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Mr Mark Robertson
Principal
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Dear Mr Robertson

Short inspection of Cambridge Regional College

Following the short inspection on 13 and 14 October 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 October 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Governors, senior leaders and managers have maintained the good quality of education, training and support in the college since the previous inspection. You and your team have maintained and increased the focus on sustaining the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the large majority of learners and apprentices are making at least the progress expected of them. Your self-assessment processes and resulting quality improvement plans and interventions identify your areas for improvement well and are timely and robust. Well-timed interventions ensure that underperforming courses continue to improve.

Along with well-informed governors and senior leaders, you have set a clear strategic direction. You work extremely closely and particularly well with local and regional employers and the local enterprise partnership (LEP) to ensure that provision is responsive to local and regional priorities and demands. As a result, a substantially high proportion of your learners progress to further study, higher education, apprenticeships and/or employment.

Governors provide comprehensive and detailed challenge and support to you and your senior leadership team with their ambition to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the performance of the college to ensure that all learners benefit. They review and question the information they receive carefully, comparing outcomes with targets and any improvement plans. As a result, they understand the college's strengths and areas that require improvement very well. They contribute well to the improvement processes implemented.

You have implemented the 16 to 19 study programmes and full time 14 to 16 provision very effectively, with a clear focus on helping young people gain practical skills valued by employers. Development routes are in place at all levels and you provide a very wide range of academic and/or vocational programmes that prepare learners well for their next step into employment or further learning. You have a strong and appropriate focus on improving English and mathematical skills, with learners improving their use of literacy and numeracy skills in many vocational lessons. Support for learners to improve their English and mathematics skills in discrete lessons is good.

Governors, senior leaders and managers have identified correctly that improvement is still required in the quality of your English and mathematics provision and in a very small number of other subject areas, where for example the achievement of higher grades still needs to improve along with the setting of short- and long-term challenging targets. Learners' progress in these subjects requires further improvement. You have appropriate strategies in place, for example in the form of very regular performance review boards, to rectify these concerns. In order to raise the success rates of GCSE English and mathematics, you have strengthened the teaching team and the monitoring of learners by managers to ensure consistency and accountability. Early indications in teaching and learning are that the interventions have started to improve the provision.

Learners and apprentices benefit from excellent practical resources at the college. They gain and develop their practical vocational skills further through relevant work experience and work-related learning tasks. You ensure through your links with many high profile employers that learners' work experience is aligned to their employment aspirations.

At the previous inspection, actions to bring about improvements identified by inspectors included: improving attendance; sharing the good practice identified in teaching, learning and assessment, particularly with the promotion of equality and diversity; improving the planning of lessons; helping learners improve their standards of English and mathematics; and the setting of targets for learners. Your leadership team has taken decisive action to improve these areas and you have started to make clear progress to the benefit of learners.

Your relationships with employers and your employment provision continue to be a strength. You have very good relationships with employers, locally and regionally, and the proportion of apprentices completing their qualifications is improving significantly. Links with employers and the LEP are extremely strong; these links support the work experience element of 16 to 19 study programmes positively and most learners access good-quality and relevant work placements to suit their future aspirations.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders, managers and the governing body have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and effective. Positive and effective action by all

staff ensures that learners are safe and know whom to talk to if they have any concerns about their safety and welfare. Governors, senior leaders, managers and staff are mindful of their responsibilities and have undertaken appropriate training and steps to protect learners from any threats in regard to radicalisation and extremism. However, learners' understanding of these threats requires further development.

Staff encourage a thorough culture of respect which is shared by learners. Learners behave well at college and respect each other and their teachers. Managers and staff at the college work very responsibly with a range of local agencies to ensure that all learners, and particularly those who are most vulnerable, are safe. They work very well with external agencies to identify young people at risk, especially those with high needs and the growing proportion of learners aged 14 to 16.

