

Halton Borough Council

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 52104

Name of lead inspector: Alex Lang, Her Majesty's Inspector

Visit dates: 1 to 2 December 2020

Type of provider: Local authority

Address: Halton Borough Council
Room 21
Kingsway Learning Centre
Victoria Road
Widnes
WA8 7QY

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

The borough of Halton is part of Liverpool City Region. The Adult Learning Service sits within the Employment, Learning and Skills Division of Halton Borough Council (HBC) and supports the key council priorities of 'employment, learning and skills'. They provide a range of accredited and non-accredited community learning programmes. HBC offer courses at entry level, level 1 and level 2 in digital skills, employability, childcare, English, mathematics and well-being. At the time of the visit, there were approximately 254 adult learners on part-time programmes. Almost 40% of learners are being supported to find a job.

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 feel that they have embraced the challenges brought as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. During restrictions, all teaching centres were closed, and many are yet to reopen. Despite learner enrolments reducing significantly, leaders have maintained an education service for adults.

HBC were the first service in the borough council to adopt the council's online teaching platform. They continue to offer a mixture of face-to-face and online learning. Leaders have maintained the full range of courses offered prior to COVID-19 restrictions. They have worked with partners to ensure the curriculum matches local skill priorities and that there are progression pathways from each course.

HBC leaders have used initiative funding, provided by stakeholders, to develop courses to improve adult literacy skills. They have trained reading mentors to deliver

one-to-one support to adults who are learning to read. Stakeholders say that they have strong working relationships with leaders and they hope the service continues to have a positive impact on their community.

Leaders work closely with schools so that learners, who are parents, can complete learning online via their child's school network. Leaders have invested in training and equipment, such as laptops and software to support tutors to deliver lessons online. Leaders have supported tutors to adapt their curriculum plans to meet the needs of learners. Tutors now feel much more confident in using technology and teach remotely.

Recently, leaders have secured additional funding to support learners who have poor access to IT. They are reviewing options to hire computers and portable Wi-Fi devices.

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 say that they have continued to use their quality processes throughout the pandemic. Managers conduct online observations of teaching and learning, and collect feedback on learners' experience through discussions and surveys. Leaders have frequent meetings with staff to monitor learners' attendance, the progress that they make and their achievements. They use these meetings to gain an understanding of any personal crises that learners experience. Actions are put in place to support learners when issues arise.

Tutors provide one-to-one support to learners, identifying and addressing any gaps in their understanding. Support lessons enable tutors to consolidate learning to embed knowledge and prepare learners for exams. Tutors set additional learning to support learners who want to progress onto further courses. Partners say that learners are well prepared to take on the challenge of higher-level learning as a result of studying at HBC.

Tutors explain that most learners have gained the necessary foundational digital skills to allow them to access learning online. For example, learners lacked the confidence to use the camera and microphone in online lessons. Tutors provided additional support to build learners confidence. Learners understand the importance of developing digital skills to enhance their future job prospects.

Leaders have adapted the curriculum and introduced courses in mindfulness, confidence building and stress management. They have also introduced short employability workshops that focus on interview techniques. These workshops have helped learners engage with different online platforms that are used for workplace interviews.

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

Leaders use information from the police and other safeguarding bodies to train staff. This ensures information shared with learners is current and relevant. For example, a rise in calls to the domestic violence helpline has prompted additional staff training in identifying the signs of abuse and how to refer concerns following organisational procedures.

Leaders have focused much of the safeguarding training on raising awareness of online risks. They have supported learners in understanding issues they may face. For example, online money scams and keeping personal data and personal devices safe.

Leaders described an increased number of learners suffering from loneliness and anxiety. They have increased contact with learners via telephone and social media. Leaders use their wide-reaching links with external agencies to provide extra support. For example, they signposted learners to a local campaign who share good news stories and promoted access to guided walks and group storytelling.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020