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Vanessa Hollis
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Dear Mrs Hollis

Short inspection of Barchester Healthcare Limited

Following the short inspection on 10 and 11 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 June 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Senior leaders and managers have, during a company-wide transformation programme, placed learning and development at the centre of operations. They have ensured that the apprenticeship programme, which makes up around one fifth of company learning and development activity, continues to provide good-quality training. Leaders regard apprenticeships as fundamental to continuous improvement of the quality of care and support functions. A small proportion of Skills Funding Agency funding also supports qualified staff to improve their English and mathematics skills through preparing for and, for the large majority, gaining functional skills qualifications.

Managers have made good progress in responding to the areas identified as requiring improvement at the previous inspection. Learners benefit from good online resources including a high-quality and well-used e-portfolio system. Managers in care homes are appropriately involved in reviewing the progress of their apprentices. Staff continuously gather and analyse feedback from learners and managers and take appropriate action following monthly management reports which help identify areas for further improvement. Lead learning and development specialists carry out effective observations of an extensive range of learning activities. Their observation reports help learning and development specialists to recognise what they are doing well and what they need to improve to help their apprentices learn and make even better progress. Learning and development

specialists help apprentices and other staff to improve their English and mathematics skills. This support is sufficient to enable a high proportion of apprentices to pass examinations in these subjects on their first attempt.

Apprentices continue to benefit from good training and support from learning and development specialists. These specialists visit their apprentices frequently, ensuring that the large majority of current apprentices make good progress. During visits to apprentices the learning and development specialists work closely with care home managers and training staff, to ensure that apprentices make good progress in developing their vocational skills and knowledge.

Achievement rates during 2014/15 were above national rates in all apprenticeship subject areas, but a little lower than the previous year because a period of high staff turnover meant that around 15% of apprentices left the company for other employment and did not complete their training. More apprentices are making good progress in the current year than in the previous year. Achievement rates for functional skills English and mathematics qualifications are good.

Safeguarding is effective.

- Arrangements to secure the safety and well-being of apprentices and other learners remain effective, as do arrangements to promote safe working practices. Induction and continuing learning and development activities place significant emphasis on the safeguarding of apprentices, and on their care and safeguarding of residents and patients in care homes and hospitals.
- Senior leaders have reviewed and clarified safeguarding policies and procedures during the company reorganisation in 2015. These are well promoted and understood across the company.
- Apprentices receive training and information about the 'Prevent' duty and about British values during their induction and through apprenticeship programme materials. However, apprentices' understanding of British values requires further reinforcement during subsequent reviews so that they are all confident in their understanding of these matters. Managers, home trainers and learning and development specialists have received a good level of face-to-face and online training about the 'Prevent' duty and about British values.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers maintain very good oversight of the quality of apprenticeships. Senior leaders have recently established an effective home trainers' focus group to review the quality and effectiveness of induction resources, and to share good practice across the regions. Internal verification and standardisation meetings usefully disseminate good practice and share experience between home trainers, assessors and learning and development specialists. Company development days bring together home trainers and learning and development specialists to improve and share good practice.

- Leaders demonstrate a very strong commitment to apprenticeships and to wider learning and development activities throughout company operations. Apprentices benefit from good progression routes; for example, around one fifth of intermediate apprentices become advanced apprentices – a progression ratio that meets company needs and gives a good range of promotion opportunities to apprentices. In addition, apprentices progress well into further roles such as that of care practitioner and into nursing training.
- Quality assurance of training in homes and hospitals works effectively, chiefly through a comprehensive system of observations of training and learning. The head of quality, care home managers and regional managers liaise well to put in place support and development for any learning and development specialist who needs to improve their performance. In the very few cases of continued poor performance from specialists, managers have taken clear and robust action.
- Care managers are closely involved with the training of employees, and learning and development specialists keep managers updated with reports on apprentices' progress every 10 weeks. Such reporting helps learners fulfil job roles effectively, and ensures that apprentices at risk of making slow progress are identified early and support is put in place swiftly. As a result of support during this year, a number of apprentices formerly deemed at risk are now making good progress.
- Written feedback to apprentices from learning and development specialists and home trainers does not always match the detail and usefulness of the comprehensive oral feedback they provide. This means that apprentices sometimes lack a record of feedback that they can review at a later date in order to improve their job performance and subsequent assessments. In particular, trainers and learning and development specialists do not always correct spelling, grammar and punctuation errors in learners' written work, or in their electronic portfolios, so that the apprentices lack guidance to improve subsequent work. The support provided by a minority of learning and development specialists to help apprentices improve their mathematical skills needs to be improved.
- Apprentices benefit from a very good range of additional off-the-job training, but this is frequently not recorded in their electronic portfolios; this means that apprentices and managers cannot review the accumulation of off-the-job training undertaken across the period by an individual apprentice to support their professional development.
- Learners are proud of their success in training and display high levels of enjoyment of apprenticeship activities. Managers have improved measures to gather, analyse and respond to learners' views during the period since the previous inspection and through these they have a good understanding of satisfaction levels. The vast majority of comments from apprentices are positive, though managers react swiftly to any expressions of concern or dissatisfaction.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and managers should ensure that:

- the number of apprentices who leave the training programme because they decide the care profession is not for them is reduced, by making sure that new employees have a fuller understanding of the demands of working in a care environment before being enrolled on an apprenticeship programme
- apprentices' knowledge of British values is improved so that they are more confident in their understanding of these matters
- all learning and development specialists correct apprentices' spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors to help them improve their written English and provide good support to help them improve their mathematical skills
- all apprentices' electronic portfolios contain a full written record of the comprehensive range of off-the-job training that they take part in, so that apprentices and their managers can review the full range of training undertaken.

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

Mark Shackleton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by the head of quality and continuous improvement. We met with you, members of your senior management team, managers, learning and development specialists and apprentices. We scrutinised key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to quality assurance, safeguarding and the performance of the government-funded element of learning and development within Barchester Healthcare. We analysed data on learners' achievements and progress relative to their starting points. We also analysed feedback from learners, including that submitted through Ofsted's online questionnaires.