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Ian Peake
Herefordshire & Ludlow College
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Dear Mr Peake,

Short inspection of Herefordshire and Ludlow College

Following the short inspection on 24 and 25 February 2016, 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 inspectors judged the college to be good in May 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education and training in the college since the previous inspection. You continue to place a strong emphasis on improvement through accurate evaluation of the quality of the provision so that you can very effectively identify what is working well and where the provision needs further improvement. Quality improvement plans and regular progress monitoring ensure that any underperforming courses improve quickly. You place a strong emphasis on the importance of good or better teaching and learning. Lesson observations, together with a number of other measures, such as the analysis of student feedback and monitoring of attendance and punctuality, effectively identify strengths and areas for improvement. You and your managers take effective action to improve the performance of your teachers so that the large majority of students make good or better progress towards their targets and qualifications.

Governors have a wide range of relevant experience and play a very active part in the life of the college. They undertake their role very well, providing you and your senior leaders with good support and strong challenge. They understand the performance of the college very well and they set challenging and ambitious targets for improvements in what is already mostly good or better provision. They are passionate about the college and support you and your staff in setting very high expectations of students. Students' response to these expectations is very good.

You, your leadership team and governors have set a very clear strategic direction for the college and you are working very well with the local authority, the local

enterprise council (LEP) and other partners to ensure that the provision is responsive to local and regional priorities and meets the needs of students and employers. This results in a high proportion of your students progressing to employment, apprenticeships, further study or higher education. You and your leadership team have managed the merger with Ludlow College well and you are well on track to improve the quality of apprenticeship provision. This was underperforming at the time of the merger.

You have implemented 16 to 19 study programmes successfully. The design of programmes includes a good focus on improving students' English and mathematics skills and providing relevant work experience. Students have clear progression routes at all levels. They have access to a good range of academic and vocational programmes, which is improved further through good working with the sixth-form college and art college that share the same campus in Hereford. The few high needs students at the college progress well in mainstream provision. You have restructured the apprenticeship provision to ensure that you can bring about improvements in success rates.

At the previous inspection, inspectors commended you and your team for leading and managing the college well, its financial security, its good governance, placing the safety of students as a high priority and providing a very good learning environment. You have maintained these strengths. Inspectors also identified areas for improvement including inconsistencies in success rates, variance in the quality of provision between different curriculum areas, and insufficiently effective skills in teaching, learning and assessment to challenge and stretch students so that more students make consistently good progress relative to their starting points. Inspectors also identified insufficiently effective performance management of teachers.

You and your senior leaders have taken decisive action to improve these areas. The impact is clear:

- student outcomes remain above the national rate, although a few inconsistencies remain, relating mostly to the recent merger
- the variance in the quality of provision between different curriculum areas has decreased.
- AS-level students make excellent progress. A-level and the majority of BTEC level 3 students make better than expected progress
- highly effective performance management of teachers helps ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are good.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and leaders have established very good safeguarding arrangements to help ensure that students stay safe. They have effectively incorporated their duty to protect students from extremism and radicalisation into the college safeguarding practices.

Governors, staff and students receive appropriate training. Students feel safe, are aware of the potential risks of using the internet and demonstrate good awareness of health and safety. They have a good understanding of the issues surrounding radicalisation and extremism. Students' behaviour in lessons and in the communal areas of the college is very good. Incidences of bullying and harassment are very low. Welfare support is a strong feature of college life.

The designated safeguarding lead works very well with external agencies and organisations who provide a good network of support, advice and guidance on the college's management of risk.

Managers take their responsibilities seriously and demonstrate a diligent approach to safety management. They use detailed and thorough safeguarding records carefully in their management of students' safety, including 'cause for concern' and 'contact logs' along with mandatory records. Managers use these logs effectively to identify vulnerable students and track the effectiveness of actions that they have put in place to support them.

Inspection findings

- Students thrive on the high expectations and standards set by teachers, leaders and managers. This is reflected in the work they produce and their exemplary behaviour and focus in and out of class. Students work productively in lessons and demonstrate maturity and dedication to learning.
- Students have a very clear understanding of their teachers' expectation of good attendance and punctuality. Students appreciate the importance of good attendance in supporting the development of employability skills. They are also aware of the impact and consequences of poor attendance and punctuality.
- Teachers plan lessons well. Apart from the most-able students, teachers stretch and challenge students to make expected or better progress in the majority of lessons. Teachers use group profiles effectively to plan for differentiated learning activities and they update students' profiles as they progress.
- Teachers provide students with timely and detailed feedback on their work and give appropriate feedback on their use of English. As a result, students understand what they need to do in order to improve their work. Oral feedback in lessons is clear and well directed to those who need it.
- Students are clear about progress against their learning targets and are well aware of how to achieve their goals and the standards needed to move to further study or employment. As a result, the large majority of students achieve qualification grades at or above those expected when they start college.
- A highly effective cross-college system is in place to support students at risk of leaving before they complete their course. Managers monitor this support very closely. Outcomes for these students are good.

- Students who do not have a GCSE grade C or above in English or mathematics are placed on the most appropriate English, mathematics or functional skills programme. Teachers use initial and diagnostic assessments well to support students' development of these skills, and students understand the importance of successfully achieving these qualifications. A minority of teachers' development of students' English and mathematical skills requires further improvement.
- Managers have introduced well-considered steps to improve the low proportion of students who achieve higher GCSE grades in English and mathematics and improve further functional skills success rates. Attendance at functional skills lessons for a minority of students requires improvement.
- Leaders and managers put a high emphasis on ensuring that students, at all levels, undertake external work experience. Much-improved links with employers have supported a further increase of available placements.
- The majority of study programme students have attended work experience or have opportunities planned for later this year; they are, in the large majority, purposeful and relevant to the students' individual career plans. Teachers draw on students' workplace experiences well to illustrate their lessons.
- Leaders and managers have developed an effective response to improve students' positive destinations and raise students' aspirations so that more of them progress to further and higher education. They have developed strong links with higher education institutions, and tutorials provide students with valuable information about careers and higher education. Curriculum staff routinely collect destination data, which managers use well to monitor improvements in progression.
- The apprenticeship provision is well managed. Managers have put in place well-considered actions to tackle the decline in apprenticeship success rates and in particular to improve progress and outcomes for health and social care apprenticeships at Ludlow. Apprentices' progress is closely monitored; apprentices who fall behind with their work are quickly identified and effective arrangements are put in place to help them progress. Good communication with employers supports well improvements in the achievements of apprentices within the planned timescales.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they improve teachers' skills in providing sufficient stretch and challenge to ensure that the most-able students make good progress
- teachers develop students' English and mathematics skills consistently well in all lessons
- they improve the quality of provision on GCSE English and mathematics courses so that a much higher proportion of students achieve a pass at grade C or above

- they raise success rates on functional skills courses and, for a minority of students, improve attendance at functional skills lessons
- they raise further students' aspirations to progress to higher-level courses in the college or to higher education.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Cutting
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection the team was assisted by the deputy principal as nominee. We held meetings with you, your senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, governors, managers, teaching staff, partners and students. We visited your three sites with members of your staff to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at students' work. We spoke with students at all sites, across subjects, including high-needs students and adults. We held meetings with staff and managers. We reviewed key documents including those relating to the college's strategy, self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of students by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, from your own student survey and by seeking the views of students during on-site inspection activity.