

Bemix

Progress monitoring report

Unique reference number:	144788
Name of lead inspector:	Andy Fitt, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent specialist college
Address:	Roper Road Canterbury CT2 7ER

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Bemix was last inspected in March 2019. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to be requires improvement.

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

Leaders and managers have dealt with most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. However, a few remain.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have strengthened their arrangements for governance by appointing a new external management committee member. Committee members, both of whom are highly experienced in education and supported internships, successfully hold senior leaders to account. They scrutinise information in detail and challenge leaders effectively to improve. Leaders acknowledge that they need to make further progress with their arrangements for effective governance. They appreciate that the work of the two external committee

members is currently unsustainable. Leaders are working to increase the membership and skills of this committee.

Leaders and managers meet frequently with staff to check and improve the quality of remote, online and classroom lessons. Leaders have improved the way they assess students' needs at the start of their programmes. They appointed a new staff member to oversee these processes and moved their initial advice and guidance sessions with students to much earlier in the year. This has helped staff make sure that the support that students need is in place when they start their learning. Students benefit from these changes as staff can talk with them and their parents before learning starts to alleviate anxiety. Leaders and governors understand that they need to improve further their systems for checking and enhancing the quality of education.

Staff now track the development of students' English and mathematics knowledge and skills in much greater detail than at the time of the previous inspection. Staff ensure that students develop skills in these subjects in all aspects of the curriculum rather than solely in functional skills lessons. Staff share this evidence of progress with students to improve their confidence. Teachers use the results of students' initial skills assessments to plan detailed and individualised learning for students.

A far greater proportion of students take qualifications in English and mathematics than at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders have enhanced students' programmes by increasing the range of vocational qualifications they can take to help them with their next steps. Leaders also introduced a suite of qualifications to build students' confidence and skills for work. For example, students interested in progressing to work in building trades gain their construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card and those who want to work in food preparation industries take food hygiene qualifications.

As a result of the pandemic, no students finishing their courses in 2020 were able to progress to paid employment. To support these students, leaders created a new second year course to give them a better chance of employment. As a result of lockdowns, only very small numbers of students are currently able to benefit from work placements. To compensate for this, leaders introduced a new job club to help prepare students for employment.

Bemix has remained open for students throughout the pandemic and currently around half of the students attend lessons on site. Other students, many of whom are highly vulnerable and shielding, access lessons remotely. Leaders ensure that all students have their own computer to enable them to access online lessons and that students know how to keep themselves safe when working online. Leaders trained staff to help them plan and teach online lessons effectively. Staff sensibly reordered the curriculum to ensure that students learned about topics such as staying safe online and mental health at the start of their courses.

Teachers know and support their students well. All students who started at bemix in September 2020 are currently continuing with their learning. Teachers understand the different abilities and needs of students and use this information to plan learning carefully. Staff work closely with students making slow progress to identify and fill gaps in their knowledge and skills. The small number of students that inspectors met during the visit have become more confident during their time at bemix. They talked about how their budgeting skills had improved and how they now felt able to compare prices in shops. They explained about the dangers of county lines and gangs, and how to use their privacy settings to keep safe when online. They described how they had become confident about travelling to bemix as a result of their learning.

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

- widen the membership and skills of the management committee to provide strong scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders and managers
- identify in detail the steps that they need to take to improve further the effectiveness of their quality assurance systems.

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