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17 October 2016

Mr Paul Di Felice
Principal
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Dear Mr Di Felice

Short inspection of Ruskin College

Following the short inspection on 27 and 28 September 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 November 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, Ruskin College has had significant changes in its leaders and managers. You were appointed as principal in summer 2016 and have already set a strong strategic direction, building this into the college's vision and values. You introduced an additional layer of senior managers to coordinate and develop the provision. This has strengthened greatly systems for performance management, curriculum review and observations of teaching, learning and assessment. Despite tight financial constraints, the residential accommodation, cafeteria, building security and learning technology have all been recently upgraded and enhanced. Leaders and managers took the decision to bring English and mathematics functional skills teaching in-house in 2015/16, where previously this was taught through a subcontractor. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses have been introduced along with GCSE English and mathematics to help learners progress through different levels, succeed and enter employment or further study.

Leaders and managers work with a wider range of partners than previously, which has increased learner numbers on access to higher education courses, established a more flexible and responsive learning support offer and shared back-office functions, such as human resources. The college continues to be true to its mission of providing education to disadvantaged adults and widening participation. Leaders and managers have strengthened the opportunities that learners have to share their views, which they take seriously when prioritising improvement action.

You have made good progress since the previous inspection to rectify the identified improvements and maintain strengths. Learners' achievement rates, which were an area for improvement, increased steadily over the last three years and are good. Leaders and managers identified where further developments are needed and implemented detailed improvement plans. They recognise that a few actions they have taken are relatively recent and have yet to demonstrate a full impact or be consistently applied by all managers and tutors.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and action is taken to safeguard learners. All staff had recent training including about their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. Staff and learners have a clear understanding of when and how to report incidents, which are dealt with swiftly and appropriately. Managers use partnerships very effectively to strengthen safeguarding, refer learners needing specialist help and enhance welfare services. Through the comprehensive action plan and risk assessment, managers have implemented well the 'Prevent' duty requirements. For example, leaders and managers now chair the many college events that have external speakers to ensure learners receive a balanced viewpoint.

Inspection findings

- The college's approach to widening participation continues to be exemplary. Managers and staff strive to eliminate barriers to learning. As a result, the college attracts large numbers of disadvantaged adults, including those with few or no qualifications, the unemployed, homeless, learners who have disabilities and those with learning difficulties. Many learners start their learning with interesting taster or short courses which motivate them to return to longer programmes of study.
- Leaders and managers plan and develop an excellent range of courses that meet the needs of individual learners and partners, such as trade unions, particularly well. They consider learners' potential careers well when introducing new courses, such as GCSEs to help access to higher education learners gain university places and ESOL for learners struggling with the level of English needed to study mathematics.
- Managers evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment accurately using a comprehensive observation scheme. They enhance formal lesson observations with 'learning walks' to identify improvement themes and 'peer observations' to give tutors support and development. In a minority of observations, observers do not identify clear areas for improvement which impedes tutors' and their line managers' ability to take suitable action.
- Tutors' training and development are well-planned and effective. Managers draw on a good range of information, including lesson observations, to prioritise training and development. Tutors readily share best practice and innovation with their peers which has helped improve their confidence in using technology and planning lessons to meet the diverse range of learners' skills and confidence.

- Leaders set an ambitious information learning technology strategy. Many tutors use technology creatively in lessons to enliven learning, for example through activities with interactive whiteboards, smartphones and tablets. The college has been slow in implementing a virtual learning environment to aid independent study.
- Learners complete a thorough initial assessment which identifies their current level, learning style, personal needs and medical conditions. The majority of tutors use this information well to plan learning and meet the diverse needs and abilities of learners within their group. However, a few learners have been recruited inappropriately onto GCSE courses that are too difficult given their current English and/or mathematical skills.
- Learners benefit from good-quality learning support which tutors plan very effectively into lessons. Through the new partnership with a learning support provider, the college offers very specialist assessment that helps to meet individual learners' needs. Learners who have disabilities and those with a learning difficulty achieve very well and learners with dyslexia have outstanding achievement rates.
- Learners, many of whom are resident at the college, receive excellent welfare support. They receive extensive help with a range of topics, including debt advice and counselling. Residential learners have termly 'well-being tutorials' where tutors and managers work productively with them to tackle any problems.
- Learners have good progression opportunities within the college from entry level to higher education. They plan potential progression routes with tutors at an early stage in their course, updating these as they progress. The large majority of access to higher education learners advance onto degree-level courses at the college or with partner universities.
- Managers have insufficient information about learners' destinations to help them evaluate fully the effectiveness and relevance of the provision. They collect data about learners' progression through different levels and courses at the college, but have not yet analysed or used this. Managers know the proportion of learners who progress to higher education but have an incomplete picture of how many learners start a job, voluntary work or further education.
- Learners achieve qualifications very well and achievement rates are consistently good. Most learners achieve their personal and course goals successfully.
- Learners' achievement of mathematics functional skills qualifications requires improvement. Managers have taken recent action to improve this but it is too early to have had an impact.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers gather and analyse learners' destination data to evaluate fully the effectiveness and relevance of the provision and help plan future courses
- after observing lessons, all observers identify clearly the tutor's weaknesses and actions needed to help them improve and increase the amount of outstanding practice
- managers and tutors use all the information available from learners' initial

assessment to plan a suitable and achievable programme, particularly in English and mathematics

- managers monitor the impact of actions taken to raise mathematics achievement rates.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Rodgers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Ofsted Inspectors assisted by the principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with the chair of governors, managers, tutors and learners and looked at past and current work. They observed lessons. Inspectors reviewed key documents including those related to self-assessment, quality improvement plans, learners' achievements and safeguarding.