

# Birtenshaw

Interim visit report

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Maura Cummins, Her Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Address:</b>	Crompton Way Bolton Greater Manchester BL2 2PE

## 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.

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

Birtenshaw College is part of Birtenshaw, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, which was established in the 1950s to support children with disabilities. The college was set up in 2014 as a subcontractor of a local further education college in response to a local need. It achieved independent status in 2016. The college provides specialist education and support for young people aged 16 to 25 years who have a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and complex health needs. At the time of the visit, there were 47 learners aged 19 to 24 years enrolled on programmes ranging from pre-entry to Level 2.

### **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 kept the college open throughout the COVID-19 restrictions to support learners that could attend. However, many learners opted to learn at home. As a result, staff worked in learner's supported living accommodation. They supported learners with their independent living skills such as cooking and gardening.

Leaders worked with parents and external agencies to identify the needs of learners following an extended period away from college. Parents say that they received regular updates on learners' progress and felt supported by staff. Staff completed assessments on learners' return to college in September 2020 and updated education, health and care plans accordingly. A minority of learners who were due to complete their programme in July 2020 were unable to access work placements during COVID-19 restrictions. Their programme was extended by a year to prepare them for the workplace.

Leaders work with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities organisations to ensure that staff have up-to-date knowledge. Staff use this professional development to support learners to become more independent.

Leaders recognise that as learner numbers have increased, the educational needs of new learners have altered. Previously most learners had complex needs, currently a quarter of new learners have moderate needs and are working at entry level to level two. Leaders have introduced more curriculum pathways to meet these needs. Learners that use wheelchairs has increased. As a result, leaders have modified accommodation to allow for easier access to learning.

Leaders have replaced learners' external work placements with internal work experience. For example, learners now develop occupational experiences such as housekeeping, reception duties, working on the farm and horticulture. Employers deliver online demonstrations to complement learners' in-college work experience. For example, chefs provide masterclasses in pastry and pizza making. As a result, learners can develop new skills and showcase their learning to potential employers.

**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 and teachers explained the challenges that learners' parents faced while home educating their young people through COVID-19 restrictions. Online video calls from teachers helped parents to support their young people's development. Staff worked with learners' parents to support their young people's learning. For example, learners with a target of improving their motor grip, had parental support to walk their dog. This enabled learners to improve their grip over time.

Teachers have adapted the curriculum due to COVID-19 restrictions. They identified that learners would not be able to take part in external activities. They have replaced visits to public places with safer alternatives. For example, learners have ordered ingredients for recipes through an online click and collect service. Learners have then travelled on the college minibus to collect items from the shop. This has taught learners how to handle money, plan budgets and shop safely during COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders and teachers explained how they have become more creative and innovative in adapting their teaching. They have engaged with sector specialists to provide online learning, such as music therapy. Teachers feel that they have worked well together to adapt teaching and share learning resources to meet the needs of their learners. This has allowed them to cover each other's classes during illness or self-isolation.

During on site lessons, learners group in 'bubbles' to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Teachers now use online video links to engage with learners in different

classrooms. Learners have started to use this technology to celebrate the birthdays of peers in different bubbles. Teachers say this has increased learners' confidence in communication while using online communications. Leaders are planning to use this technology to engage learners in class discussions.

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

Leaders check that learners understand how to keep safe in and out of college, including staying safe online. The curriculum covers national awareness topics, including road safety, anti-bullying and world kindness day. These sessions reinforce the skills and knowledge learners need to stay safe.

Leaders have updated risk assessments considering COVID-19 restrictions. They have adapted transport arrangements to include the use of Perspex shields for minibus drivers and mandatory mask wearing for staff and learners. Learners remain in their bubbles during college time and when using minibuses. Vulnerable learners with complex needs are placed in their own separate bubble alongside staff that support them.

Visual displays in college inform learners about washing hands and social distancing. Leaders say that the learners have adapted well to the changes as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Learners join staff in hourly cleaning routines and taking staff's and learners' temperatures.

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