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Mr John Clarke
Principal
Southport College
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Dear Mr Clarke

Short inspection of Southport College

Following the short inspection on 27 and 28 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 inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in March 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders, managers and governors have continued to provide a consistently good quality of education and training for learners and apprentices. Senior leaders and governors have identified accurately the weaknesses within the college, particularly in apprenticeship programmes, and are monitoring closely the impact of current actions on improving quality across all areas of the college.

With governors, senior leaders and managers, you have set an ambitious strategic plan that provides a clear focus on improving the college further. You and your team respond quickly and decisively to meeting priorities such as local, regional and national skills shortages. You recognise that learners in a minority of subject areas do not always have the opportunity for external work experience as part of their study programmes. As a result, you are working closely with employers and partners such as the Southport Business Improvement District to increase work experience and work-related learning opportunities to enable all learners to make informed decisions about their next steps in education, employment or apprenticeships.

Learners and apprentices enjoy their time at college. The large majority of learners achieve their qualifications and progress to further study, employment or apprenticeships. The proportion of learners who achieve GCSE grades A* to C in English and mathematics has increased over the last two years and managers have well-developed plans in place to improve this further. You recognise that much work

was needed to improve the quality of apprenticeship provision; the impact of current actions shows that the progress of current apprentices is now good.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified areas for improvement in the:

- retention of 16- to 18-year-olds
- attendance rates
- challenge for the most-able learners
- success rates
- sharing of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that teaching across all areas is good or better
- embedding of systems to enable and sustain improvement.

Leaders, managers and staff have worked hard to improve provision and have been successful in addressing most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Improving success rates for apprentices, and attendance rates, particularly in English and mathematics, and challenge for some of the most-able learners remain areas for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are highly effective. The highly qualified and experienced safeguarding team investigates thoroughly safeguarding concerns, including those relating to radicalisation and extremism. Members of the team work closely with external agencies such as the police, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Prevent duty coordinator, and domestic violence and housing charities. This ensures that learners have access to the most appropriate sources of help and support. Wide-ranging college support services such as counselling, progress tutors and financial guidance help learners facing challenges in their lives to complete their programmes.

Staff and governors receive regular updates and training on all aspects of safeguarding and the Prevent duty. Learners, as part of induction and regularly throughout their programmes, receive safeguarding and Prevent duty training. Learners feel safe and are very clear about to whom they should report any potential issues.

Leaders and managers have successfully implemented the Prevent duty and have intervened successfully, with the support of external agencies, where learners have been at risk of radicalisation. Learners have a clear understanding of life in Britain, clearly demonstrating aspects such as tolerance and respect while at college.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers accurately identify poor performance. They identified and analysed carefully and accurately weaknesses such as low success rates in apprenticeships and adult learning programmes. Subsequent action plans, and close monitoring of actions in order to improve the quality of provision, are effective. Systems introduced since the last inspection have enabled managers to accelerate improvement in the few areas that are underperforming.
- The college has a relatively small apprenticeship programme across nine subject areas. Strong partnerships with employers, partners, stakeholders and the local enterprise partnership ensure that the curriculum, including apprenticeships, meets local, regional and national skills needs. Senior leaders recognise that, although improving, the proportion of apprentices successfully achieving their apprenticeships is too low and that the quality of apprenticeship provision requires further improvement.
- Leaders, managers and governors have successfully strengthened the arrangements for improving and monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Highly effective continuing professional development, and swift and decisive performance management have ensured that teaching and learning remain good. Leaders have an accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Attendance, particularly in English and mathematics, is below the college target.
- Increasing challenge for the most-able learners was a recommendation from the previous inspection. Managers carefully monitor the starting points and progress of learners. Some of the most-able learners, particularly on level 3 programmes, are not always challenged, and as a result, they do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Learners who join the college with low starting points make good progress, meeting and often exceeding their target grades.
- Teachers are particularly good at tailoring programmes to meet the specific needs of high-needs learners. Learners are well supported, develop good independence skills and most progress to higher level programmes. A high proportion of learners make such good progress in their personal and academic skills that they no longer require funding to support their needs.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are generally good across the college for learners and apprentices. Most teachers plan interesting and innovative lessons that develop learners' personal, social and employability skills. For example, level 1 hospitality and catering learners work with level 2 and level 3 learners to develop the skills needed to prepare and serve food and to provide good customer service. As a result, most progress to higher level programmes or supported internships. Learners working at higher levels develop highly effective skills of supervision and teamwork when working in mixed-level groups.
- Leaders and managers have successfully implemented all aspects of the 16 to 19 study programme. The proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 achieving GCSE A* to C grades in English and mathematics improved significantly in 2015. All current learners with a GCSE grade D or E in English and/or grade D, E or F in mathematics undertake GCSEs in English and/or mathematics. The vast majority of learners participate in good-quality, meaningful external work experience and work-related activity which help them to prepare for their next steps in

education, employment or apprenticeships. Staff recognise that external work-experience placements are underdeveloped in a small minority of subject areas such as games design; they are working hard to develop further opportunities for external work experience.

- Feedback to learners during and following assessments is not consistently good across all subject areas. A small minority of learners do not always know what they need to do to improve their work, and feedback is not always helpful in supporting learners to further develop and improve their English skills.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeships rises substantially and a much higher proportion of apprentices achieve their apprenticeships in the planned timescale
- learners, particularly the most-able on level 3 programmes, are challenged in their learning to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable
- opportunities for external work experience for learners, in the minority of subject areas where they are underdeveloped, are improved so that learners can make informed decisions about their next steps in education, employment or apprenticeships
- teachers improve further the feedback provided to learners to ensure that learners in all areas of the college understand how to improve their work and further develop and improve their English skills
- learners' attendance at lessons, especially in English and mathematics, improves through rigorous monitoring in order for learners to make good progress, develop their skills and successfully achieve their qualifications.

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

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the vice-principal, curriculum and quality, as nominee, assisted the team. We held meetings with you, your senior leaders, representatives from the governing body, managers, teaching staff, partners, employers and learners. We observed teaching, learning and assessment with members of your staff. We reviewed key documents, including those relating to the college's strategy, self-assessment, performance, safeguarding and Prevent duty. We considered the views of learners by reviewing comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, from your own learner survey and by seeking the views of learners and employers during on-site inspection activity.