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Ms Pam Ollerenshaw
Group Human Resources Director
Axle Group Holdings Limited
Floor 4, Regent House
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Dear Ms Ollerenshaw

Short inspection of National Tyre Service Limited

Following the short inspection on 8 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 National Tyre Service Limited was judged to be good in February 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

Leaders and the senior management team have prioritised well the apprentices' training and development within the business. As a result, you have maintained the strengths and improved the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

The Chairman, the Chief Executive, you and the Group Training and Development Manager have set high expectations for apprentices. You have communicated your expectations clearly to all staff in all the company's regional branches across England. As a result, the potential tensions between the operational needs of the business and the delivery of apprentices' training plans to a high quality are managed very effectively.

You and your managers are ambitious for apprentices and recognise the positive contributions that they can make to the business. The good management and planning of training has ensured that most apprentices achieve their qualifications and complete a useful range of additional courses linked to business needs. The current apprentices are making good progress towards completing successfully.

Managers and staff have an accurate view of the quality of provision. They take appropriate actions to resolve issues when they are identified. The improvement action plan is detailed and ensures further development of the quality of the apprentices' programme. The arrangements to share best practice between assessors and with other providers are not developed well enough to ensure apprentices benefit consistently from the highest-quality training and assessment.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff continue to ensure that the arrangements to keep apprentices safe are up to date and are fit for purpose. Your staff provide apprentices with good information at the start of their programmes about keeping themselves safe. Apprentices have a good understanding of safe practices when using the internet and digital social media. The policy and practice to ensure that they cannot access harmful material on the internet while at work or when studying are effective.

Assessors and branch managers focus particularly well on promoting and ensuring that apprentices have a good understanding of health and safety at work. As a result, apprentices have a high regard for safe working practices, particularly when changing tyres, balancing wheels and using vehicle ramps.

Apprentices have a reasonable awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Assessors do not reinforce and monitor apprentices' understanding of these risks during their progress reviews well enough.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, senior managers, training staff and employees in all branches are very committed to the apprenticeship programme. The Group Training and Development Manager, appointed after the previous inspection, reviewed fully the planning and the delivery of the apprenticeship programme and took effective action to make improvements and minimise any potential conflicts between the operational aspects of the business and the training of apprentices. He, with your support, ensures that branch managers have a key role in the training of apprentices and they have direct responsibility for mentoring the apprentices in their branches.
- The provision is managed well. Each assessor is responsible for the training of a small number of apprentices. Assessors have a very detailed knowledge of their apprentices' performance and support needs and they use this information well to support the apprentices to become productive employees in National Tyre branches. Apprentices benefit from well-planned, regular, one-week long, off-the-job training that is delivered in the company's two training centres. They share the technical experience that they gain in different branches. Assessors encourage apprentices to link their practical experience to off-the-job training topics well. Apprentices are supported well in planning their careers and undertake a good range of additional courses to raise their aspirations. For example, they can develop their expertise in technical aspects of fast-fit vehicle repair or in the management of branches.
- High-quality training and assessment ensures that apprentices make good progress. The Group Training and Development Manager monitors and improves the quality of teaching, training and assessment. The observers of teaching and training sessions pinpoint where improvement is needed and take effective action to eradicate weaknesses. Assessors benefit from a good range of staff development to improve their practice, but they do not get sufficient opportunities to share best practice between each other.

- The Group Training and Development Manager monitors all aspects of the development of each apprentice well. He quickly resolves any issues which impact adversely on an apprentice's development. For example, he transferred an apprentice from one branch to another when he required additional support.
- Staff support apprentices effectively and monitor their welfare carefully. They develop the apprentices' technical, personal and customer service skills well through challenge, praise and encouragement. Branch managers set apprentices a wide range of relevant tasks to extend their technical competencies. As a result, they grow in confidence to apply their skills to fit tyres, balance and align wheels or to replace car brakes. A few most-able apprentices help to manage the customer service reception desk at the branches.
- Your staff have been very successful in providing apprentices with good opportunities to extend their technical knowledge through extra-curricular activities. Apprentices' visits to tyre manufacturers ensure that they develop an in-depth understanding of different makes of tyres, treads and tyre compounds. They enhance their problem-solving skills in relation to tyre defects and the consequences of fitting tyres incorrectly.
- Assessors and mentors make good use of their professional expertise to coach apprentices in the workplace. Assessors visit apprentices frequently at branches to review their progress and assess their competencies. Apprentices are set challenging learning targets to ensure they make good progress. Assessors develop apprentices' personal and workplace skills well during reviews, for example challenging apprentices' practices when punctuality and attendance are not good enough.
- Assessors and mentors ensure that apprentices receive effective and constructive verbal and written feedback about improving their practical and written work. Written feedback in the electronic portfolios system enables apprentices to refer to their past work and improve the standard of their written work.
- A significant majority of apprentices already have GCSE grades A* to C in English and mathematics when they start their training; they make good use of these skills in the workplace. They apply mathematics confidently in industrial and commercial situations, for example when fitting tyres, or carrying out wheel alignment measures. Apprentices who study functional skills achieve well.
- Most apprentices achieve their qualifications, but around a quarter do not do so in the planned time. On completion of their programme all apprentices progress to full-time employed technicians. A few apprentices are subsequently promoted to deputy managers and branch managers. Apprentices enjoy their training, are very motivated and committed to learning and progress well in their job roles. Most apprentices attend well, show high standards of behaviour at work and become highly valued employees.

- Since the previous inspection, assessors have improved the apprentices' understanding of equality of opportunity. Apprentices are confident to express their concerns about intimidation and harassment. Despite the training that assessors have received, they do not develop sufficiently apprentices' understanding of key principals such as democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a higher proportion of apprentices complete their qualifications within the planned time
- all staff have a clear understanding of how they can improve further the quality of their training and assessment by sharing best practice between assessors and with other good or better providers so that all apprentices receive training of the highest standard
- assessors regularly extend apprentices' knowledge about the risks of radicalisation and extremism and about British values.

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

Yours sincerely

Shahram Safavi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by the Group Training and Development Manager, as nominee. We met you, your staff and apprentices. We observed training and lessons with members of your staff and looked at apprentices' work. We interviewed your apprentices. We reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of apprentices by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, and by seeking their views during on-site inspection activity.