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Mr Lee Weatherly
Chief Executive Officer
Midland Group Training Services Limited
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Dear Mr Weatherly

Short inspection of Midland Group Training Services Limited

Following the short inspection on 21 and 22 June 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 November 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, you and members of your senior leadership team, with the active support of the board of trustees, have successfully maintained the good quality of education and training delivered to apprentices. Trustees continue to provide good challenge to senior leaders. As a result, together you have successfully addressed most of the areas for improvement and consolidated the strengths identified at the previous inspection.

You have formulated a coherent and ambitious strategic plan that provides a clear focus on improving the provision further, maintains your strong financial stability, and precisely sets out how Midland Group Training Services Limited (MGTS) intends to respond to government initiatives linked to recently announced apprenticeship reforms. For example, you have successfully introduced a higher-level apprenticeship in engineering and a new trailblazer apprenticeship in engineering maintenance.

Relationships with employers are exceptionally strong. You and your team are successfully meeting the growing needs from both large corporations and small- to medium-sized enterprises within engineering, manufacturing, food and drink, and logistics sectors for highly trained, multi-skilled maintenance technicians and team leaders.

You have sustained an ambitious culture of collaboration and high expectations

which focuses strongly on helping apprentices to realise their career aspirations as well as developing an extended curriculum offer that reflects local, regional and national skills priorities particularly well. With the active support of different regional local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and industry partners you have invested significantly in the establishment of two new well-resourced training centres that complement well your existing training facility in Coventry. Apprentices benefit from good access to an excellent range of engineering resources that closely mirror technical equipment found in the workplace. Employers we spoke to were very positive as to the quality of training you provide and how it is personalised to meet their specific industry needs; in many cases you have become their provider of choice.

As a result of the actions you have taken, apprenticeship programmes offered through MGTS are well aligned to, and fully meet, the specification of apprenticeship standards for England (SASE). Staff who train apprentices are knowledgeable, well qualified and skilled in all aspects of the provision. They benefit from ongoing professional development to ensure that their technical knowledge and commercial skills reflect current industry practice. Tutors and training development advisors (TDAs) use their considerable industrial and technical experience well to inspire and motivate apprentices through a good range of teaching, learning and assessment activities. Most apprentices make good progress in developing their vocational knowledge and trade-related skills. However, in a few instances target setting and the quality of written feedback that staff provide to apprentices are not sufficiently evaluative, and in a very small minority of instances TDAs' own work contains grammatical and spelling errors.

You have ensured that as a result of well-planned training, apprentices quickly develop a comprehensive understanding of the world of work, including the importance of demonstrating positive attitudes towards learning. Apprentices are highly motivated and enjoy their learning; their attendance and punctuality both at the training centre and in the workplace are very high. They quickly acquire good personal thinking and learning skills and are able to work independently and as part of a team. For example, they contribute well at a team briefing on how externally assessed quality and standards can be tested and confirmed in a range of manufactured products. In the workplace, they work alongside skilled professionals in a wide range of industrial and commercial settings where they gain good experience and confidently develop their industry-related technical and commercial skills to a good standard. They organise their portfolios well and take pride in the good standard of work they produce. They prepare well for individual progress reviews by reflecting on their own performance, which enhances discussions with their allocated TDAs. Employers appreciate the often rapid transition their apprentices make in becoming more confident and professional in their conduct and vocational skills.

Due to the prompt and effective actions taken by you and your team, most apprentices now have a well-developed knowledge of equality, diversity and inclusion and how these aspects apply to their everyday practice. However, while you and your team have carried out successfully recent work to

extend apprentices' knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty and how it applies to them and others, adult apprentices' knowledge of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism is less well developed and so requires improvement.

You have ensured that apprentices are now better supported and routinely challenged to develop good skills in English, mathematics and information technology (IT) which they confidently use both to undertake independent research and to produce technical work to a professional standard. For those apprentices who do not have an appropriate GCSE high-pass grade upon entry, vocational tutors and specialist staff provide good support in these essential skills. Most apprentices pass their functional skills examinations at the first attempt.

