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9 May 2017

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Dear Robert

Short inspection of Voyage Group Limited

Following the short inspection on 26 and 27 April 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 February 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

At the previous inspection, most learners achieved their qualification, developed a wide range of very good skills to support the company's business needs and were enthusiastic about their programmes. Their enhanced skills and professional behaviour were recognised and valued by their managers.

Following the previous inspection, achievement rates remained high and proportionately more of your apprentices consistently achieved within the planned time than in similar providers. However, in 2015/16 there was a marked dip in the proportion of advanced apprentices aged 24 and over who achieved their qualification within the planned time. These apprentices represented about a quarter of the total. You identified a number of apprentices for whom the results of their initial assessment tests were misleading, which meant that they did not receive the additional support they needed early enough in their programme.

In response, you introduced a new initial assessment and functional skills system to improve your knowledge of apprentices' starting points and abilities. This new system is providing more accurate results and more detailed information about apprentices' skills gaps. Assessors make good use of the information gathered to plan learning to meet apprentices' individual development needs. Apprentices who need more time to develop their functional skills to the required level receive an individualised development programme before starting their apprenticeship. The

new process is thorough and enables assessors and apprentices to discuss and agree the level of programme an apprentice will complete and any additional needs they may have. Managers have extended the range of curriculum available to apprentices to better match their career aims.

Since the previous inspection, managers now monitor and review aspects of teaching, learning and assessment more effectively. They make good use of these reviews to identify themes for improvement and to share examples of good practice with assessors during one-to-one and regional meetings. At termly regional meetings, assessors work together in order to share best practice and to plan and develop further improvements. Assessors value the support they receive through the very productive team meetings and use the shared ideas effectively when planning apprentices' learning.

You have successfully widened the range of assessment methods used. Assessors now use recorded professional discussions, witness statements, records of meetings with key workers such as nursing service residents, and regular workplace practice observations to supplement the workbooks that apprentices complete as evidence of their competence. As a result, apprentices are regularly and routinely able to demonstrate more clearly their occupational skills, care practice knowledge and expertise.

At each assessment and review meeting, assessors provide apprentices with detailed, clear, supportive and helpful written and verbal feedback. This motivates apprentices to make good progress and helps them understand what they need to do next.

As a result of the good range of actions you have taken to rectify the dip last year in achievements within the planned time, most current apprentices are making at least expected progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding continues to be a core priority for the organisation, and the leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Your assessors introduce their apprentices to the important elements of safeguarding during induction with a strong focus on ensuring that they understand the various types of abuse to which vulnerable people are disproportionately exposed.

You have continually reviewed and updated this induction programme, most recently to take account of radicalisation and extremism as potential sources of risk of abuse. You regularly review and update policies and procedures, which now include a 'Prevent' risk assessment. The designated safeguarding lead officer receives regular reports from an external company charged with maintaining a well-used whistleblowing function for apprentices who have any concerns about their clients or staff they work with. Many of the referrals do not fall within safeguarding criteria, but you make it clear to staff that you prefer them to over-report when in doubt, rather than risk missing something. When concerns are judged to be serious,

you refer appropriately to external agencies, including the police or local social care services.

Apprentices have a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities to safeguard their clients and they demonstrate good practice in the workplace. They are confident that they can recognise signs of abuse or bullying and know what action they must take when they have any concerns. Apprentices working with clients, many with complex needs and learning disabilities, ensure that clients are kept safe, including safeguarding their personal finances. Care settings are secure and staff focus strongly on all aspects of security. Apprentices understand the widely publicised concerns about terrorism; they are less sure about how the risks of radicalisation or extremism might affect them either in their work or personal lives.

