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Marcus Towse
Principal
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Dear Mr Towse

Short inspection of Scarborough Sixth Form College

Following the short inspection on 20 and 21 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 May 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

Leaders and managers have generated a culture of high expectations for staff and students which has led to marked improvements in student outcomes. Many students achieve very well, as shown by the increasing proportion achieving high grades and the strong progress that students make from their starting points. This is true for students on vocational courses and the majority of AS and A-level courses. A major factor in this improvement has been the guidance support team, who monitor student progress very well and ensure effective interventions, where needed. There are now only a small number of courses where students make only expected progress, and a few where they make less than expected progress.

Staff at all levels within the college have successfully implemented the 16 to 19 study programme. A number of aspects of this programme are very strong, such as student progression and the proportion of students who improve their attainment in GCSE English to grade C and above. While the proportion who improve their GCSE mathematics grade is higher than the low national rate, it still needs to improve further. Students receive highly effective guidance and support to ensure that they are on an appropriate course and are able to access a range of additional activities, but not enough of them take part in relevant work experience.

You and your senior managers have ensured that the curriculum has continued to develop so that it offers a range of high-quality options for students. The increasing number of vocational courses you have introduced has improved responsiveness to the local skills agenda. You are looking to strengthen this further, building on recent

developments, such as your increase in early years provision in response to requests from early years settings.

Governors are well aware of the strengths of the college and the areas where further development is needed to ensure that all aspects of provision reach the same high standard. They use their skills effectively to monitor key aspects such as safeguarding and student achievement.

Students feel safe at the college and enjoy their studies. They are appropriately challenged by their studies and achieve well. There is some variation in the level of challenge to students, and in assessment and feedback between subjects, with some stronger than others; teachers use assessment strategies and feedback particularly well on vocational courses. You and your managers are aware of this variation and are using effective strategies to improve teaching in less strong areas of provision, and bring them up to the high standards of your strongest departments, such as art.

You, your senior leaders and staff have made good progress in addressing the areas for development at your previous inspection. A much greater emphasis is placed on student progress, the rigour of quality assurance has improved, teaching and learning shows greater challenge for students and targets are used more effectively to monitor the performance of staff and students. You are acutely aware of subjects which have not reached the high standards you expect and are working on improving them, using strategies that have proved successful for other subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, governors and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that action is taken to safeguard students. Policies and processes are regularly updated, for example including references to the 'Prevent' duty, and linked effectively to training so that staff are kept up to date on any potential issues. Comprehensive records, analysis of support and case studies reflect how well staff are dealing with any safeguarding issues and concerns. Numerous examples show that staff interventions support students to overcome barriers and successfully move on to their next steps, such as higher education.

Training for governors and staff, and awareness-raising for students, have been developed well using scenarios covering topical subjects. These help students understand how different issues, such as radicalisation and extremism, relate to their lives and how best they can deal with them. Student feedback, both during the inspection and from surveys over time, shows that students feel safe and supported. Student behaviour around the college and in lessons is good.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have used their intensive support programme effectively to improve underperforming subjects. Successful improvement strategies can be seen particularly well in English, where the achievement rates and the progress

that learners make at advanced level increased significantly in 2015. This high level was sustained in 2016, as was the A* to C grade achievement in GCSE English. Staff have also improved the quality of provision in other subjects, such as psychology and modern foreign languages. Senior managers now have a strong focus on the few remaining subjects which, although improved, have not yet reached the quality aimed for. In addition, senior leaders and heads of department have already analysed performance for 2015/16, identified a number of areas of underperformance and are putting in place appropriate action plans.

- Self-assessment practices at departmental level, which was an area for development at the last inspection, have improved markedly. Heads of department have much better data reports to inform self-assessment, which show three-year trends and key points such as high grade achievement. They use these well, in combination with other information such as learning walks, to identify key strengths and areas for improvement. Managers focus on a limited number of significant improvement actions, so they can monitor them and their impact more easily. Many examples show how effective this method is, for example significantly improving the retention rate for AS art, following adaptations to the first part of the course.
- The curriculum continues to be very well matched to the needs of students, as it was at the last inspection. Senior managers have introduced increasing amounts of vocational provision, which has proved highly successful in terms of student achievement and destinations. Students are able to pick a combination of courses which best suit their needs and aspirations. Senior managers have also improved their links with employers and the local community and are looking to strengthen these links further to ensure as effective a match as possible with current and future local skills needs.
- Students are given appropriate advice and guidance that helps ensure they enrol on study programmes that match their career aspirations and provide progression and challenge. Students who need to continue studying English and/or mathematics are placed on appropriate programmes and more of them are successful than in other similar colleges. Students move on to positive destinations, with many progressing to university or into employment. There are few former students whose destinations are unknown.
- The college provides an appropriate range of work-related learning activities including additional qualifications, trips and visits, guest speakers, participation in events and competitions, such as the Bar Mock Trial competition, and live briefs from employers. Not enough students, particularly those on vocational programmes, participate in well-planned work experience that helps them develop their understanding of the workplace, the skills they need to develop and the careers open to them.
- Overall, teachers provide students with an appropriate level of challenge during lessons. The extent to which staff challenge all students, including the most able, does vary between subjects. In addition, the extent to which teachers provide stretching learning activities varies and this is reflected in the variability of progress that students make. In vocational subjects, teachers have well-developed approaches that ensure almost all students achieve well above the

level suggested by their prior attainment. This is also true of the majority of AS and A-level subjects.

- Assessment is used very well in vocational programmes to ensure that students are assessed at the appropriate time and by the appropriate method. As a result, students achieve consistently high grades in assignment work. The extent to which AS and A-level students benefit from assessment varies between subjects, although mostly assessment is used well. In AS history, for example, students make clear progress from assessment to assessment but in other subjects this is not always evident.
- Assessment feedback is of variable quality, although students usually find it helpful. There are examples, such as in AS-level English, where work is carefully annotated and feedback is carefully and coherently summarised on a separate sheet. Consequently, improvements can be seen in students' work as they progress through their programme. In other subjects, although feedback is evident in student work, it is not coherently summarised or it does not offer clear guidance as to how students could improve.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff use support and intervention strategies effectively to improve student achievement and progress in the small number of subjects where performance is not yet consistently strong
- leaders and managers build on recent developments in provision to further strengthen links with employers and develop the curriculum to meet local skills needs
- more students, particularly those on vocational programmes, participate in well-planned work experience that helps them develop their understanding of the workplace and the skills they need to develop to be successful in it
- assessment and feedback processes in all departments reach the same high levels as those seen in the most effective departments, such as English.

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

Heather Barnett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors were assisted by the vice-principal curriculum and quality, as nominee. We met with you and your senior managers, the chair of governors, heads of department and teachers. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, accompanied by members of the senior team, and reviewed students' written work. We spoke to students in lessons and around the campus. We also considered the views of students, parents and carers by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires. Inspectors reviewed key college documents, including those relating to self-assessment and the college's intensive support programme, student achievement and progress, student assessment and safeguarding.