

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



7 April 2016

Mrs Sheila Blackett
Learning Contracts and Quality Assurance Manager
First College Lincs
19 Ida Road
Skegness
Lincolnshire
PE25 2AR

Dear Mrs Blackett

Short inspection of First College Lincs

Following the short inspection on 9–10 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 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

The senior management team continues to nurture a caring and safe learning environment that effectively supports good apprentice and trainee achievement. The training outcomes for the majority of apprentices are good with high apprenticeship success rates in most sector areas.

Productive partnership working has allowed the college to make a valuable contribution to skills development within Lincolnshire. You have responded effectively to local and national initiatives, and successfully introduced new programmes to meet demand. For example, the implementation of traineeships has been good and resulted in high progression to apprenticeship training.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have maintained a clear focus on establishing and monitoring challenging expectations of performance. Quality assurance and improvement arrangements have continued to raise standards and meet the needs of learners and employers.

You have a sound understanding of your organisation, and the training environment in which it works, that allows you to plan appropriate actions to address areas for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have maintained the supportive culture noted at the previous inspection. This culture successfully promotes the protection and safety of learners and staff. You have established an appropriate range of safeguarding procedures and policies that are subject to regular review to ensure relevance and effectiveness. All staff, work and training places are subject to thorough appropriate vetting which has contributed well to learners feeling both safe and protected. However, the impact of 'Prevent' training on the professional practice of subcontractor staff has not yet been evaluated.

You have maintained good links with social workers, police, community and specialist agencies to help learners in the rare instances when they raise concerns. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of how safeguarding applies to them. They are confident that staff will both listen and quickly respond to situations or incidents that are making them anxious.

Leaders and managers have given a high priority to ensuring that staff and learners have a good appreciation of the risks posed by radicalisation. Learners generally have a good understanding of British values with regard to their personal and work life. However, you recognise that managers need to undertake further work in this area to ensure that all learners' understanding is consistently high enough.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have maintained the good quality of teaching, learning and assessment noted at the previous inspection. Improvements in the quality assurance processes, using direct observation of taught sessions, correctly identify key areas of better practice and required actions to raise standards. However, records of completed observations do not consistently focus on the learning taking place and the progress made by learners. This was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. The quality assurance of guidance interviews does not always place sufficient emphasis on how well the activity improves learners' understanding of the available options.
- The senior management team has further developed its good use of partnership working, as identified at the previous inspection. It has addressed successfully the apprenticeship recruitment needs of local employers and regional objectives. Managers have continued their careful design of the apprenticeship training programmes to ensure that timing and delivery methods fit the requirements of employers and learners. In many cases, staff provide the entire programme on the employer's site to reduce the impact on business performance and ensure that opportunities for assessment that arise in the workplace are fully utilised. This approach has resulted in sustained levels of recruitment by employers.

- Well-focused strategic planning has resulted in the introduction of a wide variety and level of provision. Managers have been particularly effective in responding to the training needs of the local hospitality and leisure industry. Across Lincolnshire, you have responded well to the staff development objectives of small- to medium-sized employers, many of which are widely geographically dispersed. Use of well-managed subcontracting arrangements has allowed a large public sector employer to benefit from the appropriate range of programmes offered by the college. The quality and performance management of subcontractors are good. Managers effectively use the self-assessment process and associated action plan to drive improvements and raise standards for all learners.

- Since the previous inspection, the senior management team has successfully implemented all aspects of traineeships. Trainees receive useful careers guidance that helps them make realistic decisions regarding their future options. Staff are adept at tailoring work experience places so individual trainees develop useful vocational and employability skills alongside a sound work ethic. Trainees value the good classroom-based teaching and learning they receive and are able to apply their learning appropriately within their workplace. For example, a trainee successfully used his newly acquired reading, writing and computer skills to support and improve the workplace's administrative function. Success rates for English and mathematics qualifications are good. Where they leave the traineeship earlier than planned, trainees are suitably encouraged and supported to complete their qualifications. Progress to a positive outcome for the significant majority of trainees is good. It is noteworthy that progress into apprenticeships for the previous academic year was high. In-year data indicate that learners are making good or better progress. Key aspects of the programme are subject to appropriate quality assurance arrangements. However, managers have yet to evaluate the implementation of the whole programme. Performance management is good and used well by managers to promote high standards and improvement. Staff understand and value the well-established process for the appraisal and observation of taught sessions, and welcome the constructive and fair performance feedback given. Managers make good use of this, and other relevant key indicators, to both manage staff performance and plan an extensive range of training and development.

- The senior management team places significant and appropriate emphasis on effectively communicating with all staff. It makes good use of frequent formal and informal meetings, and an annual training day takes place to inform staff of planned initiatives and gather their views on the draft self-assessment report and business plan. The quality improvement group effectively monitors progress in achieving identified improvement actions.

- Managers regularly collect learners' views throughout their training programmes. However, analysis of survey results does not sufficiently identify trends across all relevant learner groups.
- Since the previous inspection, managers have maintained the good rate of learners' progress and success rates for the significant majority of apprentices, particularly within business administration. In other sector areas the success rates are very high. The personal support available to learners is outstanding and contributes to high rates of programme retention and learner satisfaction.
- All learners receive an appropriate initial assessment that trainers effectively use to plan training and support needs. They enjoy their learning, both on and off the job. Learners develop good workplace skills and knowledge. The quality of their completed work and portfolios is of a good standard. Learners are able to use their newly acquired skills and qualifications to help them progress and become more useful members of their workplace. For example, the application of learning by an information and communication technology (ICT) apprentice helped in the development of spreadsheets to meet business needs, improved social media use for customer promotion campaigns and supported the development of a large circulation newsletter.
- You have successfully introduced strategies to improve learners' understanding of equality and diversity, which is now good. This improvement has given learners a better appreciation of how to use their learning to be more effective in the workplace. For example, following training, an apprentice was able to empathise and better deal with customers with hearing impairments.
- All apprentices and trainees receive appropriate reviews of their progress. As a result, they are generally able to identify what short-term actions they need to complete to achieve further. However, as judged at the previous inspection, objective setting is not consistently effective for all learners, particularly where long-term targets are established. Too often they do not include enough detail to guide learners' actions or are not demanding enough to challenge the most-able, for example through the use of targets for additional unit completion.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the evaluation of:
 - the impact of 'Prevent' training for subcontractor staff, and
 - traineeship programmes implementationresult in an action planning process that leads to improvement.
- the use of quality assurance arrangements for:
 - taught sessions by observation includes a clear and documented evaluation of the learning and progress that is achieved
 - careers guidance interviews include an evaluation of their impact on learners understanding of the available options.

In addition:

- surveys of learners' views should be analysed to identify trends across all groups of learners
- the quality of target setting for learners, particularly for long-term objectives, needs improving so it is both consistently effective and appropriately challenging of the most able.

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

Nigel Bragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the short inspection, the learning contracts and quality assurance manager as nominee assisted us. Inspectors met with senior leaders, managers, staff, employers, apprentices and trainees, using both 'face-to-face' and telephone interviews. Key documents, including those related to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding were reviewed. Inspectors visited training and workplaces to discuss with learners their experience of the received training, assess their progress and scrutinise the quality of completed work. In addition, we observed teaching, learning and assessment sessions.