

# Hills Road Sixth Form College

Interim visit report

---

<b>Unique reference number:</b>	130615
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Penny Fawcus, Her Majesty's Inspector
<b>Visit dates:</b>	8 to 9 December 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Sixth-form college
<b>Address:</b>	Hills Road Cambridge CB2 8PE

## 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

Hills Road Sixth Form College operates on a single site on the southern edge of Cambridge. At the time of the visit, there were 2,641 level 3 students aged 16 to 19. All students are on A-level study programmes. The college offers 35 A-level subjects, including the extended project qualification. There are 13 students with high needs.

Hills Road students have a higher-than-average GCSE profile on entry to the college. Most students progress on to university, including many to the most competitive higher education providers. The college has no 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 decided that to provide a broad curriculum safely to their students, they would need to move teaching online. They concentrated on providing a high-quality learning experience that students would value. They consulted with staff and students to plan the curriculum. Leaders increased their communication with staff, students and parents to reassure them and share the changes.

Leaders and staff say the enhanced communication has developed a sense of community and collaboration. They describe a constant network of troubleshooting and sharing ideas. Leaders provided training for staff to ensure that they can adapt to teaching online with confidence. Staff appreciate this and feel well cared for by leaders.

Leaders completed a risk assessment before returning to face-to-face teaching. They reviewed campus constraints for social distancing and surveyed staff and students to understand their concerns about returning on site. Leaders then took appropriate action. For example, they invested in marquees to provide more social space. They reflected on what elements of the curriculum could continue to be provided online.

Leaders provided staff and students with technology and internet access where needed. They listened to, and acted on, student feedback about learning from home. They monitored student participation in online learning during national restrictions. Leaders considered the high attendance to virtual induction activities for new students. Therefore, they are confident that every student is accessing and participating in online learning.

Parents and the director for education services at Cambridge and Peterborough spoke about leaders' positive response to the national restrictions. They described the measured planning to continue teaching students in a COVID-19-safe environment. They told inspectors about the wraparound support for students and leaders' focus on student well-being.

Leaders carry out lesson visits to check the quality of classroom and online learning. This has helped them to cascade ideas, provide support and share best practice with teachers. Leaders have identified teachers experienced in using digital technology to provide remote learning to larger groups. This has released more staff to be able to teach and coach small groups of students who may be at risk of falling behind with their studies. Leaders report that progress checks show a marked improvement on last year. They say that student attendance and retention are higher than in previous years.

**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?**

Managers feel that changes made because of the pandemic have resulted in improvements. They have a blended curriculum that links one week of online lessons with face-to-face lessons the following week. Lessons in college start with an assessment of the knowledge and skills students have gained online. Teachers prioritise practical skills acquisition and knowledge application during face-to-face lessons.

Staff are proud of the resources they have produced to support online learning. All online lessons are live and recorded. Students value these recordings and use them for their revision or catch up. Staff say that students' work and progress are much easier to see with online learning tools. They feel they are now quicker to identify and act upon any issues with students' learning or progress.

Students recognise what the college has done to ensure that their learning is not affected. They enjoy the breakout rooms and use of interactive tools. They feel online lessons are helping to reinforce their knowledge and skills. In chemistry, students have been better able to grasp difficult concepts of rules, mechanisms and types of reactions.

Parents told us about the good academic progress they felt was being made despite national restrictions. They credit this with regular assessments, feedback and

progress reviews. They say staff communicate with them and are swift to contact them to discuss any concerns.

Leaders recognise that students prefer face-to-face teaching. Parents say reduced face-to-face social interaction has been particularly difficult for new students. Staff mitigate this by creating social media peer groups and breakout rooms during online lessons.

Staff moved the tutorial, careers and enrichment programme online. They provide students with guest speakers, virtual mock interviews, employment and apprenticeship support, virtual work experience and gap year planning. They help students online with their university applications. They send students regular newsletters covering topics such as well-being and study skills.

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

Students say they feel safe and know how to report concerns. Parents and the director for education services at Cambridge and Peterborough told us that leaders focus on students' well-being, as well as their academic progress.

Staff describe the regular contact and support for vulnerable students and those with high needs. Tutors have additionally identified students considered to be at risk because of the national restrictions. Leaders have arrangements in place for these students to come on site for pastoral and learning support. Leaders told us about well-being concerns that have emerged during lockdown. These include eating disorders and mental health issues. The college's mental health steering group focuses on these concerns.

Leaders have updated safeguarding policies because of the pandemic. Staff told us that they recognise signs to look out for when teaching online. These include changes in behaviour and difficult home situations.

Teachers say the pandemic has made safeguarding topics more relatable to students. It provided teachers with the opportunity to increase students' awareness of online safety, extremist views and fake news.

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](mailto: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/](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2020