

16 December 2015

Mr David Byrne
Principal and Chief Executive
Barnet and Southgate College
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Dear Mr Byrne

Short inspection of Barnet and Southgate College

Following the short inspection on 3–4 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in November 2009 and since the merger in November 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

Because of the length of time that has elapsed and the significant changes in the college structure that have taken place since the previous full inspection, inspectors prepared lines of enquiry drawn from the findings of the Ofsted monitoring visit in February 2012 and your own most recent self-assessment report. Our findings are set out under these lines of enquiry.

- Following the college merger and actions to rationalise the provision and reduce duplication, leaders have made significant improvements to the appropriateness and relevance of the curriculum. You have considerably increased the additional responsibilities given to curriculum managers in quality assurance, staff appointments and budgeting, which they have embraced enthusiastically. The curriculum matches local and regional employment needs well.
- Achievement for adults is continuing to improve and adult learners achieve in line with other similar providers. However, achievement for learners aged from 16 to 18 dipped in 2014/15 after a trend of consistent improvement. This was largely because of the decline in the results for GCSE mathematics, following a significant growth in enrolments, with achievement at grades A* to C dipping sharply after being higher than that nationally for two of the last three years. You have introduced several measures to address this decline, including additional funding to attract experienced mathematics teachers and

teaching and learning coaches, which are already leading to improved teaching and learning in maths.

- Curriculum managers have significantly increased the number of work experience placements for learners on study programmes, using their links with individual employers and also the support of a partner employment agency. You have been particularly successful in securing the support of Transport for London in providing whole-year work placements for disabled learners and those with learning difficulties, which have led to employment in customer services.
- Progression continues to be good. Currently managers know the destination of around two thirds of learners who left in 2014/15 and almost all of these learners have progressed to employment, further or higher education. You make effective use of an external company to continue to track learners' destinations for most of the year after they have left, with the result that last year around 90% of learners' destinations were known by the end of the six months' monitoring period.
- Leaders and managers have secured a rapid and significant improvement in the achievement of apprentices, so that their achievement is now better than that of their peers in similar providers.
- The system for judging the quality of teaching and learning by observing lessons is well established and effective at identifying both good teaching and areas for improvement. Curriculum managers are taking increasing responsibility for planning the observation schedule and for using the findings of observations to plan staff development activities or, where necessary, manage the performance of individual teachers. Observers now focus well on the development of learners' mathematics and English skills during lessons. This is leading to improvements in the development of these important skills in subject lessons.
- You are rightly proud of the provision for disabled learners and those with learning difficulties. You offer an extensive range of courses and programmes catering for a wide range of needs, including for learners with profound and complex learning difficulties and life-limiting conditions. You place a strong focus on work-related skills. Learners develop their confidence and skills very well and enjoy working with high-profile organisations such as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). Managers and staff put a strong emphasis on teaching learners how to keep themselves safe. The facilities for this provision are excellent.
- The new governance arrangements are highly effective. Governors challenge managers and leaders robustly during quality meetings and hold them to account for areas of underperformance. Governors are well aware of the college's strengths and areas for improvement, and what actions you are taking. They bring a good range of experiences and commercial expertise to their roles and put the best interests of learners at the heart of their work. Governors are currently recruiting a second learner governor because they value the contribution of learners so highly.

- You have secured steady improvements in punctuality and attendance in most curriculum areas. Much of this has resulted from the increased responsibilities of curriculum managers in quality improvement activities. They monitor punctuality well and are quick to try innovative solutions, such as changing the times of sessions to ensure that transport difficulties do not result in learners being late. Leaders and managers recognise that the quality of lessons is the most important factor influencing attendance.
- Governors, leaders and managers all listen to the views of learners and respond effectively where there are concerns. The range of mechanisms the college uses is very wide: as Principal, you host lunches to meet learner representatives, governors host meetings where learners use a 10-minute one-to-one slot to raise any concerns, and there are surveys, forums and workshops where learners make their views known. More unusually, support service staff hold learning walks to gather learners' views about the service they provide. The high response rate to the Ofsted learners' voice website indicates that learners understand the importance of their contributions to such surveys. Their views are overwhelmingly positive.

Safeguarding is effective.