Since the previous inspection, the proportion of learners completing their apprenticeship and within the planned timeframe remains high and the large majority of apprentices gain a good range of highly relevant additional qualifications. However, as you recognise, while achievement rates for apprentices continue to be above those of other similar providers, the rate of improvement has not been consistent over time. Similarly, the destinations of just under a third of apprentices who completed in 2015/6 are unknown. Current apprentices make good progress in their training activities compared with their starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team ensure that safeguarding arrangements continue to be effective in keeping young learners and vulnerable adults on apprenticeship programmes safe. MGTS has a designated officer, and since the previous inspection a trustee has been appointed with specific responsibility for safeguarding. All staff have undertaken mandatory training on British values, safeguarding and more recently on the 'Prevent' duty. Apprentices feel safe and are very clear about to whom they should report any potential issues.

Leaders and managers have appropriate links with external safeguarding bodies across the regions in which MGTS operates. Managers record and deal with safeguarding incidents well and report on such matters to the board of trustees every quarter. Managers have a detailed 'Prevent' risk assessment and action plan in place, they ensure that apprentices receive training at induction in the 'Prevent' duty, British values and online safety.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have continued to improve the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Managers have made good use of the quality improvement plan at monthly meetings to monitor and to drive forward improvements. Consequently, strengths at the previous inspection such as the performance of apprentices, partnerships and governance have been maintained and in a few cases have been strengthened.
- Managers have successfully addressed most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. For example, the observation of teaching

and learning is more rigorous, better linked to performance management, and is leading to improvements in apprenticeship outcomes. Managers use the outcomes of observations to ensure that individual tutors who are not teaching to the required standard receive prompt and targeted support to do so before a re-observation.

- The management of staff performance is very effective. Managers have high expectations of tutors in terms of both their technical expertise and their teaching skills. A wide-ranging staff development programme meets individual staff and organisational needs well. Leaders and managers closely monitor training activities and evaluate the impact of these on the performance of their staff over time, ensuring that apprentices continue to benefit from teaching and learning that are of a high standard.
- Highly productive partnerships with employers, partners, stakeholders and the LEPs ensure that the curriculum meets local, regional and national skills needs and skills shortages. Since the previous inspection leaders have successfully introduced a higher-level apprenticeship in engineering and a trailblazer apprenticeship in multi-skilled maintenance to meet the needs of the food, drink and logistics industries.
- Leaders and managers collaborate closely with employers to ensure that their apprentices develop the industry-specific skills that will help them develop their businesses. The large majority of employers who work with MGTS commit to training that goes well beyond the minimum technical requirements of the apprenticeship programme. This results in apprentices benefiting from access to an extensive and broad range of multi-disciplinary vocational trade skills, for instance combining electrical and mechanical skills. As a result, they become valued and highly productive employees.
- The chief executive officer of MGTS is on the skills board of three LEPs within the West Midlands region and as a result, the company is well positioned and contributes positively to meeting regional skills priorities – particularly those aligned to engineering and advanced manufacturing.
- Governance was a key strength at the previous inspection and continues to be so. Since the previous inspection, two trustee champions for quality assurance and safeguarding meet quarterly with their respective managers and report to the board of trustees. Trustees have access to good information on the performance of the programme and provide sufficient scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders. Trustees are fully involved in shaping the strategic direction of the company.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good and supports apprentices to make good progress and succeed well. Initial assessment clearly identifies individual apprentices' starting points and levels of skill in English, mathematics and IT. Tutors and TDAs use the results of accurate initial assessment to plan appropriately personalised learning targets.
- However, for a small minority of learners the short-term targets tutors set for them to improve their interpersonal and soft skills such as adaptability, problem-solving and critical observation are less well developed.

