

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Jane Tupper
Deputy Principal, Quality and Standards
Askham Bryan College
Askham Bryan
York
YO23 3FR

Dear Mrs Tupper

Short inspection of Askham Bryan College

Following the short inspection on 15–16 March 2017, 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 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

You and your managers have ensured that most of your provision has continued to improve since the previous inspection, during a period when the college has grown substantially and learner numbers have more than doubled.

You have invested considerably in new technologies and plant which equip learners well for modern industrial farming employment. You have maintained your excellent partnerships with employers and the local farming community to ensure that the curriculum you offer reflects local, regional and national priorities well.

You and your managers have addressed most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection and consolidated the strengths. Because of the strong relationships you have with employers, your apprenticeship provision has continued to improve and a high proportion of apprentices achieve within their planned timescale. We also found that you and your staff give very good support to learners with specific high needs and, as a result, the vast majority successfully complete their programme. However, learners on your small amount of adult provision continue to achieve less well when compared with national rates. This is one of the few areas for improvement that has not been addressed fully since the previous inspection.

You and your managers have implemented the requirements of the study programme fully since the previous inspection. We found that all learners benefit greatly from very well-planned work experience and from a wide range of carefully considered enrichment activities. You have found it difficult to ensure that learners successfully complete the English and mathematics components of the study programme. We found, however, that learners were developing these skills well in specific English and mathematics lessons.

We were very impressed with the quality of practical lessons, which interested learners and enabled them to develop industry-level skills. However, as at the previous inspection, we found that the quality of theory teaching was not as good as the practical teaching. Teachers in these lessons did not challenge the most-able learners sufficiently.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding arrangements continue to be effective in keeping young learners and vulnerable adults safe. The college's designated officers, site managers and wardens carry out enhanced safeguarding training and are well known to learners. All other staff, including governors, have undertaken mandatory safeguarding training, including in the 'Prevent' duty.

The safeguarding team has good links with external bodies, such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board and police across the regions covered by the college. Managers deal with safeguarding incidents swiftly and appropriately. They record, analyse and report on incidents to senior leaders and governors well.

Learners receive training in the 'Prevent' duty, British values and online safety at induction. The majority of them have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe from radicalisation and extremism, and they know how to report any concerns. However, assessors and trainers do not reinforce online safety sufficiently with apprentices.

Inspection findings

- The apprenticeship provision has improved steadily since the previous inspection. A high proportion of apprentices successfully complete their framework, with three out of four completing within the planned timescale. Current apprentices are making good progress. The proportion of learners successfully completing study programmes has remained above the national rate for the last three years. The proportion of adult learners who successfully complete their programme remains below national rates, as at the previous inspection. The college's data for the current year indicates that more adult learners have remained on their course this year compared with the same time last year. The vast majority of learners who complete their programme at level 3 progress into employment or further education.

- Governors and leaders do not have good access to information about the performance of the college as a whole to help them drive forward improvements. Managers in a few departments are not clear about the progress that their learners are making.
- Teachers develop learners' skills very well in practical sessions. They use their specialist knowledge and expertise to plan lessons successfully and engage and motivate learners to develop new knowledge and skills. Teachers make links to employment in lessons very well. They effectively use naturally occurring evidence, including learners' work experience, to reinforce aspects of teamwork, and personal and social skills. In a dog-grooming practical lesson, learners worked to commercial times and developed good practical skills.
- Theory lessons are not of the same high quality as practical lessons. The pace in a significant minority of lessons is too slow and, consequently, the most-able learners become disengaged and do not make sufficient progress. Teachers do not stretch learners sufficiently to reach their full potential. They do not check learners' understanding effectively in lessons and, therefore, do not use this information to set challenging activities and targets.
- Learners demonstrate British values in their behaviour in and outside the classroom. Teachers effectively promote learners' respect and tolerance for their peers in lessons, including debating topics directly linked to the rule of law, such as alleged destruction of evidence by the police and animal welfare. However, in a few lessons, teachers do not effectively promote equality and diversity. For example, they do not always challenge gender stereotypes sufficiently.
- Leaders and managers have implemented the study programme for learners aged 16 to 19 successfully. Learners benefit from strong vocational delivery by teachers with up-to-date knowledge and experience that allows them to develop skills that are directly linked to the workplace. All learners have access to high-quality, relevant work experience that supports their learning well.
- Managers have developed excellent partnerships with a range of relevant employers and, as a result, learners benefit from additional visits to these employers to explore their employment aspirations and to gain real work experience within a variety of settings. In these settings, learners develop a range of skills such as meeting new people, and communicating and working in teams.
- A large number of learners take directly relevant, additional qualifications to enhance their employment prospects. Learners also participate in a range of enrichment activities and sports, often taking part in external competitions. Learners regularly undertake duties within the college such as maintenance of the grounds and looking after college animals. These activities further enhance their wider skills' development.

