

Capel Manor College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130438
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Type of provider:	Specialist further education 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 and apprentices 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.

Information about the provider

Capel Manor College is a specialist land-based college, with its main campus in Enfield and five other centres across London. The college is the largest and the only specialist land-based, environmental training provider in London.

The college offers a range of full- and part-time courses in further and higher education for school leavers and adults. At the time of this interim visit, there were approximately 2,430 learners, including 1,008 young learners. These learners are on study programmes and apprenticeships in subjects including: horticulture, landscaping, arboriculture, environmental conservation, animal management and saddlery.

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 how they set key priorities quickly to develop their information technology systems and software across all sites. Just before the first restrictions in March 2020, leaders surveyed learners to find out if they had access to technology to learn from home. They provided laptops to those who did not have them. Staff also guided the parents of learners with high needs on how to use technology to support their child to learn. As part of the induction, staff train all learners on how to access the online learning system when learning from home. Staff report that learners' computer skills and confidence have improved.

Fewer 16- to 18-year-old learners and apprentices have been recruited than in previous years. On the other hand, leaders report that they have noticed an increase in the number of adult learners. Leaders link this to the rise in unemployment. They feel that the national focus on the outdoors and climate change has made their courses attractive to many. Therefore, they plan to grow their curriculum offer further.

Leaders recognise the challenge staff face amid the uncertainty around examinations and the delays in final assessments. They have adjusted timetables, so staff can address the needs of their learners and employers. Staff provide extra mathematics and English tutorials to develop learners' knowledge through practice. They hold regular revision sessions with the apprentices who await final assessments. Consequently, learners have stayed on their courses and report that they feel supported.

Stakeholders, including the industry placement providers, appreciate the way staff make adjustments to their teaching. They described how staff have changed the days of work-place training to fit their business hours. Careers advisors and teachers guide learners to continue to train and go on to employment and higher education. Staff report that learners' attendance remains comparable to previous years.

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 decided to keep the college open from June to August 2020 for learners to access practical training. Since most businesses are still not fully open for work-related learning, staff have increased the use of resources on college sites. For example, learners learn tree climbing, tree felling and animal handling on the college estate and farm. In horticulture, students can complete practical sessions, including double digging, in their own gardens. Learners can also video record themselves feeding and handling pets at home. Leaders report that in most subjects, learners' progress remains on track due to the adjustments.

Staff recognise that the apprentices who were furloughed have fallen behind. They plan to extend the duration of their programme. Teachers are conscious of the additional pressure learners feel as they approach examinations, especially those who did not have GCSE examinations this year. Teachers hold revision sessions and teach study skills to help these learners prepare. Teachers report that the new learners in animal management do not have the expected levels of knowledge in sciences required for their course. Therefore, teachers have revisited basic biology, including animal anatomy, at the start of the term.

Learners benefit from online talks with industry professionals and carry out virtual tours of their workplaces. For example, learners discussed the role of a zoo keeper with a zoo worker in America. Garden design learners watch videos of walk-throughs of prestigious gardens. Where national competitions such as Chelsea Flower Show have stopped, staff run college-based competitions to celebrate learners' work. Staff report that learners' engagement with online learning activities has increased over time.

In the online sessions, teachers use short quizzes to check learners' understanding. They ask learners to post emojis to show their engagement with learning. Teachers

have introduced more breaks and breakout sessions within lessons following learners' feedback.

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

Leaders prioritised the safety of their learners and staff when allocating resources across all campuses at the onset of the pandemic. They provide learners with rules on how to remain safe online. Learners follow measures such as social distancing and increased use of outdoor space to carry out learning activities safely.

Staff have noticed an increase in general anxieties among learners. They report that homelessness in young learners is also on the rise since September 2020. Leaders and staff link this to the breakdown in relationships and disruptions in learners' education and employment during the restrictions.

The welfare team provides support to learners through regular mentoring and counselling. In some lessons, teachers build in time to allow learners to talk about their personal experiences and manage their anxieties through sharing. Staff work with local authorities to help vulnerable learners access support services. They assist learners to secure accommodation, fill in housing applications and claim benefits.

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