Inspection findings

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good across the vast majority of subject areas, including discrete English and mathematics sessions and the full-time 14 to 16 provision. Data provided by leaders indicates that an increasing proportion of learners are achieving their qualifications and progressing into either employment or further study.
- Governors, senior leaders and managers have implemented the full-time 14 to 16 provision in a considered way to ensure that the quality and performance meet the expectations for younger learners. Leaders have established a sound curriculum that provides core subjects in English, mathematics and science with a good vocational offer. Managers and teachers have succeeded in integrating the 14 to 16 cohort into broader college programmes, particularly vocational programmes, and deliver the core subjects in a dedicated and safe environment.
- Teachers use information about learners' starting points well to plan and structure a good range of learning activities to ensure that all learners participate and make sufficient progress in lessons. Learners gain very good practical skills, valued by employers, and develop their knowledge and skills effectively.
- Leaders and managers review the quality of teaching, learning and assessment often and their self-assessment report and resulting quality improvement plan are mostly accurate. Leaders and managers understand the college's strengths and areas that require improvement very well and demonstrate a good level of ambition to improve further the areas of concern. Senior leaders meet frequently to scrutinise provision and identify further actions for improvement throughout the year, including holding individual departments and teachers to account.
- Senior leaders and managers have implemented revised quality assurance processes which are appropriate and focus on individual learners' progress with a clear focus on practical skill development.
- Learners work well in the very large majority of practical and classroom sessions, often working collaboratively to good effect. Teachers have a good understanding

of learners' starting points and abilities and set challenging tasks. The large majority of learners respond well to such challenge and are well prepared for the level above their current learning. The very large majority of learners are ambitious and keen to obtain the highest grades possible and reach their potential in order to achieve their aim of progression to university or purposeful employment.

- Most current learners are making at least the progress expected of them and, in a minority of cases, better than expected progress. The large majority of learners set their own targets for achievement in lessons and for each week of study. Teachers in a majority of subject areas check and monitor these targets well; however, in a minority of lessons, targets are not sufficiently challenging or are too generic or vague. In a very small minority of sessions, work for the most able learners is too easy and, as a result, this hinders the progress these learners could make in the time allocated.
- Learners on GCSE English courses in 2015/16 did not make the progress expected of them and many failed to achieve A* to C grade passes. However, following actions taken by managers, current learners now benefit from improved and revised teaching, learning and assessment processes and resources that include study hubs, targeted support and specialist teachers. Vocational teachers promote English and mathematics development more effectively in their teaching. For example, learners in motor vehicle studies were able to calculate the capacity of an engine without the use of a calculator.
- Teachers make good use of their technical knowledge and learners benefit from gaining good work-related skills at an appropriate level. Lessons are based on broad and inclusive skill development rather than the development of isolated skills. For example, beauty learners develop body massage skills while learning about the anatomy of skin and apply their knowledge well. Learners in media and games design apply high levels of expertise to develop new games working in partnership with an international market leader in their field. Learners are kept on task well by support staff and encouraged to extend their English and mathematics skills.
- Learners take part in a broad range of activities and make good use of sports clubs, educational visits and work experience. Staff and learners at the college have a good focus on healthy lifestyles. Almost all learners take part in relevant external work experience, often at high-profile employers or, where appropriate for the learner, on internships within the college.
- Following recent successful interventions and revised management processes, the apprenticeship provision at the college and at subcontractors is managed well. The vast majority of current apprentices make at least the progress expected of them and a high proportion now complete their qualifications and gain sustainable employment or promotion in their workplace.
- Apprentices benefit from good training, assessment and support. Those apprentices able to work at a higher level are challenged to enhance their

English and mathematics skills further. However, the recording and monitoring of targets for the majority of apprentices require further development.

- Governors, senior leaders and managers have very good and effective strategies and employer relationships to meet the local enterprise initiatives and priority to increase the numbers of learners on science, technology and engineering programmes. Leaders and managers have focused their attention on ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of local and regional employers and the career aspirations of learners. The relationship between college senior leaders, managers and the LEP is well established and highly effective.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they increase the proportion of learners achieving their GCSE English and mathematics qualifications at A* to C grades
- teachers and assessors set meaningful skills-based targets which meet learners' and apprentices' skills development needs and promote the achievement of high grades
- learners and apprentices understand precisely how to improve their work and staff can monitor progress more effectively
- teachers promote and enable learners to better understand the threats from radicalisation and extremism.

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 Hunsley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by the deputy principal, teaching and learning, as nominee. We met you, your senior leaders, middle managers and governors, including the chair of the governing body. We visited lessons and apprentices with members of your management and lesson observation teams to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at learners' work. We spoke to learners and apprentices. We held meetings with learners and staff, spoke to employers and reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners and employers by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking the views of learners and employers during the on-site inspection activity.