- Learners who have not previously achieved grade C or above in English and mathematics develop these skills well in specific lessons as part of the study programme. In these lessons, teachers manage learning well, which enables learners to make good progress. The majority of learners are aware of the progress they have made. However, insufficient attention is given to developing further the skills of those learners who already hold grade C or above, and the development of literacy and numeracy skills in vocational lessons is not consistently high.
- Leaders and managers have developed a series of strategies to tackle the low achievement in functional skills qualifications. For example, specialist link staff in curriculum areas enable teachers to identify learners at risk more swiftly. The curriculum has been remodelled into shorter, more focused lessons to interest learners and improve their motivation. It is too early to gauge the impact of these measures on improved outcomes for learners.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not use the findings from assessments of learners' starting points to plan learning. In these lessons, learners carry out the same activities regardless of their starting point, and a few do not acquire new knowledge or skills.
- Leaders' and managers' actions have had a positive impact on limiting the number of adults who withdraw early from programmes. Managers have improved information, advice and guidance, particularly with regard to the physical and emotional demands of the role of veterinary nurses. They have increased the number of one-to-one sessions for learners with their teachers and have introduced a six-weekly review to support learners with their academic skills and to discuss employers' feedback about their performance at their veterinary practice. As a result of these initiatives, an in-year improvement in the proportion of adults remaining on their course is evident at all levels on part-time adult courses. A higher proportion of adult learners who attend classes with predominately younger learners are also remaining on the programme compared with the previous year. For example, staff on the veterinary nursing programmes have addressed the very high drop-out rate during the previous year.
- Managers recognise that adult learners mainly withdraw from programmes due to personal or family circumstances. They are flexible and supportive to individuals who are facing challenging times in their personal lives by making specific adjustments to their timetables to help them to succeed.
- Managers and staff delivering the apprenticeship programme maintain particularly strong links with employers. For example, one regional employer provides scholarship support for a few learners and jointly runs a prestigious machinery event at the college. Agricultural engineering employers are working with the college to design the new apprenticeship standards to meet local priorities. Employers value highly the communication and support from the college and the assessors. Assessors maintain good contact with employers and keep them well informed about apprentices' progress by email and telephone calls.

- Most off-the-job training helps apprentices, who often work and live in isolated communities, to make friends and develop their personal and social skills. One apprentice from a non-farming background, interested in sheepdog training, has developed his skills sufficiently to represent England in 'One man and his dog'. Apprentices' work and the evidence in their portfolios are of a good standard. A few off-the-job sessions are uninspiring, lack pace and do not challenge the most-able apprentices effectively.
- While apprentices make good progress and most assessors track individual apprentice's progress effectively, managers are not able to monitor the progress that different groups of learners are making against their targets.
- The review process on the apprenticeship programme requires further improvement, including the setting of targets for apprentices, the frequency of reviews, and the reinforcement of apprentices' understanding of diversity and aspects of safeguarding, such as online safety.
- Leaders and managers have made significant changes to the provision for learners with high needs since they began working with this group of learners two years ago. Additional learning support staff, working closely with managers in areas with learners who have high needs, have improved communication about how best to meet learners' specific needs, which has led to nearly all current learners being retained to date. Learners with high needs have significantly higher achievement rates than their peers. However, the most-able learners with high needs are not supported well enough to develop further their mathematical skills.
- Staff support learners very well to develop independent thinking and learning skills. They encourage learners to 'have a go'. Learners enjoy sessions and feel well supported, and attendance and retention rates are high.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they improve management information systems to ensure that governors and leaders have accurate information about the whole college to help them to drive forward improvements
- the quality of theory teaching is improved by ensuring that teachers:
 - provide sufficient challenge to the most-able learners
 - check learners' understanding of the knowledge and concepts being taught
 - promote diversity and have the confidence to challenge negative stereotypes in lessons

- they improve the development of learners' English and mathematics skills by ensuring that:
 - teachers use the results of assessments of learners' starting points to plan learning
 - learners, including the most able, are challenged to continue to develop their English and mathematical skills
 - English and mathematical skills are consistently well developed in vocational lessons
- all assessors carry out regular reviews to check and extend apprentices' knowledge and skills, including their understanding of safeguarding and diversity.

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

William Baidoe-Ansah
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The deputy principal (quality and standards), as nominee, assisted a team comprising three Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Ofsted inspectors. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the letter. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.