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Mrs Elaine Price
Acting Principal
Carlisle College
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Dear Mrs Price

Short inspection of Carlisle College

Following the short inspection on 2 and 3 November 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 December 2009.

This provider continues to be good.

You have ensured that learners and apprentices continue to receive good education and training. You provide excellent care, support and guidance, which learners and apprentices value greatly, and which ensures that they make good progress.

The proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications within the planned time, often from low starting points, is good. Teachers, assessors and progress coaches know their learners well and are quick to respond if they identify any as being at risk of not being successful on their course. As a result, the large majority of learners are prepared well for work, complete their courses or training and go on to secure permanent employment or progress onto further study.

Achievement rates for the large majority of learners are high. Achievement rates for apprentices are also high. The majority of apprentices aged 16 to 18, and apprentices aged 19 to 23 complete their programme in their planned timescales.

The achievement of functional skills at level 2 in English and mathematics and the number of young people who achieve a high grade at GCSE level is too low, despite a number of interventions by managers. You, governors and managers have put further actions in place and are monitoring the impact on progress very carefully.

You, governors and senior leaders have ensured that the requirements of the study programmes have been implemented effectively since the last inspection. Young

people achieve well on these programmes and their progression to further study or employment is good.

You have successfully addressed the large majority of improvements identified at the previous inspection. You have improved achievement rates for the vast majority of learners, particularly for adults, which are now very high. All provision types now have achievement rates above those of similar providers. Retention is now high for level 3 learners on study programmes and for adults. However, retention for learners aged 16 to 18 on study programmes at entry and level 2, although improved, is still too low.

You have improved the achievement rates of apprentices to such an extent that they are now high and above those of similar providers. The majority of apprentices now achieve within their planned timescales; however, achievement rates within the planned timescales for the small proportion of apprentices aged over 24 requires further improvement.

You have improved the attendance of learners, particularly in the current year, by the introduction of progress coaches who closely monitor the attendance of those learners aged 16 to 18 deemed to be at risk. However, attendance for learners at levels 1 and 2 requires further improvement.

You have successfully closed the achievement gap between male and female learners on college-based courses. Support teams now self-assess the quality of the service they provide to learners, resulting in staff being more focused on how they can contribute to improving learners' overall experience. For example, the provision of and access to technology for learners.

Board members know the college well and hold senior leaders to account very effectively; as a result, there has been steady improvement in the vast majority of subject areas.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have maintained the effective safeguarding arrangements since the last inspection and have revised them in respect of the 'Prevent' duty. This ensures that learners are safe and feel safe. You, your managers and staff continue to prioritise safeguarding. Designated safeguarding officers have received regular training, including on the 'Prevent' duty. Staff ensure that learners have a good understanding of the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism.

Managers carry out appropriate recruitment checks and keep accurate records. Through mandatory training, staff know how to ensure and maintain safe working practices and are very clear how to report any concerns about learners' safety. Staff maintain good relationships with a number of agencies, which ensures that the most vulnerable learners are kept safe. Learners know how to keep themselves safe, including when working online. They are aware of the requirements to work safely both in the college and in their workplace.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers self-assess the provision rigorously. The few areas assessed as requiring improvement during the short inspection were accurately identified in the most recent self-assessment report. Managers use the highly effective performance management processes to ensure that they swiftly put any necessary improvements in place.
- Leaders and managers have been highly responsive in improving the quality of apprenticeships. Managers have implemented a range of rigorous and effective improvement initiatives, which have brought about rapid improvement. Apprenticeships are now well managed and they meet the requirements of employers well. Employers value their apprentices and the contribution they make to their business. Apprentices improve their technical and personal skills and develop self-confidence, which prepares them well for work.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are of a high standard across all programmes of study. The large majority of learners make good progress in lessons and are developing the necessary academic and technical skills and knowledge they need for further study or employment.
- Leaders and managers have developed provision that meets local and regional needs well with a good focus on an employer-led curriculum. This results in a high number of learners progressing into employment.
- Leaders and managers have effectively implemented study programmes. Learners receive high-quality information, advice and guidance before and during their programme. High-quality enrichment and work experience develop learners' self-confidence and communication skills well and support their progression on to further study or employment.
- Managers and staff monitor the attendance and progress of each learner well through an electronic recording system and by regular review meetings with progress coaches. Where learners are not making good progress, staff put effective plans in place to support them; this has resulted in improved attendance in the current year.
- Senior managers maintain the good standard of teaching, learning and assessment by accurately assessing the performance of teachers and providing appropriate support and challenge when needed. Effective staff development ensures that teachers and assessors are up to date in their vocational area, which ensures that learners develop the relevant skills needed in the workplace.
- Improvements to the enrolment processes and the assessment of learners' starting points are effective in getting learners onto appropriate English and mathematics programmes quickly. As a result, most learners are making progress in developing their skills and how they apply them in work. For example, learners in catering lessons are able to use mathematical concepts well to calculate the ingredients needed in recipes.
- A minority of teachers and assessors do not always check learners' and apprentices' understanding to ensure that they develop the necessary skills and knowledge. Teachers and assessors do not focus sufficiently on ensuring that all

learners and apprentices are making the progress that they are capable of, relative to their starting points.

- Managers have yet to address successfully the poor achievement in English and mathematics at GCSE and functional skills at level 2. Teachers do not use learners' starting points well enough to plan learning to extend learners' knowledge, particularly the most able, in these subjects. The additional support provided does not focus well enough on what individual learners need to improve; consequently, the majority of learners do not extend their skills in GCSE English and mathematics courses.
- Managers' arrangements to monitor the English and mathematics skills of young people who are looked after or for those learners eligible for free school meals are not effective. There is no clear scrutiny of their current performance to identify if identified gaps in achievement are closing.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use learners' starting points to plan learning so that all learners, including the most able, develop and extend their skills and knowledge to make the progress of which they are capable
- the proportion of learners who achieve a grade A* to C at GCSE level and the numbers who achieve a functional skill at level 2 in English and mathematics is increased quickly, including learners who receive free school meals or who are looked after
- attendance rates and retention rates at level 1 and 2 for learners aged 16 to 18, the number of apprentices age 24 and over that complete within their planned timescales, and the number of academic learners achieving high grades is increased.

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

Andrea Machell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by you and the director of quality, as nominees. We met with members of the leadership team, teachers, assessors, learners, apprentices and employers. We observed sessions in the college and in the workplace. We reviewed learners' and apprentices' assessed work and electronic

portfolios. We obtained learners' views through an online survey and face-to-face interviews. We reviewed key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to strategic planning, lesson planning and assessment, quality assurance and performance monitoring and safeguarding.