

Derby Skillbuild

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	51525
Name of lead inspector:	Saul Pope, Her Majesty's Inspector
Visit date(s):	10 to 11 December 2020
Type of provider:	Not for profit organisation
Address:	Moor Lane Allenton Derby DE24 9HY

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

Derby Skillbuild is a charitable limited company based in Allenton, Derby. All learners are aged between 16 and 18 and enrolled on vocational studies courses at level 1. Many of them were disengaged from mainstream school or further education, and are identified as vulnerable. Learners study English and mathematics, units to develop their skills for study and employment, and a variety of optional vocational units. These include plumbing, electrical installation, music, sport, health and social care and childcare. At the time of the visit, there were 26 learners studying at the provider.

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?

Early in the first period of national restrictions, newly-appointed leaders identified that they would best meet learners' needs if they studied on site rather than studying at home. Leaders ensured that the main site was COVID-safe and then invited learners back to classroom-based study. They prioritised vulnerable learners first, followed by other learners that they and tutors had concerns about. Tutors worked supportively with learners and their parents if they were worried about returning to classroom learning.

Leaders have altered the curriculum so that it now offers learners a broad mix of vocational subjects. This gives learners career options that they would not otherwise consider, such as more female learners developing plumbing skills and more male learners gaining an interest in health and social care. Leaders promote high expectations for learners through a formal course interview process and a workplace-like approach to dealing with poor attendance.

Leaders and managers have focused on improving support for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use initial course interviews to ensure that they meet the needs of learners with SEND, rather than relying on education, health and care plans to provide support, as these are sometimes outdated.

Managers and tutors recognise that during the last academic year, many learners missed important elements of their English and mathematics courses. At the start of this year, tutors adopted a more rigorous approach to assessing learners' starting points. They teach learners in small groups, including one-to-one sessions, so that they can focus on individual gaps in knowledge.

Leaders have found it difficult to work with external organisations during national restrictions. For example, they have not been able to arrange on-site visits from employers or organisations offering careers information, advice and guidance. This limits learners' exposure to the world of work, and their ability to make realistic career decisions. Leaders, managers and tutors recognise that they should make improvements within these areas.

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?

Once learners returned on site, managers and tutors focused on enabling them to complete their qualifications. They also supported learners with their personal well-being. For example, learners wrote a letter to their future selves about how they were feeling during the restrictions.

Tutors focus closely on building learners' confidence through team-building activities and encouraging them to have a positive mindset when it comes to learning. Learners have settled into the new term. Most attend classes well and work confidently with their peers.

Learners access assignments, course materials and lesson notes using Derby Skillbuild's virtual learning environment (VLE). Tutors provide feedback to learners via the VLE. During classroom sessions, tutors use digital quizzes to check learners' understanding of key topics. Learners have adapted well to these newly-introduced approaches, for example, completing assignments and making alterations to them using word processing. Most are making expected or better progress.

If learners cannot attend classes, they work remotely using online resources. Tutors use in-person catch-up sessions to check that learners have understood key topics. In the event of further restrictions preventing learners from attending campus, tutors plan to teach live lessons using videoconferencing.

Managers and tutors use individualised reviews to check learners' progress. They feel that these are a useful source of motivation for learners. Tutors review learners' written English during reviews, for example, by picking up on spelling mistakes in assignments. However, they do not use reviews to identify wider pastoral or well-being issues that may be affecting learners.

Leaders assess the quality of teaching through observing lessons and reviewing online materials that tutors have produced. Staff at all levels report a constructive, supportive approach to quality assurance, which makes it easier to improve teaching. At the time of the visit, leaders had not conducted a formal survey of current learners' experiences.

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

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) recently refreshed the safeguarding policies and procedures, including the online safety policy. The DSL and tutors have completed updated general safeguarding training, as well as training on specific safeguarding themes such as county lines and female genital mutilation. Leaders have recently upgraded the IT system to better monitor learners' online activity.

Learners know who they should contact if they have a safeguarding-related concern. They feel safe at the site and value recent improvements to security measures, such as the electronic entrance gate. Learners recall covering online safety and COVID-related safety during their induction, but have only a vague understanding of topics such as radicalisation and county lines. Leaders recognise that they need to include more of these and other safeguarding themes within the curriculum, for example increased content about online safety.

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