- Leaders took the initiative when preparing for the introduction of the new 'Prevent' legislation duties. The college's safeguarding specialists attended training with the London region's 'Prevent' coordinator well ahead of the introduction of the duties. As a result, they trained a large proportion of the college staff in good time, and made good use of risk assessments of curriculum areas and support services to prioritise the training. Governors were also included in this training and understand their safeguarding responsibilities well. You have involved learner representatives in preparing a college-wide statement on freedom of expression and how it interacts with safeguarding young people from extremism.
- Leaders have ensured that general safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and rapid and effective action is taken to safeguard learners. Designated safeguarding officers have excellent links with relevant agencies and authorities. Managers ensure that updated policies reflect the new duties and also the changes in statutory guidance about recruitment checks.
- The tutorial programme introduces learners to current topics of particular concern such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and child sexual exploitation. Staff undergo regular face-to-face training to prepare them for their role in promoting awareness of these sensitive topics. Activities designed to promote understanding of fundamental British values are embedded in the tutorial programme and in several curriculum areas.

Inspection findings

- Curriculum managers make particularly good use of information about local skills gaps and learners' destinations after college to make sure that the

curriculum meets the needs of employers and learners. Where destination information identifies individual employers, managers contact the employer to establish strong links. In several cases, employers have been involved in planning or adapting the curriculum to ensure that learners learn the latest working practices and developments. This boosts their chances of progressing to employment in fields such as digital media where there is strong competition for employment.

- Governors, managers and staff know the college very well. Self-assessment is a thorough, critical and robust activity. Curriculum managers plan improvement work to deal with priority concerns and readily share ideas in team events such as 'Grow Wednesdays'. In particular, you quickly recognised the need to improve the teaching of mathematics and have secured the approval from governors for the necessary financial resources to attract experienced teachers. This is already leading to improvements in the development of current learners' mathematics skills. The work of the teaching and learning coaches is effective and valued by the teachers they support. Where teachers have responded well to the support from learning coaches, the improvements are clear. In other cases, curriculum managers have acted quickly to address poor staff performance. You are aware that there remain some pockets of underperformance and you are addressing these effectively.
- Learners enjoy their lessons, participate well in discussions and in question-and-answer sessions, and are making appropriate progress in most curriculum areas. They work together well, sometimes in mixed groups from different courses with similar lesson topics or practical activities. In a small minority of lessons, teachers are not sufficiently adept at questioning learners carefully to ensure that they understand the work. Learners' special educational needs and those on entry-level courses develop very good writing skills including correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. Apprentices are developing very good practical skills. The well-developed industry-standard skills training centre is much used by employers, and you also make it available to other providers to train their apprentices. This contributes well to your strategy to reduce duplication of provision in your local area and make efficient use of publicly funded resources.
- Teachers increasingly include the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills in their lessons, so that learners are developing good language skills, for example through making presentations, as well as confidence in using mathematics. Inspectors saw learners' mathematics skills being developed well in an English lesson and their English skills being developed well in a mathematics lesson. A few learners are unclear about why they are working on English exercises in their other lessons, and what they are required to do to complete them.
- Teachers now have better access to systems for monitoring learners' progress and they are beginning to use this information more effectively in setting targets for learning. There is some good practice in the setting of well-focused targets but many targets are too general, so that while learners know what they have to do to succeed they are not always clear about the smaller steps they need to take on the way to success. This is particularly problematic

in mathematics and English lessons, or where these topics are incorporated in lessons on other subjects. It is too early to be sure of the impact of this new emphasis on target setting and monitoring, but staff are very enthusiastic about the new systems and the information they are receiving about their learners' progress.

- When marking work, teachers in most curriculum areas provide detailed feedback which helps learners to improve.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers monitor the progress that learners make in mathematics and English more effectively, set specific targets to help individual learners improve and ensure that learners recognise and value the skills they are developing and their importance to future study and careers
- new strategies to improve teaching, learning and assessment result in better progress by learners, and that teachers intervene quickly where learners' progress is slow
- learning coaches support those teachers who are less effective in particular aspects of the craft of teaching, such as checking and increasing learners' understanding or explaining the lesson's objectives so that learners understand their relevance and value.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Gadfield
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by the director of quality and learner experience. We met you, your senior leaders, managers and governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. We visited four of your sites to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at learners' work and the facilities available to them. We spoke to learners whenever possible, including apprentices. We held meetings with staff and managers. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners and employers by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking their views during the inspection.