

HMP Buckley Hall

Prison education standalone progress monitoring visit report

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Visit dates: 20 and 21 July 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 nine 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

The governor and his senior management team continue to implement their ambitious vision to change the education, skills and work curriculum to prepare prisoners for their next steps towards release. They have achieved this while working within the constraints brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Managers' plans to reopen classrooms in the education centre, following the rules of social distancing, have not been permitted during any part of stage 3 of the recovery roadmap. Instead, managers have continued with the model of prisoners undertaking in-cell education packs and teachers providing one-to-one support to prisoners on their units. Through this approach, half of the prisoners have engaged with in-cell education packs.

Managers were able to reopen the vocational training and industry workshops as soon as they entered stage 3 of the recovery roadmap. As a result, the number of prisoners who were able to attend these workshops increased, even if in only limited numbers due to social distancing requirements.

Managers ensured that prisoners could achieve qualifications in vocational subjects throughout the different phases of the pandemic. Through a combination of in-cell education packs and practical sessions run outdoors, prisoners achieved qualifications in warehousing, pump trucks, horticulture and shop-fitting.

Managers prioritise the allocation of prisoners to the training workshops for those who have completed in-cell education packs on the theoretical knowledge underpinning vocational subjects. Prisoners are now able to complete the practical components of qualifications in brick laying, maintenance and plastering.

Leaders and managers have comprehensive plans to increase the number of places available for prisoners in education, skills and work as soon as they move to stage 2 of the recovery roadmap. However, only a small number of prisoners will be able to attend the education centre because of the need to meet social distancing requirements. Leaders and managers are also planning to increase the number of prisoners benefitting from enrichment activities, such as the broadcast-ready Buckley Hall radio station.

Leaders and managers continue to build productive links with external partners, such as the local authority, the Department of Work and Pensions, and organisations in the community and voluntary sector. For example, plans are well advanced to establish a settlement hub in the prison with input from multiple agencies.

Teachers work effectively to overcome the barrier of not being able to provide classroom teaching sessions by making regular visits to the units to provide one-to-one support to prisoners. They give useful feedback that helps prisoners to improve their work and make progress on their courses. In English, teachers support prisoners to develop their letter-writing skills. They learn how to use commas, apostrophes and paragraphs correctly.

The pace at which managers reintroduced functional skills qualifications has been slow. They persisted with providing prisoners with unaccredited bitesize learning packs for too long. It is only very recently that the first few prisoners have successfully completed their functional skills exams.

Managers remain ambitious for the quality of support offered to prisoners with the next steps towards their release. Managers secured 20 digital notebooks for prisoners studying distance-learning courses. Prisoners use this resource effectively to prepare and edit their assignments for degree and postgraduate qualifications.

Staff have continued to provide face-to-face induction sessions throughout the pandemic when it was safe to do so. Information, advice and guidance staff gather information about prisoners' previous education, qualifications and work experience before they meet new arrivals. Prisoners create digital action plans based on this information. As a result, the great majority of prisoners are allocated to education, training and work that matches their career aspirations.

An employment coach supports prisoners 12 weeks prior to their release to help prepare them for interviews and to submit job applications. Staff contact university and college admissions departments to secure interviews for prisoners who have studied subjects such as art at the prison so that they can apply for degree courses.

Teachers do not always use the information that is collected on prisoners' learning needs to enable them to appropriately plan the one-to-one sessions that they have with prisoners. Some prisoners with dyslexia find that they struggle to develop their English and mathematical skills when they are solely reliant on in-cell education packs and no classroom teaching.

Recommendations

- Leaders and managers should ensure that the pace at which prisoners are prepared and entered for functional skills qualifications is accelerated.
- Leaders and managers should prioritise the return of those prisoners who would most benefit from face-to-face teaching when they reopen classrooms in the education centre.
- Teachers need to use the information they have available on prisoners' learning needs to plan and deliver learning sessions that better meet their needs, including those prisoners with dyslexia.

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