

# Sheffield City Council

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 54349

**Name of lead inspector:** Andrea Shepherd, Her Majesty's Inspector

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**Type of provider:** Local authority

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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.

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

Sheffield City Council's Lifelong Learning and Skills Service is located in the People Services portfolio. The service delivers education and training to adults across the city. At the time of the interim visit, there were 550 learners studying adult learning programmes, including family and community learning courses. The vast majority of learners study English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The service currently has 307 apprentices on frameworks and standards-based programmes in a range of subjects from level 2 to level 5. There are 162 learners on study programmes for young people, including 108 learners with high needs. In addition, the service delivers traineeships to 100 learners. Sheffield City Council uses 21 subcontractors to support with the delivery of their provision.

### **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 kept their main learning centre open throughout the pandemic. During the initial period of COVID-19 restrictions, this was to support vulnerable learners, the children of key workers and learners with high needs. Later, leaders supported learners and apprentices to attend the centre to complete skills-based assessments.

Leaders explained that their community learning venues remain closed due to local restrictions. Teaching for most apprentices and adult learners is remote. Leaders stated that work that they had already done to develop digital learning helped with this. For example, teachers use videoconferencing packages to teach yoga to learners in their own home.

Leaders amend the curriculum to reflect changing circumstances. They alter the order in which topics are taught so that tutors concentrate on practical skills when they teach learners face to face. Leaders now include more support for learners on study programmes to develop independent learning skills in case of increased restrictions in the future.

Leaders work with employers to make changes to assessment arrangements. They support employers to have professional discussions with apprentices on teaching assistant programmes who can no longer receive observations of their practice in the workplace. Leaders stated that there were delays in arranging final assessments for some apprentices while they were waiting for guidance from awarding organisations.

Leaders explained their commitment to providing a programme of activities to support learners to engage with each other. For example, tutors encourage adult learners who study ESOL to join virtual learning cafes. This gives learners the opportunity to discuss and receive support about current issues, such as government guidance on COVID-19 restrictions.

Subcontractors appreciate the flexibility and support that they receive from leaders and managers. Staff from community organisations have been able to renegotiate contracts in recognition of changed circumstances and attend staff training delivered by the council. Managers supported subcontractors with the calculation of teacher-assessed grades.

### **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 provide resources to learners to help them develop knowledge and skills at home. Tutors maintain telephone contact and send learning materials through the post to learners who lack the skills or confidence to join online classes. For example, tutors send seed kits to learners with high needs who study horticulture.

Tutors use a range of different methods to check learners' and apprentices' learning and inform further teaching. At the start of the period of COVID-19 restrictions, they called learners at home to identify gaps in knowledge and skills. Tutors create opportunities for small group discussions, video learners and apprentices demonstrating skills and use quizzes to assess progress.

Managers said that they revised careers information and guidance materials to respond to changing career and progression opportunities created by the pandemic. Tutors provide extra support to learners who have not attended formal education since the start of the pandemic. They help learners to identify the reason for joining their chosen study programme and what they want to achieve from it.

Leaders outlined steps that they take to overcome barriers to online learning. They work with partners and other council departments to provide reconditioned laptops

to learners with no access to a computer. Tutors support adult learners to use online resources to access the curriculum content at a time to suit their personal circumstances.

Leaders provide staff with a range of training and support to adapt to new ways of teaching. They appointed 'digital champions' to help staff to plan online classes. Tutors appreciate the guidance that they receive to improve their digital skills.

Managers continue to monitor the quality of the curriculum. They adapt procedures to check how tutors teach and assess. Managers believe that increasing the frequency of team meetings enables them to support tutors to deliver an adapted curriculum and address any problems.

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

Leaders implement a range of strategies to monitor learners' well-being. Tutors and mentors make telephone calls to learners and carry out socially distanced home visits, if necessary. Managers deliver food parcels, and use this as an opportunity to check on learners' welfare. Tutors use enrichment activities, such as clubs, to help learners to talk about their experiences.

Leaders provide staff with information about risks that could affect learners and apprentices. They work with other local authority departments to provide additional support to learners and apprentices who experience difficulties.

Staff complete mandatory training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Some tutors attend other more specific training sessions on gambling awareness and recognising signs of domestic abuse.

Tutors provide learners with information on how to keep themselves safe. They cover topics such as COVID-19 safety, county lines and mental health awareness. Tutors support learners to behave safely online. They provide information about using safe search terms and how to check internet links.

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