

# HMP Maidstone

Prison education standalone progress monitoring visit report

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

**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 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 national COVID-19 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 were quickly improved to support prisoners to develop their knowledge and skills in a range of topics. The packs supplemented the effective use of the in-cell media television channel, which offered a range of topics, including business and basic motor vehicle maintenance.

Leaders and managers have continued to provide prisoners with access to work in some of the industry areas. For example, in the café and in the prison grounds, prisoners continued to work and obtain qualifications. However, managers have been slow to support prisoners to gain qualifications in some industries, despite prisoners producing work to industry-recognised standards.

In the last month, managers have restarted classroom learning, prioritising English, mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). In addition, vocational courses such as bricklaying and multi-skills have been reinstated. Prisoners said how much they enjoy being back in these activities.

Leaders and managers have developed a novel way to increase the number of prisoners attending education courses, by alternating face-to-face lessons and peer study group sessions. However, leaders and managers have not evaluated whether this approach has been successful.

Managers have risk-assessed classrooms and identified that the likely additional number of learners who will be able to join a class will increase, but it will remain small overall when the prison moves to stage 2. Therefore, leaders and managers have prioritised access to ESOL classes to support prisoners with poor English skills to help them read prison signs and complete basic forms. Leaders and managers have commissioned a range of different organisations to provide an increased range of education courses for prisoners to access.

Prisoners undertake an induction process that helps them to identify their existing skills and their careers aspirations. This information is used appropriately by staff to match prisoners to the right course.

The allocation of prisoners to activities is effective in targeting their education needs. However, staff do not sufficiently consider information on prisoners' resettlement needs when allocating them to the appropriate vocational courses or work. Overall, 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 are being deported at the end of their sentence. This information helps prisoners to better understand the opportunities for education and employment available to them in their own country. However, those prisoners being released into the UK or subject to immigration restrictions do not receive sufficient information on what options are available to them on release.

Leaders and managers have not developed sufficiently well the opportunities for prisoners to complete distance-learning courses. The very small number of prisoners on Open University courses started these prior to arriving at HMP Maidstone.

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 do not always use this information to plan lessons that take into consideration the needs of individual prisoners.

Feedback on work packs is not precise enough to support learners to make improvements to their work. Some learners are not able to describe what they have learned while completing work packs. Instead, they remember that they might have completed tasks, but they have not retained much of the learning.

Prisoner peer mentors support prisoners effectively to access education. The peer-mentoring programme is well established within the prison and it offers learning support to prisoners on the accommodation units.

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.

During COVID-19 restrictions, prisoners appreciated the thoughtful actions by instructors to allow them to voluntarily tend to the prison gardens. Such actions had positive benefits on prisoners' mental health and their welfare. These activities have now been extended and include, for example, tai chi sessions at the weekend.

## **Recommendations**

- Leaders and managers must evaluate the success of their initiatives and the effectiveness of the process of allocations in ensuring that a greater number of prisoners access education, skills and work-related activities.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that teachers use the relevant information about prisoners' learning needs to support them better to learn, progress, and achieve their qualifications.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that those prisoners being released into the UK or subject to immigration restrictions receive sufficient information on what education and employment options are available to them.

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