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23 March 2016

Mr Tim Fisher  
Principal  
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College  
Vane Terrace  
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County Durham  
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Dear Mr Fisher

### **Short inspection of Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College**

Following the short inspection on 3 and 4 March 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in February 2012.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the college since the previous inspection.

Together with governors and other leaders you have approved and managed building modifications and refurbishments that have enhanced facilities and successfully created an excellent college environment in which learners and staff treat one another with respect. Together with a culture of high expectations this promotes learning and encourages studious attitudes. Learners behave extremely well and show excellent attitudes to learning. They make very good use of the library and other areas to study outside lesson times. As a result of the highly effective work of college leaders, teachers and support staff, learners develop into confident, mature, and articulate young adults who are well prepared for their next steps.

You have introduced a range of initiatives to improve the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Leaders have made changes to the assessment process with more frequent assessment points and a move to objective grades based on external standards to help accelerate learners' progress. All learners are clear about their aspirational targets and the level they are working at, and support for underachieving learners is in place. Learners who attend extension studies, another recent innovation, benefit from developing their independent learning skills in a supportive, supervised environment.

You and your team are responsive to changes in the employment market. The curriculum is carefully planned, making good use of local and national intelligence about skills needs. The introduction of your innovative and popular 'Future Engineers' Scheme' followed discussions with the local business community and local authority. The new college combined cadet force provides valuable opportunities for personal development. A wide range of enrichment opportunities contributes well to learners' employability skills and their personal development.

Across the college teaching and learning continue to be good as a result of effective management strategies, including a range of staff development initiatives and performance management. Arrangements for teachers to share best practice have developed well since the previous inspection. An increased emphasis on learning in lesson observations has also helped to bring about improvements.

You have implemented 16–19 study programmes well. Learners have access to a wide range of mainly academic courses and their programme of study is closely aligned to their needs and aspirations. Careers advice and guidance are highly effective in ensuring that learners are well informed about future options. Your learners develop a broad range of useful skills through their studies and extra-curricular activities. Learners studying GCSE English and/or mathematics qualifications achieve well. Outcomes for learners taking November resits in 2015 are better than the previous year, showing the positive impact from recent changes to the delivery of these qualifications, including increased curriculum time for mathematics. Most learners develop a good range of employability skills. However, you and your managers recognise that external work experience is one aspect of the study programme that needs further improvement. You have appointed an employer links coordinator to improve this, and her work has done much to improve the position this year.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a high priority given to ensuring that learners are safe and that safeguarding procedures are central to the work of the college. The college fulfils its statutory duties with regard to safeguarding and the 'Prevent' agenda. The single central record is secure and well maintained and records of staff training are up to date and monitored closely. All staff have received the required level of training.

Governors receive an annual report on safeguarding and there is a lead governor for safeguarding. There are good relations between the college and local agencies responsible for safeguarding, including the local safeguarding children board. The college has a proactive approach to monitoring and supporting e-safety. Robust procedures are in place for referring learners for whom there are areas of concern. Record-keeping is detailed and appropriate. It indicates that appropriate liaison takes place with external agencies, including the police and the local authority children's services.

Learners feel that they are listened to and know who to go to if they have a concern. They have a very good understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism and of British values. The college has recently increased its

arrangements for security through the introduction of a lanyard for learners. Learners value the introduction of this measure and it is well monitored by staff.

## **Inspection findings**

- Leaders and managers have worked effectively to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. There is clear evidence of the impact of their actions, for example in the high success rates and improving rates of learner progress.
- College approaches to self-assessment have been refined. They include a very thorough analysis of subject data with details relating to key performance indicators, attendance and an analysis of value added data by gender.
- Governors scrutinise the performance of the college well. They have a good understanding of the full range of data and provide effective support and challenge to drive improvement.
- The college quality improvement plan is well focused, with specific actions to tackle key weaknesses identified through the self-assessment process. Leaders monitor this plan carefully and good progress has been made this year to date.
- Managers have identified a small number of courses that are in need of support because of underperformance and are working with staff teams to bring about improvements. Historic successes show that the process works well. In addition, where observations or other evidence show that individual teachers need to improve their practice, managers draw up action plans to support them to develop their skills.
- Teachers plan well so that teaching and learning in the large majority of lessons are effective. Most lessons include learning activities that meet individual learners' needs, including the most able and those who need additional help. In most lessons teaching engages and motivates learners effectively, enabling them to make good progress.
- In a small minority of lessons teachers do not plan learning thoroughly or meet all individual needs and learners make slower progress.
- Teachers' records show differences in the approach taken with learners who are underachieving against their target grades. Most learners who have been underperforming are given effective additional support. The type and level of support is tailored to individual need and includes additional one-to-one support by subject teachers and extra timetabled sessions. Learners appreciate this support and are making better progress as a result of it. In a few cases teachers' records offer explanations for the underachievement rather than focusing on what can be done to support the learner to get back on track.
- In many subject areas assessment progress files are detailed and well maintained. Others are less consistent in their quality and there is insufficiently detailed written commentary to enable learners to improve their work. A senior manager has recently been appointed to address these issues and promote good practice.
- Managers have implemented the college-based components of study programmes well, providing good, holistic learning experiences.

- Although managers have taken steps to improve the situation, second year learners who do not intend to go to university have had too few opportunities for external work experience at an early enough stage of their course. The appointment of a coordinator is helping to ensure that suitable placements are arranged in the near future.
- In academic subject lessons learners, especially those not intending to go to university, have too little exposure to work-related learning.
- Success rates have shown an improving trend over three years and are high. At A level learners make overall progress in line with expectations based on prior attainment. At AS level learners' progress has improved and in 2015 learners made better than expected progress. Behind this overall data there is variation between subjects, with excellent progress in a few subjects and slow progress in a small minority of subjects.
- Learner destinations show a very positive picture, with a high proportion of learners progressing to higher education, and almost all others to positive destinations, such as apprenticeships or employment.
- Learners' progress is improving this year as a result of actions taken by leaders, managers and teachers. Retention at the time of the inspection was better than at the same point last year. Mock examination results show an improvement in 2016 when compared with 2015.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve the consistency of assessment, progress tracking and interventions with underachievers to ensure that progress accelerates, especially in the very small minority of subjects where learners make slower progress
- they ensure that arrangements for external work experience placements for learners not intending to go to university are made early enough in their courses to help inform their future plans
- work-related learning is further developed in academic subject lessons, particularly for the benefit of those not intending to progress 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

Ruth James  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection the team was assisted by the vice-principal as nominee. We held meetings with you, your senior leaders, governors, managers, and learners. We observed teaching, learning and assessment and looked at learners' work. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, from your own learner surveys and by seeking the views of learners during on-site inspection activity.