

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



23 March 2016

Ms Simone Wonnacott  
Leeds College of Art  
Blenheim Walk  
Leeds  
West Yorkshire  
LS2 9AQ

Dear Ms Wonnacott

### **Short inspection of Leeds College of Art – further education provision**

Following the short inspection on 2 and 3 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 the provider was judged to be good in March 2011.

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

Students on further education courses at the college continue to receive a good arts education. The largest numbers of students are enrolled on the foundation diploma course and the vast majority complete this course successfully. Although the proportion of students completing the level 3 extended diploma declined last year, achievement rates for those who complete remain high.

Managers have implemented study programmes well. Students develop very good specialist skills and subject knowledge across a broad range of art and design disciplines. The large majority progress to specialist art and design higher education courses, both within the college and across the United Kingdom; a small but increasing number progress to employment or apprenticeships.

Course leaders and senior managers take effective action to remedy identified weaknesses. For example, a thorough analysis of the reasons for students' early withdrawal from the extended diploma course has led to important changes in the course structure and processes for monitoring and supporting students. At the time of this inspection, the number of students who had left the course early was markedly lower than at the same time last year. Students benefit from well-equipped studios and specialist library resources, and opportunities to work alongside undergraduate students at the college enhance their understanding of the requirements of higher education.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The senior management team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and takes appropriate action to safeguard students. Students feel safe on the college campus, and know how to report concerns and where to seek advice or support if needed. Students receive clear guidance on how to keep themselves safe when working online or using social media. All students have received information from specialist external agencies on how to protect themselves from the potential dangers of sexual exploitation or grooming. Students on the extended diploma course have developed art work for a college-wide campaign to promote safeguarding; this has enhanced their own understanding of key issues, as well as helping the college to communicate effectively with a young audience.

Managers carry out appropriate pre-employment checks on all teachers and technical staff who work directly with further education students. Staff receive regular training and updates on safeguarding to ensure that they understand their responsibilities in keeping students safe. Managers also provide additional training and support for staff if specific issues or concerns arise throughout the year. Teachers and technicians promote health and safety and safe working practices in studios and workshops, so that students use materials, tools and equipment safely, resulting in a very low rate of minor accidents.

Senior managers work effectively with local partners and external agencies to implement the recently introduced Prevent duty to protect students from radicalisation and extremism. They have worked closely and sensitively with staff to allay anxieties and dispel misinformation; this has increased staff awareness and understanding, and developed their confidence to identify where fundamental British values are already inherent in the college's work.

All staff have undertaken online training on the Prevent duty; key managers have attended additional training on preventing radicalisation and extremism, and plans are in place for further training for all staff by the end of this academic year. Managers acknowledge that there is more to do to develop fully students' understanding of the potential risks, and are developing appropriate strategies to support teachers and tutors to integrate this work more fully into the wider curriculum.

## Inspection findings

- Students achieve very well on the foundation diploma course, and the vast majority gain higher education places within their chosen specialist pathway. Overall, a very high proportion of students gain merit or distinction grades. Managers have identified some variations in outcomes between the different pathways, for example, in the proportions of students achieving high grades and, in a few pathways, relatively high numbers of students not gaining a pass at the stage 1 and stage 2 assessments during the course. Course leaders and managers have investigated thoroughly the reasons behind these variations and are monitoring the current progress of students closely. In this academic year, more students achieved a pass at stages 1 and 2 and are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications than was the case at a similar time last year.
- Managers have undertaken a thorough and detailed analysis of the reasons for the declining completion rates for students on the extended diploma course. This led to a clearer and more finely nuanced understanding of patterns of, and reasons for, withdrawals throughout the course. This year, course teams have implemented changes in the course content and structure, and have monitored any students causing concern very carefully. So far, these changes have proved very effective in retaining students on the course, with a significantly higher proportion of first-year students remaining on their programme compared with the same point last year.
- The proportion of current second-year students continuing with their studies has also improved. However, managers acknowledge that higher drop-out rates in this group's first year will mean that overall success rates will be lower at the end of this academic year. Current data suggest that while this year's outcomes are likely to be better than last year's, more work is needed to ensure that recent improvements are sustained for the future. Achievement rates for students who complete the extended diploma have been consistently high, and a significant proportion of these students achieve merit and distinction grades and progress successfully to higher education.
- A relatively small number of adult learners study on a level 2 diploma or a level 3 access to higher education art and design course. These courses help adults returning to education to develop good practical and personal skills and gain self-confidence; they build a broad portfolio of art and design work, and most progress to higher levels of study.
- Students with specific learning difficulties or disability receive good support which enables them to achieve well; their achievement has improved since the previous inspection and they now achieve better than their peers. However, managers have not analysed students' outcomes to identify the success rates of those with different types of disability. As a result, they cannot evaluate the effectiveness of different support strategies.

