

Woodhouse 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 and apprentices 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.

Information about the provider

Woodhouse College is a sixth form college situated in the south-eastern part of the London Borough of Barnet and close to the adjacent boroughs of Haringey and Enfield. Around three quarters of its students live in these three areas and the rest come from elsewhere in north London with a few from central London and Hertfordshire.

The College offers A-level courses only and mainly appeals to young people who anticipate going to university.

At the time of the visit, 1,475 students were enrolled on courses in 26 subject areas. Most students study three A levels over two years.

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 describe how the timetabling of the college day has radically changed since fully reopening in September. Now, students learn in blocks of two and a half hours. Study time and tutorials, including pastoral support, take place online. Leaders say that this pattern of learning reduces the number of people in college at any one time by about 40%. Vulnerable students and those without space to study at home stay on site. They can join other classes and study in the library.

Leaders explained that students new to the college had a longer induction period than usual. Teachers used this to identify gaps in learning caused by the disruption to students' education earlier in the year. Managers say students need practice with reading and study skills. They also need to reinforce personal habits such as eating and sleeping well and keeping physically active.

Managers say that the new timetable means that teachers have more time to teach the curriculum content in depth. They also have time to recap on previously taught content from the year before.

Managers acknowledge that the revised timetable and online learning does not suit all students. For example, students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder need more frequent breaks. Teachers receive training on online teaching strategies for students with hearing and visual impairments. They now wear visors instead of face coverings so that students can lip read, and they put subtitles on videos.

Staff continue to offer one-to-one careers interviews online. They also run career workshops in various subjects including medicine, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Leaders think that new students who do not know other college students at the start of the year miss the social aspects of being in college. This is because activities such as debating societies, groups and clubs cannot run face-to-face due to social distancing measures.

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?

Teachers describe the changes made to the curriculum as a result of safety considerations and the introduction of remote learning. In mathematics, teachers plan to teach complex topics such as trigonometry and calculus face-to-face. In geography, mock field trips, which take place on the college site instead of in the community, help students acquire data collection skills.

Students acknowledge that most teachers use technology well in lessons. They say they can link the content taught when learning remotely to the topics taught in class. For example, in chemistry students have home reading activities to complete before the teacher introduces a new topic. Students summarise their understanding then share their thoughts with teachers in online lessons. Teachers believe this encourages a deeper level of group discussion.

Teachers say they use the results of mock examinations and assessments to identify the areas of learning students struggle with. In English, teachers note that students in the lower sixth form need support with organising ideas for a long piece of writing. They also plan to practise skills in analysing passages from unseen literature later in the year.

Leaders and managers report that they have successfully put measures in place to help students catch up. These include additional booster sessions as well as recap time in the longer lessons. As a result, leaders say that students' knowledge and understanding of subject content is at or above the level expected at this time of year.

Teachers say they improve their online teaching skills through the training they receive, and by sharing ideas with each other. An information technology champion shows teachers how to live stream and record their lessons. Managers join online lessons and give verbal feedback to teachers on how they can improve.

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

At the beginning of the pandemic, leaders identified from existing records their students most at risk. Leaders made sure that these students had access to a computer, good internet connection and the space to learn at home safely.

During lockdown, students and their parents or carers received frequent newsletters by email reminding them of the college's safeguarding contact details. Leaders say that parents felt able to ask them about supporting their children with issues such as gaming addiction and eating disorders.

Students speak positively about their learning environment, calling it 'friendly, healthy and safe'. They know that the closure of the social space helps with social distancing and understand why they need to wear face coverings in the college. Students know who to contact if they have concerns about their safety or well-being.

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