

Aspens-Services Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	2539290
Name of lead inspector:	Ian Higgins, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Employer
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by ESFA and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Aspens-Services Limited is an employer provider based in Worcester. They provide catering services in 700 schools across the country. At the time of the visit, 52 apprentices were on programme. Twenty apprentices were on level 2 production chef, 15 were on level 3 senior production chef, 15 were on level 3 team leader, and two apprentices were on level 2 customer service. All apprentices are on standard-based apprenticeships.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Insufficient progress

Senior leaders have a clear rationale for the apprenticeships they deliver. They have identified culinary skills and team leading skills as being key to a large proportion of their workforce. They have designed the programme of apprenticeships to 'upskill' their workforce with these skills as the focus.

Leaders have not ensured that there is a clear delivery plan and resources in place to support apprentices. Almost all of the current apprentices on programme have been recruited during the pandemic. However, many of those responsible for teaching apprentices have been furloughed. There is no clear plan in place for how apprentices are taught, assessed and supported to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need. As a result, apprentices are making slow progress. There are no plans in place for how apprentices will be supported to catch up.

The development of knowledge and skills in English and mathematics does not have sufficient focus within the curriculum. There is no plan for how apprentices should build on what they do know, to improve their English and mathematics skills.

Those responsible for governance do not receive sufficient information on the quality of education that apprentices are receiving. They rely too much on information showing graphics on the progress apprentices are making through completion of modules. They do not hold senior leaders to account sufficiently well on the quality of education that apprentices receive.

Leaders do not ensure that they are meeting the principles of a high-quality apprenticeship. For example, there is no clear plan for how on- and off-the-job training link together. The line managers of apprentices are not clear on what apprentices are moving on to next. As a result, almost all apprentices are making slow progress.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? **Insufficient progress**

Tutors do not identify and plan learning so that apprentices gain new knowledge and skills swiftly. It is not clear what content apprentices need to learn first, and how tutors are going to develop apprentices' understanding over time. Apprentices complete a range of assessment activities to find their starting points, but tutors do not use the results of these activities sufficiently well to plan teaching based on what apprentices already know, and what they need to know.

Leaders and managers have not clearly planned the move from face-to-face teaching to more online teaching in response to the ongoing pandemic. Almost all apprentices have been set assessment tasks to show what they have learned from the course before any teaching has taken place.

Tutors' reviews with apprentices lack focus. They do not set clear targets for what apprentices need to do next. Tutors do not routinely review the targets that they have set for apprentices. As a result, apprentices do not know what they need to do next to improve.

Apprentices do not develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, some apprentices who have been on their apprenticeship for four months have only recently received contact from their tutor. There is no clear plan for what apprentices need to know and by when.

Tutors do not use assessment well enough to check learning reliably. In many cases, apprentices are asked to complete assessments before any learning takes place. Where apprentices have completed assessments, the feedback they receive is not clear on what they need to do next. Feedback does not guide apprentices on what knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to gain to improve the standard of their work.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place?

Reasonable progress

Managers ensure that there are clear policies and procedures in place to help safeguard apprentices. Where any disclosures have been made, the safeguarding team act quickly to support apprentices. This support includes making referrals to external agencies where needed.

The members of the safeguarding team have recently completed updating training on safeguarding. They keep updated through bulletins and as a result of their participation in local networks. They clearly understand the safeguarding risks linked to the current pandemic.

Leaders ensure that any new staff undergo the relevant checks to make sure that they are suitable to work with apprentices. New staff complete a thorough induction to the provider, which includes a significant focus on safeguarding apprentices.

Apprentices benefit from useful information about staying safe online. They complete useful online learning through 'flick modules'. Apprentices are clear on where to go to report any concerns they may have about their safety and well-being.

Leaders and tutors support apprentices to understand safe working practices. For example, each site has access to a 'document library'. This contains a range of information about how to work safely. Leaders have recently updated these documents so that apprentices know how to work safely in line with current guidelines linked to the pandemic.

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