

Ofsted,
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD

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



28 September 2015

Mary Murphy
Principal and Chief Executive
Riverside College
Kingsway
Widnes
Cheshire
WA8 7QQ

Dear Mrs Murphy

Short inspection of Riverside College

Following the short inspection on 23 and 24 September 2015, 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 February 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

- Your leadership team has maintained the good quality of education and training in the college since the last inspection. You and your team have continued to have a strong focus on sustaining the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the large majority of students are making good or excellent progress. Lesson observations accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement, including in apprenticeships and subcontracted provision. A rigorous and accurate self-assessment process and robust action plans ensure that underperforming courses are improved rapidly.
- You, senior leaders and governors have set a clear strategic direction. You work successfully with the local authority and the local enterprise partnership (LEP) to ensure that provision is responsive to local and regional priorities. This results in a high proportion of your students progressing to further study, higher education, apprenticeships and employment.
- Governors support and challenge you, senior leaders and managers well in their drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They rigorously interrogate the accurate information they receive on retention and achievement, comparing outcomes with targets. As a result they are very well informed about any areas that require improvement.
- The implementation of study programmes is effective. Clear progression routes are in place at all levels, with a range of academic or vocational programmes preparing students well for their next step. The design of programmes includes an

appropriate focus to improve students' skills in English and mathematics and more students are studying these subjects than previously.

- Students on study programmes, including those eligible for high needs funding, develop their vocational skills well through relevant work experience, work-related projects and competitions.
- Senior leaders and managers have accurately identified that improvement is required in the quality of the provision in English and mathematics and in students' progress in these subjects, as well as in the proportion of AS students progressing to A-level programmes. You have appropriate strategies in place to improve these concerns.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors commended the college's success in focusing on core priorities and the rapid increase in student outcomes. Inspectors also identified a number of areas for improvement, including: low achievement rates on a small number of courses; the variability of A-level students' progress in different subjects; insufficiently challenging work in a few lessons; low student participation in relevant enrichment activities and developing programmes that meet students' needs and interests. The leadership team has taken decisive action to improve these areas and has moved the college forward.
- The variability in success rates has been reduced and achievement on the large majority of underperforming courses has improved, particularly in health and social care, construction and animal management. Apprenticeship provision has improved significantly and the proportion achieving their framework is now good. The gap between apprentices at levels 2 and 3 has narrowed considerably.
- The number of A-level students achieving high grades has improved and most make good or better progress, although on a minority of AS courses, too many students do not make sufficient progress.
- Students are better prepared for further study or employment as a result of the significant enhancements to the enrichment programme. These have been effectively implemented as part of the study programme requirements.
- Students now benefit from an improved curriculum, revised enrolment criteria and good information, advice and guidance. As a result they choose appropriate courses that meet their needs and aspirations. However, as you have recognised, the large majority of AS students progressed to A-levels or transferred to vocational programmes and a very small minority of AS students left the college.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and very effective action is taken to safeguard students. Staff are aware of their new responsibilities and have taken appropriate steps to protect students from radicalisation and extremism. They promote a strong culture of fairness and respect. Students behave particularly well at college and respect each other and their teachers. The college has very good relationships and works very effectively with a range of agencies in the borough to ensure that the most vulnerable students are

identified and kept safe. The college is working particularly well with external agencies to identify young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Inspection findings

- Teaching, learning and assessment are consistently good, enabling the large majority of students to achieve their qualification and progress to employment and further study. Teachers plan a good range of learning activities to ensure that all students participate well in lessons and develop their knowledge and skills effectively, including in the correct use of technical language.
- Learning and progress is checked regularly and routinely in the majority of lessons. However, in a few lessons the more-able students are not challenged sufficiently. Marked assignment work contains good checking of spelling and grammar and has clear information on how a student can improve their performance.
- Students become more confident and demonstrate good work-related skills at an appropriate level, for example, hairdressing students accurately select the most appropriate colouring technique and high needs students prepare a meal for themselves.
- The large majority of students achieve grades at or above those expected from their qualifications when they start college. Vocational advanced-level students make excellent progress, often from a low starting point. Students' progression to further study, higher education, apprenticeships or employment is high.
- The teaching of English and mathematics is not yet consistently good. Attendance at English and mathematics lessons is too low and low-level disruption in a few mathematics lessons results in students not making sufficient progress. In 2014/15 the proportion of students achieving grade A*-C in their GCSE was low. The college has implemented a robust strategy to improve.
- Students take part in a good range of sports, educational visits, work experience and other enrichment activities. For example, students develop their research and presentation skills and this prepares them effectively for higher education. Sport students plan sports days and coach primary school children. The majority of students take part in relevant external work experience.
- The apprenticeship provision at the college is managed well. The college has reduced the number of subcontractors to those delivering high quality. Senior leaders and governors scrutinise the performance of apprentices very effectively and a rigorous plan is in place to sustain the improvements.
- The college has developed an effective strategy to increase the numbers of students on science, technology and engineering programmes to meet the LEP priorities. The college has worked effectively with employers to develop courses to meet their specific needs, for example, in additive manufacturing.
- Processes to accurately assess high-needs students are robust. The college communicates well with partner schools and other agencies, and as a result,

transition arrangements are effective. Students have effective individualised plans and are making good progress.

- The targets set for students on foundation-learning programmes are not always sufficiently specific for the individual. The recording of their progress is overly descriptive. It does not record clearly enough the skills developed or identify the barriers to their progress.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they monitor closely AS students' progress to ensure that they achieve well across all subjects and a greater proportion continue to A-level courses
- they improve the quality of the delivery of GCSE English and mathematics lessons, to engage all students who have not achieved a grade C, so that they develop their skills, attend regularly and make good progress
- they share good practice in teaching, learning and assessment to ensure a consistently high-quality learning experience across all subjects and types of provision.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Machell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by the Assistant Principal quality and curriculum. We met you, your senior leaders, managers and governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. We visited your two sites with members of the leadership team to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at students' work. We spoke to students across both sites, including apprentices. We held meetings with students, staff, managers and external partners. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of students by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking the views of students and employers during on-site activity.