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Mr Christopher Bradshaw
Chair of Governors
Queen Alexandra College
Court Oak Road
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Dear Mr Bradshaw

Short inspection of Queen Alexandra College

Following the short inspection on 8 and 9 June 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 June 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the college since the previous inspection. The team understands what makes good teaching and learning, and has continued its strong focus on sustaining the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; as a result, most students make good or better progress from their starting point. A rigorous and accurate self-assessment process and robust quality improvement action plans lead to the rapid improvement of underperforming courses.

Governors are well informed and have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college. They support and challenge successfully leaders and managers to work together in their drive to improve continuously the quality of education and the students' experience. For example, governors linked to curriculum areas and to aspects of management such as fundraising share their considerable knowledge and prior experience.

The implementation of study programmes is effective. Managers have put in place clear routes enabling students to progress between courses and levels, with a good range of vocational and academic programmes. The design of the programmes includes an appropriate focus on improving students' English and mathematical skills and their skills for work, preparing them well for their next steps.

Leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college. They have accurately identified that further

improvement is required in students' achievement of qualifications in information and communication technology (ICT), media, and functional skills in English and mathematics. They have taken decisive actions to ensure improvements in teaching, learning and assessment practices; they closely monitor students' progress and achievement at regular educational progress review meetings, and ensure that staff make appropriate and timely interventions to enable all students to make the progress they are capable of. As a result, college data for the current academic year shows improvements in student achievement on each of these courses.

Leaders and managers ensure that all students have the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of their experience at the college, using a wide range of collection methods such as online surveys and those supported by the use of larger print, Braille and symbols. As a result, students' response rates are high. Leaders and managers make good use of this feedback to help improve the provision.

The leadership team has taken decisive action to rectify the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, and the impact of their changes is clear. For example:

- Accurate reporting of the performance of different groups of students is now in place; managers make good use of data to inform their decision-making effectively.
- Leaders and managers work with employers and other stakeholders effectively to inform improvement planning and self-assessment. For example, constructive feedback received from employers has resulted in improvements in the communication between college staff and employers, and an increase in the levels of support from staff. As a result, employers are able to support students on work placements more effectively.
- Teachers ensure that students receive and understand their individual personal and social targets; they spend time at the beginning of lessons engaging students in discussions on how the targets will help them to achieve their end goals.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that effective action is taken to safeguard students. The safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and meet legal responsibilities. Staff and governors are aware of their responsibilities and have taken appropriate steps to protect students from the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Staff promote fundamental British values well through tutorials and the personal, health, social and education programme.

All staff promote a positive, caring, friendly and tolerant culture. Students behave well in the wide range of learning settings and in college communal areas. They respect each other, college staff and the members of the general public they come into contact with in the college café and the gym.

Leaders and managers have developed and enhanced the role of learning support assistants further, for example by providing them with additional training in

personal care needs and choking prevention. As a result, they are able to ensure that the college staff are better able to meet the increasingly complex needs of students.

Managers work well with a range of external agencies to ensure that students are kept safe in the residences, when travelling to and from college and while learning. Managers keep detailed records of safeguarding incidents and meet weekly to monitor the well-being of students; they also share this information with the governor responsible for safeguarding. However, during the inspection, inspectors identified that leaders and managers did not monitor sufficiently the progress made by an external agency in dealing with one student incident that had been referred to it, in order to ensure that the outcomes were appropriate and timely.

Inspection findings

- Students make good progress from their starting points in managing their anxieties, maximising their abilities, cooperating with fellow students and communicating in speech, by signing or by eye-pointing. They progress well on vocational courses, on employment programmes, on preparation for life courses and on work placements.
- All students make good progress in developing their communication skills. Most make some improvements in their practical mathematical skills, in reading and in writing. A few students make very significant advances in English or mathematics, way beyond what might be expected from their starting points.
- Students progress very well after leaving the college, and many achieve the personal, social, employment and educational destinations they have identified as their goals.
- The college meets the complex and diverse needs of its students well, providing programmes from pre-entry level to level 3, and with an increasing focus on the needs of young people with autism. Students study on a good range of courses, including motor vehicle, media, performing arts, art and design, trades such as tiling and plastering, health and social care, ICT and hospitality. Good residential provision ensures that students unable to travel daily can also attend college.
- The curriculum prepares students well for adulthood, independence and employment. A preparation for life programme develops the skills of young people with the most complex needs to make choices about their future lives and to live as independently as possible. Students at level 1 and upwards choose between vocational courses leading to further study and employment, or practical employment-focused programmes, developing the skills needed for work.
- Students' transitions into and out of college are well managed and sensitively handled by staff. As a result, students settle in with as little anxiety as possible on joining the college. They are well prepared for whatever they decide to do on leaving.
- Work experience arrangements are very good. Most students attend a wide range of placements, carefully matched to their individual needs and

abilities. Students' attendance at placements is regular. The placements last long enough to enable them to develop further their skills and confidence. Travel training and job coaching ensure that students become appropriately independent on their placements. Supported internships with local and national employers for a few students prepare them particularly well for future employment.

- The majority of college staff plan very good, detailed and imaginative learning sessions with clear, measurable individual targets for each student, which help them to progress in small steps. In these lessons teachers provide lively and stimulating learning tasks, as well as opportunities to apply English and mathematical skills in the context of their other studies. However, not all teachers demonstrate this good practice. Too many teachers do not help students to understand well enough the skills being developed in their lessons, or use the unfamiliar language of examination bodies. When setting targets, they do not break tasks down into small enough steps; targets such as 'to complete a unit', 'to recognise coins in general' or 'to improve spelling' are too large to be achievable. As a result, students sometimes find it hard to know how well they are progressing.
- Many staff do not plan in enough time towards the end of lessons to review with students what they are now able to do as a result of the learning sessions, and to record this learning accurately. Teachers do not all enter students' progress on the college electronic progress monitoring system regularly enough, and as a result staff and students are not always clear about the levels of progress made in all aspects of their learning.
- Students' achievement of qualifications is good in most vocational subjects, in mathematics at entry level 3 and in English at level 1; their achievement of functional skills qualifications at other levels and in ICT and media is not as marked. Staff are engaged in ongoing training and receive support in the promotion of literacy and numeracy skills in learning sessions. Managers have decided to adopt different qualifications in the future, which they regard as more accessible for their students.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff improve the planning of individual student targets; allow for time at the end of a session to consolidate learning; and record students' progress in the development of vocational, English and mathematical skills in all learning sessions, so that staff are able to measure progress and students are able to identify what they have learnt as a result of the session
- managers should ensure that teaching staff share the existing good practice across all curriculum areas
- leaders and managers monitor more consistently the progress made by external agencies in following up safeguarding incidents which the college has referred to them
- all students achieve their qualifications in the planned timescale, particularly in functional skills in English and mathematics, and in media and ICT.

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

Denise Olander
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by the vice principal-academic, as nominee. We met governors, leaders, managers and teachers. We visited many of the curriculum areas, the café, the gym, vocational workshops and external work experience placements to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at students' work. We spoke to students and held meetings with staff and managers. 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 reviewing feedback from employers, parents and carers and students in college surveys.