

HMYOI Wetherby

Prison education interim visit report

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Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all Ofsted 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 prisons and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). Interim visits aim to help prisoners, parents, employers and government understand how establishments are meeting the education and skills training needs of prisoners during this period, including prisoners with special educational needs and disabilities. They also help to identify what next steps are needed as prisons start to return to full education and skills programmes, taking into account the need to ensure safety throughout. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

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

Children's access to education, skills and work fluctuated significantly over the past 12 months depending on the level of restrictions in place and varied between the units where learners were housed. The small number of learners on the specialist units benefitted from 15 hours of face-to-face education from the early stages of lockdown. These were the most vulnerable and challenging children at the establishment.

For the great majority of learners on the main units, the return to face-to-face education was slower, with hours per week varying from two and a half a week up to the 12 hours at the time of the visit. Managers provided educational packs for learners to complete in their rooms to bring the hours up to 15 per week. The majority of learners who responded to the survey did not find these packs useful or stated that they had not received them.

When face-to-face education returned, leaders and managers designed a model of delivery, based on 'bubbles' of four, that made learners feel safe. Managers stated that learners were less subject to peer pressure and threats of violence. As a result, they were more willing to engage in education and attendance at classes was high.

Managers had continued to provide the great majority of vocational pathways that were available to learners prior to lockdown, although on reduced hours of delivery. For example, learners had been able to work in the bistro to develop their hospitality and catering skills.

Managers were able to provide learners with careers advice through a large and well-qualified team of engagement and resettlement staff. Managers used information on learners' destinations well to refine the careers advice they gave to learners.

Leaders and managers were not able to assure themselves of the quality of teaching and learning. This was because they had stopped doing formal observations of teachers as part of a well-intentioned strategy to reduce pressure on staff during the pandemic.

The small group of learners interviewed by inspectors welcomed the return to more hours of classroom teaching, even if they were restricted to groups of four. They described some of the new skills that they had developed, such as the use of audio technologies and microphones in music production. Learners' views of the education packs they were given to complete in their cells were very mixed. Some said that they had helped them to develop their English and mathematical skills. Others stated that they had not even opened them. They all looked forward to returning to some of the more practical subjects, such as construction, which were unavailable due to the restrictions.

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 prisoners?

Teachers have benefitted from a well-considered programme of training to develop their pedagogical skills. For example, training on special educational needs was increased so that teachers could better understand and meet the needs of the large number of learners with education, health and care plans in the establishment.

Teachers have focused well on addressing the gaps in learners' knowledge that have grown during the early stages of the lockdown. For example, in mathematics teachers started with revising learners' arithmetic skills by preventing them using calculators.

Teachers have enabled learners to continue to make progress during the pandemic. They ensured that learners achieved qualifications in the summer through centre-assessed grades in English and mathematics GCSE. In subjects where qualifications were not available, such as animal care, teachers have adapted the course materials to suit the interests and abilities of individual learners.

Teachers reported that there have been challenges when assessing learners' progress on several programmes. This was because courses have not been running fully, or because there have been delays with receiving work from wings during times of greater restrictions.

Teachers adapted the materials they included in learners' in-room education packs as the pandemic unfolded. Initially the packs contained distraction activities. These were then supplemented with English and mathematics exercises, and the more theoretical components of practical vocational subjects, such as catering. Despite the appropriate nature of much of these materials, only a minority of learners stated that they benefitted from them.

Teachers' feedback on learners' written work was not specific enough to inform learners of what they needed to do to improve their skills and knowledge. Feedback was too vague in describing what learners had done well and tended to state that the standard of work was high when it was of average quality.

Next steps

Leaders and managers should continue to increase the hours of education, skills and work that children receive ensuring that they access a full curriculum as soon as possible, by attending classes or by remote learning.

Leaders, managers and tutors should encourage learners to complete their education packs by reviewing their contents to make them more engaging and provide support to those who need help completing them.

Teachers should provide more specific and helpful feedback on learners' written and other assessed work to enable them to improve their knowledge and skills.

Leaders and managers should increase their level of oversight of teaching and learning to provide themselves with assurance as to their quality.

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