- Managers acknowledge that female students achieve consistently better than male students, and that the difference in achievement has increased in recent years. Managers' analysis of the reasons behind this shows no clear or consistent trends. In some pathways, a significant minority of male students received unconditional offers for higher education courses and left the further education course before completion, so although they did not complete and achieve the qualification, they progressed successfully to their chosen higher education course. Current monitoring of performance by gender reveals no notable differences in terms of attendance, retention on the course or standard of work.
- Most teaching is at least good and helps students make very good progress, as evidenced in their high-quality practical work, sketchbooks and reflective journals. Students develop good practical and technical skills and subject knowledge that enable them to explore ideas and produce high-quality and well-presented work. Teachers provide frequent and thorough oral and written feedback. After assessments, they identify strengths and weaker areas of students' work, and make specific recommendations on how to improve at the next stage or assignment. Teachers use coaching strategies effectively to help students develop their own ideas and creative solutions.
- In 2013, managers took the strategic decision to discontinue discrete provision within the college for GCSE and functional skills in English and mathematics, in the context of the relatively small number of students who needed to study for these qualifications, as well as difficulties in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified English and mathematics teachers. Revised entry criteria since 2014/15 mean that all 16–18-year-olds on study programmes already have GCSE English and mathematics at grade C or above when they join the college. Senior leaders worked closely with further education partners in the locality to ensure that any students without an English or mathematics qualification wishing to pursue a course in art and design could do so elsewhere within the local area, and take the necessary English and mathematics qualifications at level 2 to enable them to progress further.
- Students continue to develop and improve their English and mathematical skills within the art and design curriculum at the college. Teachers place a strong emphasis on developing students' oral and written skills, so that students use specialist and technical language confidently and fluently, and are able to articulate their ideas and opinions well. Students annotate their work in sketchbooks and develop critical evaluation skills well through reflective and contextual studies journals and regular tutorials and group critiques. However, a minority of teachers do not promote sufficiently the use of note-taking in lessons to ensure that students record and recall key information or concepts.

- Managers acknowledge that students' mathematical skills are less well developed than their English skills. While many good examples exist of teachers integrating lower level skills, such as measuring and scaling, into design projects, staff do not yet place sufficient focus on developing higher level numerical skills for problem solving across the curriculum. A few teachers are exploring more creative approaches, for example, focusing on concepts such as linear, cubic and exponential growth and half-life decay, and the creative use of numerical sequences such as the Fibonacci sequence. Other approaches include encouraging students to explore the use of addition, subtraction, multiplication or division in their artistic experiments, though students were not clear about how, or if, this actually improved their mathematical skills.
- College staff have defined a comprehensive set of skills and attributes that students should master to become successful professional artists and designers. Teachers develop these skills well through a well-planned series of projects and enrichment activities. For example, students research the range of career opportunities open to practitioners with specific specialist areas, such as illustration, graphic, fashion and 3-D design. Students benefit from opportunities to work on live briefs with external, commercial clients; to show their work in public exhibitions in the city centre; and to hear visiting lecturers talk about their work and creative practice. Students comment on how such opportunities have informed their thinking about future career possibilities and aspirations. However, relatively few students have opportunities for external work placement.
- Managers use self-assessment well to evaluate the quality of provision, identify accurately any areas requiring further improvement and put in place effective actions to secure change. Since the last inspection, senior leaders have improved the arrangements for governance and oversight of the further education (FE) provision, with the appointment of a governor with experience of, and responsibility for, FE. The quality of provision and performance is monitored closely through the FE committee, academic board, senior management team and governors.
- Course leaders and FE managers have a very good understanding of underlying reasons for areas of weaker performance, although they do not consistently articulate these reasons in the course-level and overall college self-assessment reports. Some actions for improvement do not have sufficiently specific and measurable targets to monitor progress effectively; in-year monitoring of progress focuses too much on the completion of actions and not sufficiently on the impact of these on students' progress and outcomes.
- A well-established system to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is in place; however, in their written reports on observations, managers focus too much on teaching and the teacher's input and not enough on the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress.

## **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- course leaders and teachers monitor closely the progress of all students on the extended diploma course, particularly those at risk of underperforming or leaving the course, to maintain current improvements in numbers completing and to improve outcomes overall
- teachers continue to monitor students' progress and achievement across the different pathways on the foundation diploma course, to ensure that all achieve well
- teachers receive the necessary training and support to integrate the development of higher level mathematical skills into the curriculum effectively and confidently
- in course-level and college self-assessment reports, staff and managers identify the causes of any areas of underperformance, and set actions for improvement with clearly specified and measurable targets, so that they can monitor impact
- in lesson observations, managers evaluate the difference teaching and assessment make to students' learning and progress
- staff devise suitable ways to enhance learners' understanding of the potential risks posed by radicalisation and extremism, and promote British values more systematically through the curriculum
- staff maximise the opportunities for external work experience and entrepreneurial activities available to students, through the college's contacts with creative networks, current practitioners and employers.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector were assisted by the college's head of further education, as nominee. Inspectors met with members of the leadership team, college managers, course leaders, teachers and students and with the link governor for the further education provision. Inspectors observed taught studio sessions and reviewed students' portfolios and assessed work. They reviewed key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to quality assurance and performance monitoring, safeguarding and curriculum planning.