

Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Sixth form 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 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

Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College operates from two main campuses in the borough of Stockport: the Cheadle College, and Marple Sixth Form College. The college provides academic and vocational 16 to 19 education programmes for young people and a small number of adult courses.

At the time of the interim visit, 1,709 students were enrolled at the college. Of these, 1,558 are aged 16 to 19 and 151 were adults. The college receives funding for 60 students who have high needs. The vast majority of young people study at level 3. The largest number of students who study A-level subjects are in psychology, mathematics, law, biology, chemistry and business. The largest number of students who study vocational subjects are in sport, health and social care, criminology and business.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of students and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders responded appropriately to the disruption to learning caused by COVID-19 restrictions. They implemented a strategy to deliver most learning online. Students had access to a full timetable of lessons online during this period.

Leaders quickly identified students who were not able to access learning online and provided them with computers. They provided additional training to staff to enable them to become more confident to use digital teaching methods.

Leaders told us about an increased number of students with mental health concerns or anxiety. For example, some students' families experienced financial difficulties. College staff arranged food supplies for them through a local food bank.

In September, teachers assessed students' skills and knowledge to identify if they had fallen behind in their studies as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Students who were new to the college had an extended induction period to ensure that they settled in and could cope with the demands of their course. Staff provided additional support to students who had fallen behind to help them to catch up and improve their grades.

Since September, students have benefited from a full timetable taught face to face in college. During the national restrictions introduced in November, students attended at least half of their lessons in college with the remainder being taught online.

Leaders continue to use established processes to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Managers complete learning walks of face-to-face and online learning to assess their quality. Managers seek the views of students on a regular basis, and students have told them they are glad to be back in college.

Partners and parents said that the college has been responsive throughout the pandemic. New students attending the college for the first time from school or from a pupil referral unit were supported to settle into college. Employers said that students on childcare courses accessed online teaching sessions throughout the pandemic.

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 students?

Managers explained how they reviewed the curriculum and made changes. For example, teachers in early years now teach the safeguarding, communication and behaviour units together so that students understand how it relates to work place practice. Managers created bespoke timetables to support the re-engagement of students.

Teachers identify gaps in students' knowledge through a range of assessments. Students receive individual support to deal with any specific gaps in knowledge. For example, students with high needs receive individual tuition on letter formation. A-level students in Year 13 attend remote sessions with Year 12 students to provide peer support.

Students apply and extend the knowledge they gain in lessons through collaborative project work. For example, media students reviewed the social media and webpages of a commercial company and presented their findings to the employer. This developed students' digital and communication skills and gave them a better understanding of the industry.

Teachers value the peer observation system. They feel that this informs and improves their practice. Leaders felt that peer observation developed teachers' skills in using digital technology. For example, teachers observed the use of questioning techniques through interactive slides. They used this in their own lessons to improve the student experience.

Leaders told us that they assessed the health and additional support needs of students with high needs before they returned to college. Managers found that some students with autism spectrum disorder struggled to return to college and engage in learning. Tutors and external agencies provided individual support to help students' transition back into college.

Leaders and managers explained the difficulties in securing work placements for students. As a result, the college is piloting virtual work placements. For example, creative media students are taking part in a project to design product packaging for a large chocolate manufacturer.

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

Managers quickly implemented a leadership group to respond to the challenges that the pandemic created. Leaders provided frequent safeguarding training and updates for staff. Staff received training on how to teach safely whilst using online learning platforms.

Leaders worked very closely with the local authority and other agencies to identify vulnerable students who were at risk. Working collaboratively, they provided a range of support to an increased number of students, including access to mental health professionals.

Students said they felt safe and knew who to contact at the college if they had a concern for their safety. They understood the importance of keeping themselves safe when working online. They were aware of the importance of using the correct privacy settings to protect them from being groomed or 'phishing' of their emails.

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