

Richmond upon Thames Borough Council

Progress monitoring report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Richmond upon Thames Borough Council was last inspected in February 2020. 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 and training 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 have started to address the key weaknesses and are taking appropriate steps to keep learners safe and improve the quality of training for adult learners.

Leaders have markedly changed the structure of their subcontracting arrangements. After the outbreak of COVID-19, they stopped the adult learning delivery through multiple community subcontractors. They sensibly brought on Richmond and Hillcroft Adult Community College (RHACC) in November 2020 as a single subcontractor for adult learning. Leaders have subcontracted Achieving for Children (AfC) for the apprenticeship provision to gain a better oversight of the quality of delivery.

Leaders have developed an employment and skills strategy that aligns with the borough's priorities. Online courses provide adult learners with opportunities to build their basic skills, explore new careers and promote their well-being. Tutors provide effective guidance to adult learners on how to access online learning.

Leaders and managers have recently developed quality assurance procedures. These are in the very early stages of implementation and have not yet been tested. Therefore, it is too early to judge the impact on learners.

Leaders have brought in new expertise to the board of governors to begin to challenge leaders' decisions. Governors meet frequently and are starting to question the content of subcontractors' performance reports. Leaders of subcontractors feel that they are suitably challenged under the new arrangement. Leaders and governors rightly recognise the need for more commercial expertise to provide further scrutiny.

Safeguarding for adult learners was judged to be ineffective at the previous inspection. New governors with suitable safeguarding expertise ensure that staff are aware of their responsibilities. Leaders have established clear safeguarding reporting procedures. Apprentices and adult learners report that they feel safe and know whom to contact if they have any safeguarding concerns.

Adult learners benefit from short online courses and classes that support their well-being. They understand how the courses can help them move towards employment. Learners gain new knowledge and find out about different career paths. For example, learners at a counselling taster session gain an understanding of the different settings in which counsellors work.

The pandemic has made many learners consider a career change. Most adult learners are on the right course to get advice on their next steps. There are some very early signs of success, with learners who have taken taster courses signing up to further learning opportunities.

Managers and tutors at AfC ensure that apprentices grow in confidence and competence in the workplace and take on more complex tasks at work. Tutors receive training that helps them to teach their subjects well. Tutors plan the curriculum according to the individual circumstances and experiences of each apprentice.

Teachers supplement their online group and one-to-one teaching with good use of textbooks and monthly progress reviews. Childcare apprentices who are furloughed watch videos of work-based scenarios, for example on dealing with children's challenging behaviour. They can make links between theory and its practical application.

Business administration apprentices remember their earlier learning, for example about prioritisation tools. They use this knowledge to manage their time well when working on multiple tasks at work. Tutors test what apprentices can recall, and

revisit earlier learning to ensure that apprentices know what they need to do to achieve their programmes. As a result, most apprentices continue to achieve high grades.

The vast majority of apprentices have remained on programme. Where tutors have any concerns about apprentices being at risk of becoming unemployed, they quickly intervene.

To help reduce apprentices' feelings of isolation when working from home, apprenticeship managers provide access to a counselling service and a peer mentoring programme. Learners with additional needs such as dyslexia get support from an extra member of staff while learning online. Employers that inspectors spoke with praised tutors for their increased communication with apprentices since the outbreak of the pandemic.

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

- fully implement and monitor the effectiveness of the new quality improvement procedures; once these have been tested, leaders and managers should review the procedures and review the performance of subcontractors to ensure that they deliver high-quality teaching and advice to learners
- recruit members to the board of governors who have commercial and education expertise to provide further challenge to improve programmes, in line with the council's employment and skills strategy
- ensure that adult learners progress into further learning opportunities.

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