

HMP Dovegate

Prison education standalone progress monitoring visit report

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Visit dates: 17 and 18 August 2021

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Progress monitoring visit

Ofsted context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all Ofsted routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections of education, skills and work activities in prisons and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), Ofsted is carrying out progress monitoring visits. The visit was conducted by Ofsted alone without HMI Prisons. It was conducted on site. At the time of the visit, the establishment was at stage 3 of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services' (HMPPS) recovery roadmap and had been at that stage for 14 weeks.

Progress monitoring visits aim to inform prisoners, employers and government on how establishments are meeting the education and skills needs of all prisoners during this period and how leaders are planning to reinstate a full education, skills and work curriculum. The focus of these visits is on the theme set out below. A progress judgement is made against the theme. That progress judgement will be one of the following: insufficient, reasonable or significant progress.

What progress are leaders making towards ensuring that staff teach a full curriculum and provide support to meet prisoners' needs, including the provision of remote learning?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have been cautious and incremental in how they have managed prisoners' return to learning since Stage 3 guidance was implemented in May 2021. The provider has detailed plans on how to progress the provision of education, skills and work onto the next stage of the recovery. Managers have planned well in preparation for a broader range of education, skills and work activities to be reintroduced when permitted.

From the outset of the national COVID-19 restrictions, managers supported education staff to work on site for some periods, delivering socially distanced activities, and to work from home on the development of learning resources. Because of this, tutors were able to respond quickly to prisoners' support needs. In addition, managers were well placed to guide and support teaching staff effectively and oversee the swift adaptation of the curriculum content in most subjects to meet the requirement for in-cell delivery.

The vast majority of prisoners are currently engaged in some form of activity across education and work, albeit limited. Attendance at education has been high. Only a few prisoners work full time in areas such as the laundry and the kitchens. This has enabled them to continue to undertake qualifications. However, prisoners who do not participate in classroom-based education, prison work, or the few industries that operate on a full-time basis, can only attend workshops and classes for up to one

day each week. Therefore, they still spend long periods of time in their cells with limited structured activities to keep them purposefully occupied.

Managers modified the curriculum to suit better the circumstances and learning needs of a disparate prison population. Despite limited access to face-to-face learning, prisoners can follow an increasingly broad range of subjects through in-cell packs. Topics such as 'stay fit and well' and 'Dovegate does Dragons' Den' have added variety and fun. Managers have expanded the prison's own television channel rapidly, providing short programmes linked to education subjects. Many of the programmes have been created by the prison's own tutors. The use of Dovegate television is high, and prisoners speak positively about it.

Managers have improved the quality assurance of in-cell packs. The weaknesses they have identified are accurate, including the variable quality of support for prisoners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Staff promote distance-learning courses well, and there has been a significant rise in enrolments since March 2020. Tutors provide good advice for prisoners to identify appropriate courses, access funds, and complete applications.

The well-established system of peer-support teaching assistants (TAs) in education has proven largely beneficial during periods of lockdown. However, the number of TAs has reduced. During the periods when education staff have not been able to visit the accommodation units, a small number of prisoners, particularly those who struggle, have not always received the support from a TA to make progress with their in-cell education packs.

Staff and tutors made great efforts to maintain links with prisoners during the period of greatest restrictions. Prisoners speak highly of the support they received from tutors, often by phone, but more recently on their units. They enjoy and value the time they now spend attending education and following the work set by their tutors. Managers have effectively prioritised support for prisoners who speak English as an additional language during the period of restrictions.

At induction, prisoners undertake an assessment of their educational history with the support of the tutor. They are also routinely screened for dyslexia and receive helpful advice about the courses or work available to them at Dovegate to support their longer-term plans. However, the process for establishing prisoners' learning support needs lacks sufficient rigour. Those who self-identify at induction as needing support undertake a thorough diagnostic assessment to establish their specific needs. However, those who do not disclose their additional learning needs remain with these not being identified for considerable lengths of time. As a result, prisoners who require specific support do not always receive it promptly.

Much of the advice and guidance that prisoners access is rightly shaped by the fact that their next move will be to a Category C prison. Prisoners are involved in periodic meetings that review the courses being undertaken and their link to their career prospects, as well as planning for the next stage. Employment and training feature well in the release planning of the few prisoners who are released each year.

Overall, there is insufficient specialist educational expertise among the education team. This curtails the pace of improvement, particularly in relation to the management of SEND and with planning further developments to teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- Leaders and managers need to review the SEND processes to ensure that prisoners' additional learning needs are accurately and quickly identified and then supported through their time in education.
- Ensure that leaders secure the necessary specialist educational expertise to support them in identifying weaknesses in the provision and with planning appropriate improvements to meet the needs of learners better.
- Build the capacity in the peer-support programme to maximise the learning support prisoners receive.

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