

# Royal Mencap Society

Interim visit report

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Jane Hughes, Her Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent Specialist College
<b>Address:</b>	123 Golden Lane Islington London EC1Y 0RT

## 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 and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

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

The Royal Mencap Society is a national charity with headquarters in Islington, London. The society started to offer provision as an independent specialist college in September 2017. The Royal Mencap Society currently provides three separate employment programmes, known as The Three Ships, based in the lifestyles and work team. The Three Ships comprise traineeships for 19- to 24-year-olds, level 2 apprenticeships across the age ranges in customer service practitioner and retailing, and supported internships. All learners have SEND. Those on supported internships all have education, health and care plans.

Currently there are 163 learners on supported internships, 3 learners on an apprenticeship and 14 learners on a traineeship. The provision is nationwide. The Royal Mencap Society receives funding from a large number of local authorities.

### **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 recognise the negative impact that COVID-19 has had on their learners. For example, learners on supported internships have reduced opportunities for work experience and many trainees are unable to stay in healthcare work placements. Leaders and managers say they have taken positive steps to mitigate these. They have increased traineeship placements with employers who work in distribution where there has been a significant demand during the national restrictions. They work with their partners to promote the benefits of offering work placements to learners with SEND. They have looked at alternative work experience options for learners on the supported internship programme. Leaders have had discussions with employers about developing a warehousing apprenticeship programme so that trainees can progress to a higher level of learning.

Employers appreciate the way staff match learners and trainees to their business, considering the business culture and beliefs. They recognise the positive impact learners have on their business. Employers work with managers to make reasonable adjustments for learners. Staff working with learners understand learners' needs, such as the importance of keeping to a routine. Employers supporting trainees state they will offer them employment at the end of the programme.

Leaders use funding from external sources to buy information technology devices for learners who do not have them, so that they can access online learning. They also use this funding to pay for extra staff to give learners more support with their welfare and wellbeing.

Leaders and managers have made changes to how they give learners careers advice and guidance because of the pandemic. They ensure learners have access to online jobs fairs and virtual talks from employers. For example, leaders arranged for staff from a national newspaper to give a talk on the types of roles available in journalism.

**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 moved all teaching online during the first national restrictions. Since the restrictions were lifted, most teaching is now face-to-face with a small amount taught online. Leaders use staff and learner feedback to decide the most appropriate content of the curriculum to teach online. They have kept sessions, such as interview preparation and elements of higher-level English and mathematics online. Leaders say this gives learners the opportunity to work in small groups, at the same level, remotely nationwide.

Leaders and managers change the way learners on supported internships currently complete their work experience. They have introduced work-based projects to do this. For example, learners make candles to sell in local shops to raise money for a hydrotherapy pool. Tutors create specific job roles in the projects for learners, such as in production and accounting. Managers are working with employers to plan the restart of external work experience placements early next year.

Tutors say they use new ways to check what learners know and if they have forgotten any key concepts during the pandemic. They conduct surveys in lessons which helps them identify topics learners struggle to understand. For example, tutors have noticed that some learners need to revisit simple fractions and elements of geometry work in mathematics. Apprentices who have returned from a break in learning complete extra sessions to practise their professional discussions. Tutors use a specialist cognitive assessment to understand how learners remember what they are taught. They then identify the specific extra support learners need. For example, tutors ensure for those learners who only remember information verbally, that they can refer to written guides.

Leaders state that most learners are making the expected progress. They say that online learning helps learners improve their communication skills and confidence now they are back in the classroom. Leaders recognise that for some learners on supported internship programmes, they have not gained enough external work experience to develop their employability skills, such as in team working.

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

Leaders have noticed that learners are more anxious about attending work experience and placements. They also say that there has been an increase in safeguarding referrals since face-to-face teaching has resumed. Leaders believe this is because learners experienced disruption in their education before joining their programmes which has unsettled them.

Leaders have increased their work with external agencies and partners to support learners with their well-being, mental health and safe travel to their training and work placements. Transport for London gave learners a talk on how to travel safely on public transport.

Learners who inspectors spoke to say they have had information about how to stay safe online and know whom to talk to if they have any concerns. Learners have access to easy-to-read documents and a website to help them understand how to keep themselves safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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