

HMP North Sea Camp

Prison education interim visit report

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Interim visit

Ofsted 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 needs of prisoners during this period, including prisoners with special educational needs and disabilities. 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?

The recently appointed governor, along with prison leaders, considered education, skills and work to be a key part of their rehabilitation agenda. They had attempted to ensure that prisoners were exposed to opportunities that closely reflected what was available to them upon release from prison.

Leaders were confident that the curriculum offer was meeting the needs of prisoners. They had recently completed an analysis of prisoners' training needs. Leaders used this to inform the education, skills and work programme. Leaders carefully selected the accredited qualifications that were available to them based on prisoners' needs, including qualifications in English, mathematics, and business ventures. Managers planned to introduce evening and weekend education classes to enable prisoners who worked during the day to participate in learning.

Leaders and managers had ensured that the way the curriculum was taught was adjusted quickly at the start of the pandemic. Teaching staff were determined to ensure that they provided prisoners with on-going education throughout the pandemic and utilised remote learning. Leaders made a conscious decision that allowed prisoners to study accredited qualifications as they felt this best met the needs of prisoners.

Since the start of the first national COVID-19 restrictions, a large proportion of prisoners had undertaken learning towards qualifications through in-cell education packs; around a third of prisoners had achieved the qualifications that they had started. Managers recognised that too many prisoners had not yet achieved their qualifications. However, in many cases, this was due to issues outside of leaders' control, For example, awarding bodies were unable to facilitate examinations for prisoners due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Prior to the pandemic, a large proportion of prisoners utilised the release on temporary licence system and engaged in education or work outside the prison. Many of these opportunities were no longer available due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Whilst managers had attempted to increase the access to on-site education or work, at the time of this inspection, too many prisoners were not engaged in meaningful activity on a full-time basis.

Prisoners valued the educational opportunities that were available to them in the prison. Most were enthusiastic about the courses that they had completed. Many prisoners recognised that they were better prepared for their future lives outside of the custodial system as a result of what they had learned.

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?

At the start of the national restrictions, tutors swiftly provided in-cell education packs to prisoners. Managers reviewed the quality of the remote learning packs and the feedback that tutors provided to learners. Tutors received guidance from managers that enabled them to continue developing the quality of these packs. As a result, prisoners were provided with helpful and well-structured packs that enabled them to make progress in their learning.

Tutors and workshop instructors undertook a large amount of professional development during the pandemic. For example, tutors were trained on how to better identify and support prisoners with additional learning needs. Instructors had been given support to improve their knowledge and understanding of British Values.

Tutors had ensured that the in-cell education packs for English and mathematics were planned carefully for individual prisoners. This approach enabled prisoners to have their specific knowledge gaps addressed through carefully selected tasks and activities.

Tutors provided frequent feedback to prisoners on their completed work. For example, in mathematics, tutors identified incorrect calculations and in English, they highlighted the errors prisoners had made. Tutors provided constructive advice to prisoners on how their work could be improved further. However, in a few cases, the feedback provided by tutors was not helpful to the prisoners.

Tutors acknowledged that they had to overcome challenges when prisoners were learning in their cells. Many initially struggled with the approach as they were more familiar with face-to-face teaching. However, managers provided effective support to tutors to overcome this barrier. Recently, tutors had been able to return to face-to-face discussions with prisoners on the accommodation units. Where necessary, they provided prisoners with oral feedback on their work and encouraged them to continue with their learning.

Staff felt well supported by their managers and the prison. They had benefited from the opportunity to work with regional colleagues to share best practices and overcome common challenges.

Next steps

Prison leaders and managers should ensure that prisoners who are engaged in learning make more rapid progress to complete their studies.

Prison leaders should ensure that all prisoners are engaged in meaningful education, skills and work-related activities, as soon as possible.

Tutors need to provide prisoners with feedback on their completed in-cell work packs that helps them to improve the standard and quality of their work over time.

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