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Ms Abby Whittaker
Director
Hair Academy South West Limited
120 East Reach
Taunton
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Dear Ms Whittaker

Short inspection of Hair Academy South West

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 visit was the first short inspection carried out since Hair Academy South West (HASW) was judged to be good in November 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, you have successfully maintained a good quality of training and a strong culture of high expectations and ambition for your learners and staff. As a result, learners make good progress, achieve high standards and gain sustainable employment. You and your leadership team support and encourage staff to aim for the best possible outcomes for all learners by providing effective staff development and opportunities to improve their professional practice.

Your leadership team and staff are fully committed to meeting the needs of your learners and improving the subcontracted provision. Directors of the company use their excellent links with leading manufacturers of hairdressing products to inspire and motivate staff and learners. Your learners benefit from the good opportunities to take part in high-profile events, including styling for a major television talent show, leading manufacturers' showcase events and London Fashion Week. The annual summer party provides a good opportunity for all staff and learners to recognise and celebrate the achievements of learners showing exceptional performance.

Learners benefit from highly effective and well-planned training. They take pride in their work, encourage each other and are keen to become good and trusted employees. They have positive attitudes to learning, including the importance of improving their English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Your staff place high importance on ensuring that all learners develop the necessary vocational skills and improve their confidence, teamwork and interpersonal skills.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified the need to improve communication with employers by sharing training plans so that the skills developed at the academy or other training sites could be consolidated in the workplace. Communication and information-sharing between HASW, employers and subcontractors have improved significantly and the increased use of the electronic portfolio system means that most parties have a good understanding of what learners are doing and the progress they are making.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team ensure that learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and what to do if they are concerned about themselves or other learners. The two designated safeguarding managers are well trained and have up-to-date knowledge about recent developments in safeguarding. Your arrangements to identify and support vulnerable learners are effective and the inclusion of the nature of the vulnerability, points of contact and necessary actions in the vulnerable learner statement gives staff and learners confidence and reassurance.

Learners feel very comfortable when discussing any problems or concerns that might adversely affect their achievement or progress. Learners value the practical advice given in the very good HASW-designed leaflets. The wide range of topics covered includes mental health awareness; self-harming; verbal, physical and emotional bullying; eating disorders; cyber bullying; and all types of abuse. Risk assessments are appropriate, clear and regularly reviewed. Where appropriate, learners contribute well to the risk assessment.

Your use of a topic of the month to reinforce and develop a good understanding in areas such as British values, staying safe, financial awareness, crime prevention, health and well-being is effective. The attractive displays around the academy and the work in learners' journals show that learners are interested in and understand why the topics are important.

Your policy to implement the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty is appropriate and clearly sets out how the company intends to protect learners from dangers associated with extremism and radicalisation. However, further work is required to implement the strategy in full and ensure that learners understand the potential risks.

Inspection findings

- The effectiveness of leadership and management continues to be good. Directors and senior leaders have a clear vision for the company and take decisive action when required. The leadership team's strong ambition to develop high-quality apprenticeship provision is supported by a clear strategic direction. Your managers communicate high expectations of performance to all staff and subcontractors through regular monitoring and challenging of performance indicators.

- Your leaders and managers use good-quality assurance arrangements that staff and your subcontractors understand. The vast majority of those involved know the part they play in improving standards and ensuring that learners receive a high standard of training and support. Your use of other providers as critical friends increases the effectiveness of your quality assurance arrangements. Academy staff and subcontractors share effective practice using the internal network.
- Your observations of learning in the classroom are detailed and generally evaluative, giving a clear picture of the activities taking place. In most cases, the observations identify what went well in the session and where improvements are required. However, the observations do not record clear feedback on the standards achieved by individuals or groups of learners, the progress learners made since starting the unit being studied or the skills they acquire during the session.
- Your teachers are enthusiastic and highly motivated. They keep themselves up to date with current hairdressing practices and make good use of the staff development activities you offer, such as behaviour management, safeguarding and how to improve teaching and learning.
- Teachers know their learners well. They monitor learners' attendance, punctuality, progress and achievement of targets in order to identify learners who are causing concern or not achieving as well as teachers expect them to. Teachers are skilled at recognising the causes of poor or declining performance and are swift to intervene where necessary.
- Teaching, learning and assessment remain good. Teachers negotiate and set appropriate targets that develop skills and encourage learners to think about opportunities for progression. Teachers plan learning well, taking account of individual needs and interests.
- Learners have good access to clients at both the academy and in their salons. Learners are professional when dealing with clients and develop strong customer care skills as they progress through their apprenticeship. Learners have access to industry-standard salon facilities. Learners develop well in industry standards such as cutting, colour, blow-drying and barbering skills that support progress onto advanced apprenticeships or into employment. Learners are proud to work for HASW and their subcontractors. The high-quality salons and enthusiastic staff inspire and motivate them to work at a high standard.
- Learners use handwritten journals very effectively to record their own learning, collect ideas and examples of hairstyles and techniques and to reflect on what could be improved. They are clearly proud of their journals and care for them well. The standard of written English is mostly good. Spelling mistakes in a minority of marked assignments are not corrected. The identification of common spelling errors and inclusion of these in your weekly

spelling tests or in the relevant lessons would help learners to make further progress.

- Staff identify learners' starting points effectively. Tests to find out what learners know when they start their apprenticeship are used very well at varying points to plot progress of individual learners to ensure that they are ready to sit their functional skills exams. HASW learners develop mathematics skills at their own rate using an online mathematics tutorial, supported by staff effectively. Staff provide strong support for these sessions, although currently there is no specialist teacher for either English or mathematics. A few subcontractors have specialist English and mathematics staff. Learners who are assessed as capable undertake functional skills at a higher level than the apprenticeship framework requirement, although numbers are low.
- You and your leadership team manage the subcontracting arrangements very effectively. Communication between HASW and your subcontractors is frequent and ensures that subcontractors fully understand what they are required to do and what they need to do to improve and reach the standards achieved by HASW staff and students. Where a subcontractor was unable to meet the improvement targets set, you took effective action by terminating their contract. You have identified that the slow progress made by some learners in subcontracted provision is the main factor in the poorer achievement of the apprenticeship framework by a minority of your subcontractors. Your support and regular monitoring is helping these organisations to improve their teaching of hairdressing and the progress made by their learners.
- In the workplace, the vast majority of learners make rapid progress. The good practical skills and industry standards in cutting, colour, blow-drying and barbering they achieve support their progress onto advanced apprenticeships or into employment. The success rates in your subcontracted provision are high and are very high for HASW learners.
- The vast majority of your learners remain in hairdressing locally when they complete their apprenticeship. A small number have moved to join other hairdressing chains or work on cruise ships.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders, managers and directors should ensure that:

- underperforming subcontractors improve their achievement rates to at least the rates achieved by HASW
- observations of learning include judgements on the standards achieved by learners, the progress they are making and skills they develop
- teachers engage learners in discussions at an appropriate level to promote their understanding of how to keep themselves safe from radicalisation and extremism.

A copy of this letter will be sent to the Skills Funding Agency and it will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by HASW's director of education, as nominee. We met with directors, senior leaders and managers. We visited local salons to meet employers and talk to learners. We held face-to-face and telephone meetings with learners, staff and subcontractors and reviewed key documents relating to self-assessment, improvement planning, performance management, strategic plans and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking the views of learners and employers during visits to salons and during telephone interviews.