

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



12 May 2016

Mr David Martin
Vice President
GP Strategies Training Limited
Floor 6a
Kingsgate
Wellington Road North
Stockport
Cheshire
SK4 1LW

Dear Mr Martin

Short inspection of GP Strategies Limited

Following the short inspection on 21 and 22 April 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 July 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

- The leadership team has successfully implemented most of the key improvement areas identified at the last inspection and maintained learners' very high success rates. They have created a positive learning culture across all centres which has enabled the needs of learners and employers to be met.
- The proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications in 2014/15 improved and was good. The number who achieved in the planned time was above that for similar providers in 2014/15. The majority of current learners are making good progress and are on track to achieve in their planned time.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Learners benefit from well-planned lessons, which are interesting and supported by good resources. Tutors use skilful questioning to check the effectiveness of learning and to ensure that planning meets individual learning needs well. During individual coaching or teaching to small groups, tutors promote learning very effectively.
- Managers have ensured that resources to support teaching and learning have been developed well, including through an intranet for staff which contains a wide range of up-to-date resource material. Tutors monitor and assist learning effectively using the electronic portfolios which serve their purpose well. Individual coaching sessions are planned well to meet the needs of apprentices; assessors utilise a good range of assessment methods to check learning. In a few

instances assessors and tutors do not enable learners to reflect upon and demonstrate their own understanding sufficiently.

- The internal observation process has improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Observations of teaching and learning are carried out regularly. They are well documented and monitored and lead to specific, detailed action plans and improvement. Well-focused continuing professional development (CPD) supports and engages staff effectively. Leaders' emphasis on sharing good practice across the company is increasingly effective, supported by the good use of electronic communication. 'Best practice' mentors have been selected to provide individual support to meet the specific needs of staff. Induction and support for new staff are good.
- Observations of learning on apprenticeship programmes focus appropriately on the quality of learning and learners' progress. However, on traineeships, there is too much focus on the teaching process and what the tutor is doing. All observations result in the identification of appropriate staff development, including the sharing of good practice between colleagues. Assessors value the help they can access from colleagues via electronic video conferencing, if they have delivery queries.
- Managers have introduced a well-organised traineeship programme that has a clear and very effective focus on progression, particularly into apprenticeships. Current progression rates into positive destinations such as employment or on to apprenticeships are high. The structure of the traineeship programme meets government requirements well.
- Most trainees have a good understanding of the relevance of all parts of their programmes and can see how their programme is helping them to prepare for the workplace and to secure employment. They value highly the way in which their training programme develops the personal skills and vocational knowledge that they need to succeed.
- Staff use the results of initial assessments and interviews very effectively to ensure that the traineeship will meet the applicants' needs. Where it is felt that they are not yet ready for traineeships, applicants are referred to other providers and support agencies. The provider works closely with these partners, who offer more appropriate programmes and support.
- The board of governors, established in 2015, is not yet fully developed. The composition of the board is too narrow to offer sufficient breadth of expertise to fully support and challenge all aspects of the provider's work. Meetings are currently too infrequent to provide sufficient, timely guidance to managers. The board receives detailed data but meeting records do not accurately capture the depth of discussion around key topics such as the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the success rates across the organisation.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in functional English and mathematics is good. The good range of online and computer-based learning resources is particularly useful to learners when they are learning independently.
- Employers say that learners' improved skills in English and mathematics enhance their occupational efficiency. A high proportion of learners achieve success in functional English and mathematics but learners who have achieved grades A* to C in GCSE English and mathematics are not challenged sufficiently to develop their skills further. There are too few qualified and experienced tutors for English

and mathematics. Insufficient progress has been made in ensuring that all learners have opportunities to obtain GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

- Safeguarding has a very high profile within the company and the leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and learners' safety and well-being are ensured.
- Safeguarding is promoted well throughout the organisation. Staff responsibilities for safeguarding in each region are clearly defined. Staff have current Disclosure and Barring Service checks and detailed risk assessments of employers are carried out to minimise risks for learners.
- All staff have received good online and face-to-face safeguarding training which is updated annually and repeated in full every three years. This training includes e-safety, child sexual exploitation, terrorism, radicalisation and extremism, fundamental British values, forced marriage, and the College of Policing Channel Project. The provider acknowledges that a small number of staff have identified the need for further training in the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values.
- A senior member of staff is the lead safeguarding officer and is responsible for reporting safeguarding matters to the board. The identified weakness at the previous inspection has been eliminated through the redesign of resources for health and safety, equality and diversity, and safeguarding.
- The identification and sharing of best practice in safeguarding, equality and diversity, and health and safety among staff has improved and is now good. The provider has a sensitive approach to ensuring that learners who are transgender achieve good outcomes and that any prejudice-based bullying is tackled.
- Although the promotion of safeguarding to apprentices and trainees is good, their recall of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism is not consistently secure. Learners have contact details to use if problems arise.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have developed a very supportive, positive learning environment within all centres. Learners are encouraged to learn and they feel extremely safe. Learners demonstrate good respect for each other, staff and visitors. Communication across the organisation is very effective and ensures staff feel well informed and supported to take on and develop new programmes.
- Apprentices enjoy their learning and develop good skills and knowledge that are being used in the workplace and are valued by employers. In the great majority of cases, their skills development is having a positive impact on the workforce. For example, apprentices' increased confidence and communication skills lead to improved teamwork and better interaction in the workplace. A significant majority of apprentices secure employment or promotion on completion of their training as the skills they develop support them in successful appointments.
- Apprentices have developed aspirational career plans as a result of the training received; they have a newly found self-belief and confidence. A significant

