

HMP Bristol

Prison education standalone progress monitoring visit report

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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 approximately eight 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 pandemic-related national restrictions, leaders prioritised maintaining essential work activities across the prison, such as cleaning and producing breakfast packs for prisoners. They established these activities on a part-time basis to enable as many prisoners as possible to take part and add purpose to their day.

Leaders swiftly distributed in-cell workbooks containing distraction activities to prisoners. However, they were promptly followed by learning packs that focused on developing the learners' knowledge and understanding in a particular subject or vocational area. Learning packs were logically sequenced, leading learners through the theoretical knowledge. Managers delayed the teaching of practical skills until a time when prisoners could return to face-to-face classroom or training activities, such as food safety or barbering.

Within the last eight weeks, as restrictions started to lift, leaders and managers have quickly resumed face-to-face education and workshop activities in bubbles with social distancing in place. However, these restrictions mean that the number of places available for each face-to-face activity remains low. This week, as the prison begins to further reduce the level of restrictions in place, leaders have begun to mix cohorts

in a controlled and carefully managed way to enable more prisoners to access specific activities. However, attendance is low on many courses.

Once face-to-face teaching and activities recommenced, those learners who had completed in-cell packs were prioritised by staff to attend face-to-face sessions. Teachers identified the practical skills that these prisoners needed to develop and focused their learning time on developing these practical skills. As a result, a few prisoners have successfully gone on to achieve qualifications in mentoring, food safety, mathematics and English.

Leaders acknowledge that staffing has remained a challenge throughout the pandemic as staff are required to cover essential activities, such as the vaccination clinic, support for vulnerable prisoners when in hospital, or routine domestic activities. Due to the restrictions, these activities have required increased staffing. Consequently, staffing to enable education and training activities to go ahead has often suffered, disadvantaging learners.

Leaders recognise that they do not have enough workshops or instructors to support full-time work for all those who wish to access it. Leaders and managers have appropriate plans in place to introduce part-time working to ensure more equitable access to the limited spaces they have available. They hope that in this way they can increase engagement further over the coming months.

Leaders and managers have evaluated the quality of prisoners' career planning and induction to education, skills and work and identified correctly that it required improvement. In response, they have implemented well-considered new induction arrangements, aiming to ensure that prisoners become motivated to learn and start building a realistic career path. Prisoners' induction to education now combines a comprehensive introduction to the education options at the prison and formal career planning. Trained information, advice and guidance counsellors create a comprehensive skills action plan for each prisoner and introduce them to employment opportunities locally and around the south west. Prisoners who had been through the induction confirmed that it was effective in achieving leaders' and managers' objectives.

The small number of prisoners that are currently learning in classrooms are keen to learn and apply their new skills. Almost all are at an early stage of learning but are already working closely with their teacher in a collegiate atmosphere. This is leading to rapid and profound learning. In the cookery class, prisoners had learned how to bone a chicken and were keen to experiment with different types of marinade. An art class included a stimulating and well-informed debate. Peer mentors were being encouraged to recognise and create appropriate targets for future mentees. All the face-to-face sessions were purposeful. Teachers sequence learning well and the atmosphere in class was one of mutual respect.

The proportion of prisoners with entry-level skills in English and mathematics is high, but there are currently too few courses targeted at this substantial group. Managers have well-advanced plans to introduce next month more entry-level and short learning programmes, designed to support prisoners to re-engage with learning.

Staff are teaching an increasing number of prisoners to read, who have no or few reading skills. Staff also support a group of prisoners on the wings who are hesitant to participate in any form of education. This group has been provided with in-cell learning and support, predominantly focusing on English and mathematics. They receive frequent visits from the life-skills tutor. Prisoners with an additional learning need are identified at induction and provided with reasonable adjustments to support their learning, such as coloured overlays for those identified as dyslexic.

Leaders have recently re-established contact with employers and charities to expand the opportunities for learners to contribute to the local community and enhance their employability skills. For example, leaders are working with a retailer to develop an on-site shop to enable prisoners to learn valuable customer-service skills and behaviours and gain warehousing experience.

Recommendations

- Leaders and managers must evaluate the education, skills and work curriculum to ensure that it fully meets the needs of all prisoners, particularly those with very low levels of literacy and numeracy skills who make up a substantial proportion of the prison's population.
- Leaders and managers must prioritise increasing the numbers of available places in education, skills and work activities and extend the breadth of what is offered as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Leaders and managers must prioritise ensuring that all available spaces in education, skills and work activities, including induction, are fully utilised while spaces are so limited.

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