

Wandsworth London Borough Council

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 53152

Name of lead inspector: Gayle Saundry, Her Majesty's Inspector

Visit dates: 25 to 26 November 2020

Type of provider: Local authority

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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

Wandsworth Lifelong Learning is part of the children's services department of Wandsworth Borough Council. The local authority delivers adult learning programmes and apprenticeships. They currently have 57 apprentices, most of whom are completing business management and business administration standards apprenticeships. The local authority also delivers adult learning programmes to 788 learners directly, and through their seven subcontracted providers.

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?

In March 2020, leaders moved their teaching from face-to-face to online. They have decided to continue teaching online this term due to safety concerns from their learners and their confidence in the quality of their online teaching. Their subcontractors mostly returned to face-to-face delivery following the end of lockdown.

Leaders have adapted the way in which they work with their subcontractors. They now focus on providing courses that develop employability skills, rather than those that provide leisure activities. Leaders considered local labour market information and feedback from organisations, such as Job Centre Plus, when planning their curriculum this year. For example, they have introduced short employability courses to support local people who may recently have lost their jobs. They have also introduced a course in health and social care, in response to the local demand for care workers.

Leaders evaluate the quality of their teaching by visiting online lessons, reviewing learners' work and by requesting feedback from learners. They hold frequent meetings with their subcontractors to monitor the quality of the training they provide.

Leaders have changed the way they work to support their staff during the pandemic. They increased the frequency of their staff meetings from monthly to weekly and have introduced meeting ice-breaker activities to encourage staff to share their interests with their colleagues.

Leaders have adopted new approaches to recruiting learners this year. These have included allowing learners to try online courses before they sign up, and by advertising their courses through local community leaders.

Leaders have ordered a number of laptops which they will shortly offer to their learners who do not have access to a laptop for their lessons. Leaders recognise that apprentices are finding it difficult to learn mathematics and English online and continue to work on solutions to improve this part of their teaching.

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?

Tutors adapted the way they were teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, they now teach evening lessons so that learners in the healthcare industry are able to attend after they finish work. Tutors have also changed what they teach, for instance introducing lessons on time management to support their apprentices, many of whom are working from home.

Leaders have supported staff to develop the skills they need to teach online. They have provided one-to-one support and training on topics such as how to use online assessment tools. Tutors use their new skills in lessons, for example sharing their screen with learners to demonstrate how to write a formula in excel.

Tutors have sent lesson resources by email and designed their lessons to be accessible to those using a smartphone, to support learners who do not have access to a laptop. Through one of their subcontractors, tutors have taught essential digital skills courses to more than 100 learners who are new to learning online.

Leaders recognise that online learning is less effective for some learners, for instance those studying construction who are unable to develop their practical skills. They are looking at different solutions for each course. They have introduced virtual coffee breaks so that English for speakers of other languages are able to practise speaking English socially with their peers.

Learners are grateful for the support of their tutors, and for the ability to continue learning during the pandemic. Apprentices, however, have missed the variety that

face-to-face learning brings, as online lessons represent more time spent working at their desk at home.

Leaders found that learner attendance fell at the start of lockdown and responded to this by speaking with learners individually. Leaders adopted a similar approach in the autumn term and report that, as a result, levels of attendance are high.

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

During the pandemic, tutors focused on regular communication with learners through well-being phone calls. Learners feel safe and know who they should contact if they have any concerns.

Tutors teach learners about how to stay safe online, including the risks of responding to phishing emails. Tutors have set out rules for behaviour during online lessons which include the need to dress appropriately.

Tutors teach learners about well-being and mental health during lessons. They have also taught learners about how to stay safe during the pandemic. Tutors of hearing-impaired learners have helped them to understand news updates, where the sign language available contains technical language with which they are not familiar.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding have recently added photographs of themselves to their website and course brochures, so that learners attending lessons with their subcontractors know who they are and how to contact them if they have any concerns.

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