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Mr Shaun McNamara
Michael John Academy (MJA)
42–46 Renshaw Street
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Dear Mr McNamara

Short inspection of Michael John Academy

Following the short inspection on 16 and 17 August 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 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

You and your management team have a clear and ambitious strategy to provide high-quality provision that meets local needs and is responsive to national priorities. Michael John Academy (MJA) makes a significant contribution to providing good-quality training for apprentices throughout Liverpool and the Merseyside area, particularly for the hairdressing, beauty and customer service industries.

You and your management team have maintained the good quality of education and training at MJA since the previous inspection. The accurate evaluation of your provision with a strong focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment linked to good staff development, is improving its quality and ensuring that a high proportion of apprentices and learners are successful in achieving their qualifications.

You have implemented the 16 to 19 study programme particularly effectively. The 16 to 19 study programme provides learners with good work experience opportunities with employers in the hairdressing, beauty and customer service industries. Your staff are particularly good at preparing learners for work experience; consequently, your learners develop good employability skills.

Since the last inspection, you have maintained and improved your strong partnerships with external provider groups, the local authority and employers. Partnership links are enabling you to develop the curriculum in response to the demand for skills locally,

particularly in the development of new apprenticeships such as in customer service. You are good at working flexibly with employers and ensuring that your courses meet their business needs and this improves the employment prospects for apprentices and learners. Employers value highly the training and support provided by your tutors for apprentices because it meets their specific business needs particularly well.

Since the last inspection, you and your managers have improved your strategy for the delivery of English and mathematics. GCSE programmes are now available in English and mathematics and staff have improved their confidence in planning and integrating functional skills into the vocational curriculum. Consequently, learners and apprentices make good progress in improving and applying these important skills.

A high proportion of apprentices complete their programmes successfully within the planned time. Apprenticeship completion rates were high in 2014/15 and your current apprentices are making good progress. Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes achieved well in 2014/15. In January 2016, you correctly identified that current learners were not making the progress expected and took quick and decisive action to change the programme; these learners are now making good progress. Since the last inspection, you have taken the decision to stop working with underperforming subcontractors.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and include appropriate checks on staff. As a result of good staff training, staff know how to keep learners safe and respond swiftly and effectively to any concerns. Links with the local safeguarding board are in place, ensuring that MJA managers are aware of local safeguarding priorities and that these inform staff training. Your staff manage the required systems and procedures to underpin the safeguarding arrangements very well and they demonstrate in their work a good understanding of their role in safeguarding. Learners feel safe and are aware of the process for reporting concerns.

All staff at MJA are fully aware of the risk of radicalisation and extremism, and have received comprehensive training on the 'Prevent' duty. Good links are in place with the North West 'Prevent' coordinator. Learners receive training on the 'Prevent' duty as part of their induction and at tutorials. However, not all learners and apprentices can confidently articulate a sound understanding of the steps they would take if they had concerns about issues relating to radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection findings

- Senior managers at MJA have successfully developed the curriculum, responding well to the needs of employers and skills shortages, such as introducing apprenticeships in customer service. The introduction and

expansion of the 16 to 19 study programmes is closely aligned with responding to the regional strategy to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training. MJA works closely with provider networks and local strategic partnerships to respond to skills needs.

- New improved quality assurance and quality improvement systems are in place; these are very effective at identifying areas for improvement and monitoring the effectiveness of actions put in place to rectify them. A comprehensive system is in place for observing all aspects of the learner journey and managers have a good overview of the quality of provision. A strong focus is on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, the observations of training sessions and lessons do not focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on learners' progress. Quality improvement of subcontracted provision was not sufficiently robust; MJA managers recognised this and have taken the decision to no longer subcontract any provision.
- All aspects of the 16 to 19 study programme are implemented effectively. Learners benefit significantly from well-organised work preparation. Tutors help learners to develop good employability skills in the MJA by successfully creating a realistic commercial environment, where they can experience the demands of the workplace. Tutors are skilled at matching good-quality work experience to learners, with a variety of supportive employers. Learners are making good progress with improving their skills in English and mathematics. The majority of learners progress into employment or apprenticeships at the end of their programme.
- Tutors use their good commercial experience effectively to improve the skills of apprentices and learners to meet the needs of employers. On the apprenticeship programme, tutors work closely with employers to identify the skills that they need and ensure that apprentices develop these skills as part of their programme. Progress reviews for apprentices and learners are good; tutors provide clear, detailed targets and helpful feedback so that learners and apprentices know what they need to do to improve. Consequently, apprentices and learners make good progress in developing good relevant occupational skills and gain in confidence in the workplace. Learners' and apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity and its application to the workplace is insufficient. Good links are in place between on- and off-the-job training, ensuring that assessment opportunities in the workplace are fully utilised. Learners and apprentices produce good standards of work. Apprentices on hairdressing and beauty programmes work to a high commercial standard.
- Systems to monitor and record the progress of learners are good and provider data indicates that current learners and apprentices are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications in the planned time. A

decline in progress identified early in the year for learners on 16 to 19 study programmes has been resolved and learners are now back on target to achieve. MJA monitor the performance of subcontractors and this resulted in improvements in the subcontractor's success rates in 2014/15. The subcontractor has not sustained the improvements during the current year and MJA have terminated their contract with the subcontractor.

- A comprehensive and thorough self-assessment process is in place, which enables managers to identify accurately areas for improvement. The process uses a wide range of evidence including feedback from learners, employers and partners. The resulting action plan has realistic objectives which are monitored regularly by senior managers to measure progress.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the last few remaining learners enrolled with the subcontractor are rigorously monitored to ensure that they are making good progress and that they achieve their apprenticeship. Where necessary, introduce support for learners who fall behind in their work
- staff who observe training sessions and lessons, as part of your quality improvement process, focus on the impact of training and teaching on learners' progress and that the outcomes from observations inform staff development
- tutors ensure that learners and apprentices develop a better understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and of equality and diversity in the workplace the changes to the 16 to 19 study programme are fully evaluated to ensure that the progress of learners towards achieving their qualification is being maintained.

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

Stephen Miller
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the short inspection we were assisted by you, the chief executive, as nominee. We met you, the quality manager, programme manager, learning support manager, your management team, tutors, employers, partners, apprentices and learners. We observed teaching, learning and assessment at your training academy and at

employers' premises. We discussed with apprentices and learners their views on their experience at MJA, reviewed the quality of their work, their progress and the skills they had mastered. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of apprentices and learners by reviewing the comments received in response to Ofsted's online questionnaires.