

HMP/YOI Stoke Heath

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 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?

Insufficient progress

During the COVID-19 pandemic-related national restrictions, leaders reduced the provision of education, skills and work (ESW) to in-cell education packs. As well as offering accredited learning in subjects such as English and mathematics, managers prioritised non-accredited courses that are focused on supporting prisoners' resettlement, such as managing money and working in diverse teams. Limited essential face-to-face teaching in subjects such as food safety and health and safety was introduced in October 2020. A significant COVID-19 outbreak in January 2021 resulted in a return to in-cell activities and essential work only, such as cleaning and manufacturing prison beds.

Since May 2021, when restrictions started to lift, access to face-to-face classroom learning for a limited number of prisoners has been available. Although this number has recently increased, it remains extremely low. In addition, only a few prisoners are released on temporary licence to undertake work in the community.

Leaders have been slow to maximise the opportunities to increase places for face-to-face activity. As a result, half of the prison population is not taking part in any purposeful activity. Of those prisoners who are taking part in an activity, a very small proportion are doing so face to face. Leaders have developed reasonable plans for how they will increase access to face-to-face ESW activities when they move to stage 2 of the HMPPS recovery roadmap.

Leaders report that prisoners are not motivated to engage with ESW, as there is a lack of incentives for them to take part. Leaders rightly recognise that there needs to be more encouragement for them to come off the residential units. They hope that increased access to their prisoner offender manager and key workers will improve this moving forward. However, those prisoners spoken to indicated that they were keen to take part in ESW activities as soon as possible.

Staff provide prisoners with a prison and education induction through remote activity, but this does not support the vast majority of prisoners to move into ESW activities swiftly, because too few prisoners have the literacy skills to access the information they receive. Initial assessment is slow at times, particularly if prisoners are not engaging with the remote assessment tool available to them, or if they experience difficulties in using this tool. In these cases, prisoners are not assessed quickly enough and their needs are not identified or met.

Leaders and managers do not provide effective information, advice and guidance to prisoners following their induction. As a result, managers do not plan well enough how to identify and meet individual prisoners' ESW needs while in custody. Prisoners do not have learning and skills plans, so they are not clear as to how they are preparing to access education, training and employment while in custody and on release.

Remote learning packs are logically sequenced and focus on the development of new skills and knowledge. Most packs have been thoroughly marked and the standard of marking is high. Teachers provide constructive and thoughtful feedback to support prisoners to make progress in their learning. Most prisoners who are studying remotely are positive about their learning, the progress they have made, and the constructive feedback they receive. However, it is too early to say if the new support sessions in education, targeted at prisoners who have fallen behind with in-cell study, are effective. Prisoners attending face-to-face education and vocational training are working productively and learning useful new skills. Teachers support prisoners to catch up on their learning when they transition from in-cell to face-to-face learning.

Staff effectively support the small number of prisoners who are enrolled on Open University and distance-learning provision. However, managers are not actively promoting distance-learning courses. Prisoners do not have access to the relevant technology to support them with undertaking these courses.

Education staff have a learning difficulty and disabilities register and can produce a report of the specific needs of individual prisoners. However, currently, this information is not shared with the wider prison staff, such as those working with the prisoners in the residential areas or in workshops. As a result, prison staff are not aware of the specific needs of some of the prisoners in their care and, consequently, are unaware of how to best support them.

Staff provide adequate pre-release employment information, advice, and guidance for prisoners nearing their release. They target prisoners who are job ready. Since November 2020, a small number of prisoners have gained employment on release, for example, in floor fitting, labouring, recruitment, driving, and operative work.

Recommendations

- Leaders and managers must urgently prioritise increasing the number of available face-to-face places in ESW activities, encouraging a larger number of prisoners to access and attend these activities.
- Leaders and managers must urgently improve the provision and coordination of induction and careers advice and guidance offered to prisoners, to inform them better about the ESW offer. They must ensure that they identify prisoners' education and employment needs and put in place an individualised learning and skills plan that meets their goals.
- Leaders and managers must ensure the prompt and effective initial assessment of prisoners, ensuring that they can offer prisoners the appropriate support for their individual learning needs.
- Leaders and managers must share prisoners' information with regards to their learning difficulties and/or disabilities with the relevant prison staff so that prisoners are better supported.

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