discussed the staff training that had taken place in areas such as: 'Keeping Children Safe in Education', developing strategies to ensure that teachers teach safely online, and a general safeguarding module that is changed to meet the current needs of the college.

Leaders explained how they maintained the college safeguarding and support processes throughout the national restrictions. They discussed how an already established online process for referrals was used and how safeguarding officers remained available to learners.

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