

Shrewsbury College Group

Progress monitoring report

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Address:	Priory Road Shrewsbury Shropshire SY1 1RX

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Shrewsbury College Group was last inspected between November 2019 and 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 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?

Significant progress

Leaders have rapidly implemented many positive changes to their safeguarding processes. They carefully risk assessed the security needs at each campus. Leaders improved the security arrangements of an open campus to resolve potential issues. They work closely with the local authority and police to understand what local circumstances may impact on their students. They take appropriate action when needed. Staff and students feel safe.

Governors are confident that they have full oversight of and input into safeguarding arrangements. They fully support senior leaders, including increasing resources

where required. Senior leaders have ensured that new governors have good experience and knowledge to be able to challenge them effectively. For example, recently appointed governors have a sound knowledge of keeping students safe and an in-depth understanding of apprenticeship provision.

Senior leaders have worked very effectively with staff representatives to develop COVID-19-secure processes. Leaders have been particularly responsive to staff anxieties regarding their personal safety. Leaders have addressed these thoroughly and positively. Leaders communicate very effectively with staff and students to keep them up to date with new guidelines. Staff say that they feel well supported and safe.

Managers have effective oversight of vulnerable students, whether they are working from home or attending the college. They have undertaken thorough individual risk assessments to identify how these students can be quickly and appropriately supported. Support staff risk-rate vulnerable students to determine the frequency of contact they need. The students with the highest risks are contacted twice-weekly by support staff. Consequently, staff are familiar with all vulnerable students' needs.

Teachers ensure that students continue to learn through the current lockdown effectively. They use video-conferencing software to enable students to access virtual sessions with universities. They record lessons and demonstrations. Teachers also support students who have gaps in learning. They have continued to teach classes as per students' timetables. As a result, disruption to students' routines has been minimal. Students are appreciative of this approach. They say that the move back to online learning in January was seamless.

Teachers check carefully the progress of students in classes. They use technology effectively to monitor the engagement of students in their lessons. Students upload their work before and during lessons. Teachers review and comment on it, replicating the feedback given in face-to-face lessons.

Students continue to build actively on their prior learning. For example, level 2 beauty therapy students confidently identified a range of skin disorders, such as eczema or impetigo. They described how they would treat and advise clients with these conditions. Teachers in science and engineering use simulation software. This helps students develop their practical skills effectively. As a result, significantly more students have passed their practical units at their first attempt than in previous years.

Managers acknowledge that enabling students to participate in work experience has been a challenge due to COVID-19 restrictions. They have introduced some virtual work experience to support students' knowledge of the world of work. However, this is not fully in place for all students. Understandably, the range of activities that students can safely undertake is limited.

Apprentices and employers have a good understanding of their final assessment process. Staff frequently discuss and agree assessment requirements with apprentices and employers. As a result, employers are able to help apprentices prepare for their tests by providing, for example, work-related tasks and activities.

Leaders ensure that apprentices receive appropriate support to enable them to continue to learn. Clinical engineer apprentices have benefited through exposure to other job roles within their organisations. Some early years apprentices have had the opportunity to work additionally as classroom assistants. However, apprentices on practical courses, such as carpentry, are not all able to practise their site skills due to COVID-19 restrictions. These apprentices are anxious about how long it will take to complete their programmes.

Leaders have ensured that many students have access to careers advice and guidance. Activities include virtual careers events and individual discussions with their tutors. As a result, students have accessed some interesting virtual work experience opportunities. These include virtually shadowing a senior clinician during their working day. However, staff have not ensured that all students engage with the advice that is offered. Consequently, some students do not know what options they have to access further study or work.

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

- develop alternative ways to enable more students to access employers and work experience, to help students to understand what it is like to work within their chosen careers
- work closely with employers in the construction industry to develop more opportunities for these apprentices to practise and develop their skills during the pandemic
- ensure that staff actively encourage more students to engage with the careers advice and guidance that are on offer, to help them decide on their next steps.

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