The Buckinghamshire College Group

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130607
Name of lead inspector:	Carolyn Brownsea, HMI
Visit date(s):	6 to 7 October 2020
Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Oxford Road Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP21 8PD

Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Information about the provider

Buckinghamshire College Group was formed in October 2017 from the merger between Aylesbury College and Amersham and Wycombe College. The college has campuses in Aylesbury, Amersham and High Wycombe. Amersham and Wycombe College was inspected in June 2016 and was judged to be inadequate. Aylesbury College was inspected in May 2013 and was judged to be good. The college has around 2500 students aged 16 to 18, 1500 adult learners and 450 apprentices. Just over 200 students are in receipt of high needs funding. Students study courses from entry level to level 5. College staff work with partner universities to teach foundation degrees. The college works with eight subcontractors.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders described their plans to return to face-to-face learning following the lockdown. They explained how these were developed in order that students would benefit from a positive learning experience. They discussed their 'respond, restart and restore' plan that has enabled students and apprentices to experience a broad curriculum that includes English, mathematics and employability skills alongside their vocational courses.

Leaders and managers have customised students' timetables for each campus. They have allocated students to zone 'bubbles', enabling them to benefit from face-to-face learning with their peers safely. Leaders explained how they have worked with employers and subcontractors to ensure safe working practices for apprentices. They described the workplace risk assessments they had carried out with employers.

Leaders explained their plans to mix online and face-to-face learning in the future.

They have helped staff to develop their online teaching skills and to become confident in teaching online. Subcontractors explained how improvements to existing online learning mitigated some of the negative impact on learning caused by lockdown restrictions.

Leaders explained how they were continuing to develop the curriculum despite the impact of the pandemic. Leaders described how the support from online teaching champions enabled teachers to make the rapid move to online learning. Leaders and managers explained how they have developed resources to check students' participation and progress when working online.

Leaders explained the benefits that using technology had brought to the curriculum. They talked about the skills that students who have high needs, and their parents and carers, had gained through using technology. They have used video calls to help staff understand students' experiences during and after lockdown.

Subcontractors felt that apprentices had made good, or better, progress during the lockdown. Employers are pleased with how well apprentices are developing their subject knowledge. They spoke about how effectively they applied this knowledge to their job roles.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

Leaders, managers and teachers explained the rapid changes they had made to move to online learning, both during lockdown and in the new academic year. Managers talked about how they had adapted the curriculum to take into account the skills that students need to develop when returning to college. They have changed the order of topics that they cover to concentrate initially on practical learning. They have maintained face-to-face teaching for all foundation students on entry and level one programmes.

Leaders talked about the changes they had made to careers advice and guidance for learners. They felt that these had increased students' awareness and preparedness for their next steps.

Teachers talked about how their skills in working online had improved and how much they had enjoyed the challenge of teaching online. They recognised that online learning is not always as productive as face-to-face teaching and discussed what they had done to make online learning more collaborative for students.

Staff told us about how they had equipped students with several new resources to support them in the development of their practical skills. Students studying games design use visualisers to immerse themselves in the games they are designing. Teachers explained how they had adapted their teaching to cater for both face-to-face and remote learning. For example, science students carry out experiments when

in class and continue to work practically at home using commonly available resources.

Students and apprentices explained how they had enjoyed online learning and the progress that they had made with their studies. Apprentices said they valued the time during lockdown when they could learn the theory and policies that underpin the qualifications they are working towards.

Leaders and managers recognise that students' attendance at online lessons is slightly lower than at face-to-face sessions.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Staff contacted students during lockdown to check their safety and well-being. They discussed how they identified students who needed help and how they used both college resources and staff from external agencies to support these students. Teachers explained how they used online tools to monitor the safety of vulnerable students. Students and apprentices described how they feel safe in college. They explained the steps that staff had taken to help them feel confident when returning to college.

Staff described their work with external partners, including local authorities, to ensure students are safe and well informed about potential risks. They talked about how they help students and apprentices to understand about topics such as keeping safe online and county lines. Staff talked about the steps leaders had taken to help them feel safe at work. They explained how they help students work safely during online sessions, for example how to dress appropriately.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020