

# HMP Brixton

Prison education standalone progress monitoring visit report

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**Name of lead inspector:** Steve Lambert, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Visit dates:** 10 and 11 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. The visit 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 15 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**

During the COVID-19 national restrictions, leaders and managers had to reduce the education, skills and work provision available to prisoners, but ensured that they had access to in-cell learning packs. These packs focused on enriching prisoners' knowledge and skills in a range of areas not previously offered. For example, prisoners were able to learn sign language, develop their understanding of how to set up a business, or learn to play chess. Later on, these packs supplemented the additional education in-cell learning packs that provided prisoners with knowledge of a range of topics, such as English and mathematics, painting and decorating, and business.

Leaders and managers have recently started to offer prisoners access to almost a full range of face-to-face education, skills and work. Leaders and managers have established maintenance parties to work on the prison grounds. For example, the newly created employment hub was refurbished by a maintenance party. In doing so, prisoners gained qualifications in areas such as painting and decorating.

Prison staff work effectively with departments across the prison to meet the needs of prisoners. Staff have received training from the mental health team to help them manage prisoners' anxieties about returning to classrooms. This has resulted in prisoners enjoying returning to these activities. Staff have worked effectively with employers to offer prisoners who won the competition to design and cook a menu the opportunity to undertake a work placement in a top London restaurant.

Prisoners undertake an induction process that helps them to identify their existing skills and career aspirations. Staff use this information appropriately to match prisoners to the right education course. However, staff do not ensure that prisoners complete the initial assessment of their mathematics and English skills accurately. Too many prisoners who have a short amount of time remaining on their prison sentence do not see the importance of participating in education, skills and work while at HMP Brixton.

The allocation of prisoners to activities is effective in targeting their education needs. However, there is an insufficient number of places available for prisoners who want to participate in education, skills and work. As a result, too many prisoners have not been allocated to any education, skills and work-related activities.

Managers have produced high-quality and informative information packs that support prisoners who want to gain employment in specific sectors. For example, they provide detailed guidance on adult traineeships for those wishing to work on the railways, or for those who wish to become self-employed couriers. This information helps prisoners to understand better the opportunities for education and employment available to them on release.

Prisoners complete a comprehensive assessment to identify any additional learning needs. As part of this assessment, they receive feedback on areas that they might struggle with, such as reading complex sentences. Tutors use this information and the resources available to them, such as specialist pens that read words, to plan lessons that take into consideration the needs of individual prisoners. Prisoners value this support, and the reading pens now allow them to read books for pleasure.

Feedback on work packs is detailed and supports learners to make improvements to their work. Prisoners' work on the customer service course is of a good standard, neat and well presented.

Prisoners find tutors very helpful in class and benefit from the way that tutors take time to explain concepts and ensure that learners understand before they move on to another topic.

Prisoners who have been identified as vulnerable have access to education, skills and work that is appropriate to their needs. However, those prisoners who are participating in substance dependency recovery programmes do not have sufficient access to education.

Leaders and managers collect a range of data relating to participation in education, skills and work. However, this information is not always analysed in a way that allows staff to plan learning and monitor the quality of provision well enough.

## Recommendations

- Leaders and managers must increase the number of prisoners who participate in education, skills and work.
- Staff should ensure that prisoners understand the importance and value of participating in education, skills and work, especially those who are on short sentences.
- More effective analysis of data should be undertaken by staff to help monitor and inform their planning of the education, skills and work provision.

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