

Hopwood Hall College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130507
Name of lead inspector:	Alastair Mollon, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Middleton Campus Rochdale Road Middleton Manchester Greater Manchester M24 6XH

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 (SEND).

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

Hopwood Hall College is a further education college, set on two sites situated five miles apart: the Rochdale campus, in the centre of Rochdale, and the Middleton campus, in the green belt eight miles north of Manchester. The college has approximately 5,800 students enrolled on courses from entry level to degree level across 14 subject sector areas. Around 3,000 learners are enrolled on education programmes for young people. Nearly 40% of young people study an advanced level 3 vocational programme, with a similar number studying at level 2. There are just under 2,000 learners on adult programmes. Over half of adult learners study at entry level or level 1. There are just under 400 apprentices who study programmes between level 2 and level 5. The college has a small number of learners on higher education and community learning courses. There are 110 learners in receipt of high-needs funding. At the time of the visit, the college did not work with any subcontractors.

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 and managers say that they felt well prepared for COVID-19 restrictions and acted quickly when these were imposed. Teachers already used the college's virtual learning environment to teach their courses. Leaders provided a wide range of support for those teachers and learners who were not as familiar with the college's online systems. This meant that when the need arose, they were able to immediately move all teaching online with very little disruption.

Leaders set up working groups to check on staff and learners' welfare and to resolve any emerging issues. They provided laptops and dongles to ensure that staff and learners could access online learning from home.

Leaders kept the college open for their most vulnerable learners while they developed a clear plan to re-introduce staff and learners to life on campus. They ensured that those with SEND received extra academic and pastoral support. Leaders and managers set up virtual tours, assessed needs, altered timetables and instigated a safe, phased return and transition to face-to-face teaching and learning.

Leaders and managers recognise the impact COVID-19 restrictions have had on staff and learners' mental health and feelings of isolation. They employ an occupational health adviser to support staff and learners to maintain positive mental health and well-being. All staff receive training in being 'trauma-informed'. This helps them identify potential issues and to support colleagues and learners.

Leaders spoke about their work with stakeholders, such as a local not-for-profit training organisation, the local authority and education partners across the north west. Partners say that they continued their joint offer of a bespoke curriculum for people from marginalised backgrounds during the pandemic. The college ensured that on-site training could continue in a COVID-19-safe environment. This meant that learners could gain their construction skills certification scheme card and access work opportunities.

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 described how they supported teachers to develop a flexible and innovative curriculum since the start of the pandemic. Learners studying science complete practical work from home via a video link with college technicians. Adult learners learn flexibly to suit their family and work commitments. Apprentices studying hospitality have remote end-point assessments instead of live observations.

Leaders and managers continued to assure the quality of teaching and learning. They carried out actual and virtual learning walks. Managers supported and encouraged staff to adapt their online curriculum to meet the needs of learners, including those with SEND and with high needs. Since returning to on-site lessons, teachers continue to change the order of teaching to support learning. In hair and beauty, learners focus on theoretical aspects until they can meet clients safely to complete the practical elements of their course.

In the summer, leaders prioritised college access for learners and apprentices who had been unable to complete practical work during COVID-19 restrictions. Learners and apprentices attended sessions to catch up with their skills development and complete assessments in areas such as construction and catering. Staff are working

hard to secure work placements for learners in health and social care and early years.

Teachers received a range of professional development training in addition to mandatory courses. They attended sessions on how to develop their learners' long-term memory, check understanding and build exam resilience. Teachers feel that this has given them more confidence to teach and assess remotely.

Leaders provide coordinated, borough-wide careers advice and guidance, both virtually and face to face with the local sixth-form college. They helped to ensure that all school leavers in Rochdale were able to access a suitable course for September 2020. Teachers make sure that learners and apprentices access a range of resources to help them make informed careers choices. Learners attend tutorials and watch videos from employers to find out what it is like to work in their chosen sector.

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

When COVID-19 restrictions prevented face-to-face teaching, leaders prioritised wraparound support, including providing food parcels, and finance and physical checks for their most vulnerable learners.

During the pandemic, staff contacted learners and apprentices regularly to monitor their well-being and to check on their progress. Apprentices appreciate the support and encouragement they have received from teachers.

Leaders have invested additional funding for a mental health practitioner to support staff and learners. They employed additional safety and welfare support officers and used links with external agencies to develop a coordinated approach of wider support for learners. This included support for an increasing demand for help with social, domestic and health challenges.

Learners and apprentices say that they feel safe in and around college and when learning online. Pastoral tutors cover topics around online safety and keeping learners safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Learners understand the need to social distance, wear masks and wash their hands.

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