number of apprentices intend to progress with their learning. In most cases progress is in line with learners' career aims and progression plans. Trainees improve their personal effectiveness well; they develop the vocational and employability skills necessary for them to secure and sustain employment. For example, the good support provided to trainees in the use of public transport removed an important barrier to employment experienced by a group of young Muslim women.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in functional English and mathematics is generally good. English is well contextualised, for example through integration with topics relating to equality and diversity. The good range of online and computer-based learning resources is particularly useful to learners when they are learning independently. Learners receive good encouragement, where appropriate, to work at a level higher than that required for the apprenticeship, although learners who have already achieved GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics at grades A* to C are not challenged sufficiently. Employers say that learners' improved skills in English and mathematics enhance their contribution to the workplace.
- Resources to support the teaching and learning of English and mathematics have been developed well at the Halifax Centre. There is now a dedicated member of staff responsible for the delivery of functional skills on the traineeship programme and for the support to individual learners on the apprenticeship programme. Paper-based and online resources support the delivery of functional skills well.
- Success rates for functional English and mathematics are high overall. However, too many learners are having more than one attempt at the tests before they are successful. Vocational tutors do not routinely identify and correct learners' spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, which hinders their progress in English.
- Managers recognise that across the company there are too few qualified and experienced tutors for English and mathematics. Insufficient progress has been made in ensuring that all learners have opportunities to obtain GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics. Overall, there is insufficient strategic and operational leadership and management of English and mathematics.
- The provider successfully introduced a traineeship programme in September 2015. This has proved to be well organised and effective. The programme is well structured and focuses on developing skills to help learners progress. Most trainees have a good understanding of the relevance of all parts of their programmes. They understand how the traineeships are helping them to prepare for the workplace and to secure employment. They value highly the way in which their training programme develops the personal skills and vocational knowledge that they need to succeed. However, some staff have not adapted their delivery to the structure of the 12-week traineeship programme, preferring the more flexible and lengthy approach afforded under the previous study programme, which allowed for wider personal development at a slower pace. Consequently, tutors do not place sufficient emphasis on ensuring that learners progress within the expected timeframe.
- Employers support the traineeship programme well. GP Strategies has well-established, productive links with a wide range of partners who offer good progression routes, including the employers for whom they run apprenticeships.

Work placements offer trainees safe and supportive environments in which they develop good vocational skills and improve the wider skills, such as timekeeping and self-confidence, which will help them to secure and sustain employment. Some trainees benefit from sampling several placements before deciding on their preferred progression route. Employers have a very good understanding of the purpose of traineeships.

- Assessors are confident in their approach to functional skills delivery. Support is available through 'expert' colleagues. Trainees develop their functional skills well and understand the relevance of this development to their future careers. Lessons are planned well and offer learners a suitable level of individual challenge.
- Learners are encouraged to work towards higher-level functional skills where appropriate. Assessors are keen to provide able learners with sufficient challenge, particularly where it will help them to progress to higher-level awards or improve their performance in the workplace. There is no opportunity for apprentices to extend their skills in mathematics or English beyond grade C at GCSE.
- The quality of tutors' feedback on learners' written work is too variable. Tutors do not routinely mark trainees' written work. They provide verbal feedback but do not offer written feedback on functional skills tasks completed in class or for homework. Too frequently, learners are unsure how to identify and correct spelling and grammatical errors because tutors' feedback does not help them to improve these skills sufficiently.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more teaching, learning and assessment becomes outstanding through the sharing of best practice
- all staff are fully trained in the 'Prevent' duty and learners' knowledge and understanding of safeguarding, including 'Prevent', is continually developed
- vocational tutors and assessors improve the quality of their feedback to apprentices, to support learners' skills development in spelling, punctuation and grammar so as to enhance their progress in English
- the breadth of expertise of governors is increased and fully utilised to allow them to challenge senior leaders and increase the pace of improvement
- they rapidly increase the number of qualified and experienced tutors for English and mathematics; ensure learners have sufficient opportunities to prepare for, and obtain, GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics and that learners who have already secured these qualifications at grades A* to C are challenged fully so that they progress to higher levels.

Yours sincerely

Bob Busby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four Ofsted inspectors (OI), assisted by the director of quality as nominee, carried out the short inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also considered data recording learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors reviewed the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision.