

Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority

Progress monitoring report

Unique reference number:	54636
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Inspection dates:	27–28 January 2021
Type of provider:	Local authority
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority was last inspected in June 2019. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to be inadequate.

This monitoring visit focused on the extent to which leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. It was undertaken as outlined in the [operational note on visits carried out from January 2021](#) and with reference to the further education and skills handbook.

These 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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, inspectors carried out this monitoring activity remotely. As a result, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would be the case during an on-site inspection. Therefore, this report provides a more limited level of assurance.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgement below. Inspectors did not evaluate leaders' response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer of 2020, when the provider was not open to all learners and there were no national expectations regarding remote education.

Theme

What progress are leaders and those responsible for governance making to ensure that staff teach a curriculum and provide support to meet learners' needs, including the provision of remote/online learning?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders now focus sharply on actions to improve the quality of education. They use a wide range of information to plan and direct specific training for teachers to improve identified weaknesses in their practice. In particular, leaders ensure that teachers use information on learners' starting points routinely to plan learning, so that learners and apprentices achieve their best. However, leaders accept that they do not know whether teachers do this consistently well.

Leaders use information about learners' destinations well to adapt their curriculum offer and monitor whether courses provide learners with the knowledge to move into

their intended careers. They also make changes to respond to regional skills needs. This includes provision to support individuals facing redundancy as a result of the pandemic.

Governance structures and oversight are now well established. Governors monitor carefully leaders' actions to improve the quality of education. They question leaders' curriculum strategy, so that the curriculum offer meets the skills needs of the region. They also use information about learners' achievements and destinations effectively to challenge leaders where too few learners move towards their intended next steps. They accept, however, that they do not have sufficiently helpful information to evaluate fully learners' progress from their respective starting points, limiting their evaluation of leaders' performance overall.

As a result of the training and support they have received, most teachers plan work to meet the individual needs of learners. They order topics appropriately, so that learners build sequentially on their knowledge and can consolidate their understanding. For example, in introductory health and social care, teachers ensure that learners have a good understanding of the structure and function of the English healthcare system, so that they can focus clearly on their future learning and career goals. However, in entry-level English, teachers do not always identify sufficiently learners' starting points with their English-speaking skills. Consequently, these learners do not practise these skills to improve their confidence and spoken English well enough.

Teachers help learners to familiarise themselves quickly with learning remotely, setting them at ease by providing step-by-step guides in using software functions. They ensure that, where possible, learners have access to devices, software and other learning materials, such as paper-based resource packs. Teachers use a range of software effectively to assess learners' understanding, including face-to-face sessions in virtual breakout rooms and capturing written evidence using online applications. However, in a few cases, teachers fail to help learners understand and secure new knowledge in their memory. They do not explain clearly enough or present information in different ways, so that learners can make links with, and remember, new information. For example, verbal descriptions of new concepts are not simple enough for learners to understand.

Teachers provide learners with appropriate and helpful feedback to improve their work. They routinely provide information about next steps and future activities, so that learners can research topics for future sessions, helping them to consolidate and build on their knowledge. Learners on distance learning courses do not always receive sufficiently helpful feedback to ensure that they fully understand the required knowledge.

At the time of the visit, there was no on-site provision.

Leaders review carefully how their curriculum plans meet learners' career goals and meet employers' skills needs. They ensure that learners receive accurate information about their course, and recruit other council agencies, such as the careers and

advice team, to provide learners with specific and helpful information about their respective career pathways. As a result, learners and apprentices are well informed about how their course will help them achieve their career goals.

Teachers routinely provide learners with appropriate information and discuss topics about safeguarding and British values, including staying safe online. Learners receive effective support to help with their mental and physical health. Leaders and teachers monitor carefully learners' behaviour and attendance and refer learners to relevant agencies and organisations for support if needed, including counselling, and advice around domestic abuse and drug and alcohol misuse.

Most teachers provide learners with effective online support and work with the council's technicians, so that learners can access information and contribute effectively during remote sessions. However, not all learners can access the necessary technology to participate fully in lessons.

Leaders and managers ensure that teachers receive a safeguarding newsletter to reflect issues related to, and exacerbated by, the pandemic, including financial scams, fake news, bullying, domestic violence, county lines and gang-related activity. Teachers share this information routinely with learners.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to ensure that:

- they have sufficiently helpful information so that they can evaluate accurately learners' progress from their respective starting points, and identify swiftly where learners do not achieve their best
- teachers develop the knowledge and skills required to plan teaching to help learners understand and secure new knowledge in their long-term memory consistently well
- all learners can access the appropriate technology to participate fully in their learning.

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