

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	54317
Name of lead inspector:	Ruth Stammers, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Local authority
Address:	South Sefton Adult Education Centre Cambridge Road Seaforth Liverpool L21 1EZ

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 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

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) manages Sefton Community Learning Service (SCLS) within its economic growth and housing division. Programmes are offered in 13 venues, including libraries, community centres and children's centres. At the time of the visit, there were 114 adult learners with most studying level 1 programmes and a few studying at level 2. Programmes are available in 14 subject areas with most learners studying English, mathematics and employability courses. Around one in five courses lead to a formal qualification.

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 altered the courses they offered due to COVID-19 restrictions. They paused most courses for leisure, such as arts and crafts. Courses that lead to formal qualifications such as English and mathematics continued online. This allowed learners who needed a qualification for employment or to progress to further education to continue to learn.

Once restrictions were lifted, face-to-face teaching resumed. Leaders reported an increase in the uptake of leisure courses such as sewing and floristry. The majority of learners on these programmes felt socially isolated during the pandemic. Leaders say returning to the classroom has given learners the opportunity to socialise with others.

Leaders liaise with other departments within the council to identify employment opportunities for learners. For example, during the summer, they worked with 'Green

Sefton' on environmental improvement initiatives. Learners worked alongside council staff to clean the beaches and provide crowd control.

Leaders report a larger number of learners being made redundant after being employed for many years. They have devised courses in interview skills and Curriculum Vitae (CV) writing for those learners who have not applied for jobs for a long period of time. They are confident that this will give learners the skills they need to gain employment in the future.

Leaders are developing the 'kickstart' programme for those unemployed aged 19 to 24 years. Topics include confidence building, motivation and online interview skills. Leaders are confident that this initiative will lead to jobs within the council and other employers in the region.

Leaders say their biggest challenge is the drop identified in learner numbers since the start of the pandemic. Although there is an increase in learners on leisure courses, there are significantly lower numbers on other programmes across the service. Leaders believe this is due to the high rate of infection in the local area. Leaders are promoting COVID-19 safety messages to increase learners' confidence to return.

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 tutors say they were prepared for the period of COVID-19 restrictions. They updated resources so that tutors could access necessary documentation when working from home remotely. Tutors identified those learners who could not access online learning at home. As an alternative, learners studying English and mathematics were provided with revision books to continue their learning. This meant that they could continue to make progress on their qualifications.

Tutors adapted their delivery methods due to COVID-19 restrictions. For example, the community interpreters award was taught online via video software. Learners continued to demonstrate their skills via video link and were successful in gaining their qualifications. A few learners are now working with community groups to interpret COVID-19 safety guidelines for non-English speakers.

Leaders provided a range of training for tutors that has helped them to develop their skills and confidence to teach online. Tutors provide feedback electronically, use the chat facility and upload useful website links. They provide useful resources to help learners make informed careers choices and post careers opportunities on social media.

During the pandemic, tutors took the opportunity to enhance the learning resources available in their online learning environment. For example, learners studying mathematics can access video clips on percentages and fractions. In the event of

further restrictions, leaders and managers are confident that they now have in place the necessary teaching and learning strategies to continue learning without disruption.

Tutors feel very proud of how they worked collaboratively during the pandemic. They willingly support each other by sharing ideas and resources. They speak highly of the support they have received from leaders.

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

Leaders encouraged learners to take part in 'Active Sefton' during COVID-19 restrictions. This council-led initiative is open to all Sefton residents and included free online fitness classes. Leaders say this was designed to ensure learners remained active and to improve their physical and mental well-being.

Leaders provide regular training events in online safety for staff. This enables tutors to pass on their knowledge to learners. Learners know the importance of dress codes in online lessons and keeping their online settings private.

Staff continued to support the 'community pantry' throughout the pandemic. This service provides food, clothing and toys for vulnerable families in the area. Some learners donate items and volunteer their time, other learners use the pantry to support their families. Leaders say the pantry is a vital part of the community that has provided support during financial hardship.

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