

HMP Sudbury

Prison education interim visit report

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Visit dates: 23-24 March 2021

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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). The visit was conducted by Ofsted alongside HMI Prisons. The visit was conducted fully remotely.

Interim visits aim to help prisoners, employers and government understand how establishments are meeting the education and skills 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?

Leaders ensure that the education skills and work offer is broad. Most education courses and vocational training are completed through in-cell work packs. Vocational courses previously delivered by subcontractors other than their main education provider, for example in rail engineering, have not been offered during the pandemic. Leaders have plans for a gradual return to face-to-face teaching.

Leaders have been further challenged by a recent COVID-19 outbreak at the prison. Prior to this, they had maintained essential work roles, both inside the prison including laundry, waste management, cleaning and kitchens. Prisoners continued to work externally to the prison in construction, supply chain and manufacturing roles.

Since the pandemic started and due to the lockdown restrictions, fewer men have taken part in education, skills and work activities. At the start of the pandemic, uptake of education courses was low. At the time of the visit, around one quarter of men were engaged in education. The prison has a small proportion of men who are unemployed. Leaders also highlight that younger men are less engaged in education.

Leaders and managers recognise that prisoners make slower progress in learning than they did prior to the pandemic. Education staff are not able to communicate with prisoners in person. The prison lacks the telephony required for communication with prisoners in-cell. Most practical qualifications cannot be delivered, and examinations in most subjects have been cancelled.

Leaders recognise that information, advice and guidance are not effective. Staff delivering these services only recently returned to the prison site. Inductions have not been completed for a significant period of time. There are too many prisoners for whom their career aspirations and existing knowledge and experience have not been considered when putting together their learning plans.

Leaders are well-informed about the changes to employment opportunities as a result of the pandemic. They plan to align the curriculum to the changed employment landscape including the introduction of heavy goods vehicle training and social care work.

Leaders recognise that prisoners with a learning difficulty and/or disability have been more adversely affected by the pandemic than other groups. Staff are not able to assess the learning needs of newly arrived prisoners and the support mechanisms to help these prisoners are not fully effective.

The small sample of prisoners that inspectors spoke with understood the reason for the restrictions that are in place. Most feel challenged by their work roles but not by their in-cell learning. They appreciate how work relates to their future plans. Those on Open University programmes feel that they are making slow progress. Prisoners feel well-supported by staff who work to keep their minds occupied. They appreciate the activity packs and how staff support them with their well-being.

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?

Managers check the quality of the in-cell work packs. Prisoners' views are also considered to inform improvements. Teachers in most subjects provide additional resources for prisoners who are struggling, or in response to gaps in prisoners' knowledge. For example, in the barista course, maps are provided for prisoners to help them identify where in the world specific coffee beans are grown.

In most subjects, teachers do not routinely order the content of in-cell learning to build prisoners' knowledge from simple, to more complex concepts. For example, in brickwork and catering teachers do not provide work packs in sequence and therefore prisoners are able to self-select the units they complete. Prisoners do not always study education courses that match their future career goals.

Staff do not effectively monitor what prisoners learn from in-cell work packs. Teachers do not put in place activities to check or reinforce learning. Many prisoners complete theoretical learning but are not yet able to apply this to practical activities. Teachers do not help prisoners retain this knowledge in the meantime.

Teachers receive regular professional development. For example, in catering they attended webinars on up-to-date barista techniques. Teachers use dyslexia training to inform the style of work packs, such as using different fonts and coloured paper.

Instructors assess prisoners' employability and work skills. They evaluate whether men adopt safe working practices and demonstrate professional behaviours. They consider prisoners' leadership skills and initiative while at work. Prisoners use their

work skills portfolios to support their preparation for applying for work in the community.

Prison leaders apply assurance measures to check the quality of the curriculum. They identify the improvements required within the provision offered by their education subcontractors. For example, they identified that too many teachers do not provide useful, developmental feedback to prisoners on their in-cell learning activities.

Next steps

Leaders should rapidly establish effective methods for teachers to be able to have contact with prisoners. Teachers should check and reinforce what prisoners are learning. They should ensure that prisoners are challenged by the content of in-cell learning and that they make progress towards their intended careers on release.

Leaders and managers must ensure that teachers plan and deliver the content of the remote curriculum in education programmes sequentially.

Leaders and managers should ensure that prisoners with a learning difficulty or disability receive the support they require to gain new knowledge through in-cell learning.

Leaders and managers should ensure that information, advice and guidance services are quickly re-established. They must ensure that the needs of prisoners who missed inductions last year are ascertained to help guide them to appropriate education, skills and work activities.

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