Inspection findings

- Apprentices find induction and initial assessment meetings motivating and are confident in the support they receive. The most-able apprentices are challenged effectively to achieve higher-level units or additional units that help them develop their skills and knowledge well. For example, apprentices interested in advanced care practice complete units that develop their understanding and skills in administering medication to service users. One apprentice has developed highly effective communication skills and uses sign language confidently to communicate with non-verbal service users. Another apprentice has completed specialist training and administers medication safely to meet service users' individual needs.
- The large majority of apprentices' functional skills development needs are met through good use of online resources and effective one-to-one coaching. Apprentices with additional needs, such as dyslexia, are supported well, and this enables them to make good progress. Assessors provide effective additional support visits to help those apprentices who fall behind to catch up.
- Assessors carefully allow each apprentice the time they need to complete their functional skills assessments at their own pace. In one example, an apprentice with severe dyslexia was able to overcome this barrier by sitting parts of each test separately, in order to practise and build confidence. This approach resulted in the apprentice successfully achieving both the English and mathematics qualifications. Another apprentice confirmed how the support and coaching received from their assessor had built their confidence levels so much that they had improved their mathematics and English skills by 50% in a recent online progress test.
- In a few cases, support for apprentices to develop their English and mathematics skills is insufficient, leading to slow progress. In a few cases, apprentices find it difficult to concentrate on the initial assessment exercise because they complete it in busy areas of their workplace, or because they are worried about not being covered by other staff while they are away from the workplace. No additional time is given for initial assessment for learners for whom English is a second language.
- Assessors have acted quickly to establish new learning, assessment, tracking and

monitoring systems that help apprentices assess their current progress and work independently toward their qualifications. Assessors have successfully developed new approaches to extend apprentices' skills, such as the more widespread use of voice recording. This enriches the feedback apprentices receive and enables them to understand better what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve further.

- Managers review apprentices' performance with their assessors by monitoring monthly, risk-rated reports. They quickly identify apprentices at risk of falling behind by using a wide variety of management information well. Managers intervene swiftly to support apprentices and arrange 'cause for concern' (CFC) meetings with assessors, workplace supervisors and apprentices. Clear targets for improvement coupled with additional support, such as more frequent visits by assessors and greater use of the online learning resources, enable the apprentices to regain lost ground.
- Most apprentices who undergo a CFC programme catch up quickly and achieve their qualifications. For the few apprentices who do not respond quickly enough, more intensive 90-day action plans are implemented, involving the workplace manager or supervisor. Assessors identify step-by-step activities that are closely monitored to ensure that apprentices progress successfully and complete their qualification.
- The monthly reports of apprentices' progress do not currently include enough information about how well they are progressing in developing their functional skills. As a result, managers are not sufficiently well informed about those apprentices at risk of not achieving their apprenticeship within the planned time because they have yet to achieve the functional skills qualifications.
- Assessors prepare clear and easily understood action plans to help apprentices to identify progress and see what work they need to do next. They are skilled in coaching apprentices during sessions to take responsibility for their own knowledge and skills development, which is essential to their development of self-motivation as learners and employees. They work sensitively with apprentices, helping them to recognise the new skills developed and the gaps remaining. This in turn leads to more robust, short-term, measurable targets and better achievement for the apprentices.
- Workplace managers do not routinely contribute to the progress reviews and action planning. As a result, apprentices do not link the outcomes of these reviews and targets set sufficiently with those set in their regular workplace appraisals.
- Apprentices benefit from good, specialist training courses which support them in their job roles. They recognise how they can help service users with learning disabilities to become more independent.
- Assessors promote well the relevance and importance of additional qualifications to their apprentices, with the result that many complete units above the required level in areas such as medication or communication. For example, one intermediate apprentice is completing an advanced unit in understanding the impact of acquired brain injury on individuals. This enhances the apprentice's

care practices for those residents suffering from such injuries.

- Apprentices recognise that achievement actively contributes to their progression within the company and improves their working practices.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the monthly management reports of apprentices' progress include an analysis of their functional skills development and progress
- the regular and detailed scrutiny of apprentices' progress that underpins assessors' action planning is reflected in equal detail in quality improvement planning at senior level
- apprentices' assessment and progress reviews take full account of targets and improvement plans set by workplace managers to support more rapid progress through the qualifications
- apprentices develop greater understanding of how the risks of radicalisation and extremism may impact on them.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Gadfield
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by you as head of learning and development. We held meetings with staff and managers. We observed teaching, learning and assessment and looked at apprentices' work and the facilities available to them. We spoke to apprentices wherever we found them and incorporated their views in our findings. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding as well as the qualification achievements for 2015/16.