- A good range of vocational and trade-specific options is offered to apprentices so they can follow their preferred occupational pathway that matches their individual needs and interests, as well as the specific role that they undertake when they return to the workplace.
- Tutors and TDAs are conscientious, enthusiastic and appropriately qualified. They make good use of their technical and commercial expertise to provide a strong industrial focus and relevance when they plan and implement learning. They use learning materials which are of good quality and assess accurately whether apprentices are learning through, for example, perceptive questioning. Training sessions often conclude with a clear recap of learners' understanding of the skills and knowledge acquired.
- In practical training areas, the quality and range of technical resources to support the training of engineering apprentices are impressive. Apprentices benefit greatly and make good use of the significant investment in new and emerging technologies, particularly in relation to virtual computer numerical control machining centres, mechatronics, fluid power and industrial automation. As a result, apprentices quickly develop their confidence and technical skills in using advanced machinery that often replicates equipment they will use in the workplace.
- Apprentices benefit from very good on-the-job training where they work closely alongside skilled workplace colleagues gaining good on-site experience and develop their practical skills and technical knowledge well. For example, they routinely work to exacting industry standards producing prototype vehicles, scale models of engineering components to test for aerodynamic and structural integrity, and manufacture high-quality medical components such as replacement hip joints using composite materials.
- Tutors and TDAs give very good verbal feedback, resulting in learners having a strong understanding of their progress and what they need to do before the next learning and assessment visit. However, in a few instances, written feedback provided by tutors and TDAs following assessment of academic assignments and examination of work products such as job cards does not precisely inform apprentices what they have done particularly well and what they need to do to improve.
- Most apprentices extend their understanding of English, mathematics and IT beyond the minimum requirements of their programme. The most able learners develop higher skills and learning in these essential skills through undertaking more challenging higher-level qualifications such as the higher national certificate. Tutors integrate English and mathematics well during off-the-job training sessions and they correct errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar in apprentices' written work to help improve the quality of apprentices' written English. However, a few TDAs do not consistently check the accuracy of their own spelling and grammar in the documents and written feedback that they provide to apprentices.
- Apprentices demonstrate good motivation and high levels of commitment to progress in their individual job roles. They receive particularly good personal support from TDAs and workplace mentors, who provide effective and regular

encouragement. Employers and workplace mentors contribute significantly to planned quarterly reviews and give honest and fair appraisals of apprentices' performance and their progress to date. As a result, apprentices have a precise understanding of how well they are doing and areas where further improvement is required.

- Managers at MGTS have successfully instigated an effective employer mentor programme to support the development of apprentices' behaviours at work. Mentors ensure that apprentices closely follow a jointly agreed skills development plan so that they are able to practise and hone the skills learned during off-the-job training when they return back to the workplace.
- Employers are effusive as to the high standard of personal, social and technical skills that apprentices quickly develop and how these are successfully applied to the workplace setting. Skills include improved levels of confidence, teamworking and problem-solving. Apprentices take pride in their work and in wearing their company uniforms.
- Apprentices closely monitor their own progress towards agreed skills targets and work hard to ensure they attain the high standards expected of them by their employer. Most make rapid progress, deepen their understanding, and quickly put theory into practice and become highly valued employees.
- Apprentices develop strong employability skills and a positive attitude towards learning and their future career plans. For example, while at the training centre they register their attendance by clocking in and out, as they would be required to do in the workplace. Apprentices are punctual and arrive at classroom and workshop sessions ready to learn. They have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. In the workplace, apprentices arrive at work on time and ready for the tasks of the day.
- Good, impartial careers advice and guidance at the start of their course ensure that apprentices are supported well to make realistic choices about their career plans and incremental steps towards them. Progression routes are well planned and offer opportunities for progression into higher-level programmes.
- Apprentices feel safe and they have a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities regarding health and safety and safeguarding, and are aware of what is expected of them in the workplace. However, while most apprentices understand the principles underpinning British values and equality and diversity, a small minority of adult apprentices do not have a secure or well-developed understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the dangers associated with radicalisation or extremism.
- Since the previous inspection, outcomes for apprentices have remained high. The large majority of intermediate and advanced apprentices successfully gain their qualifications and within the planned time. Similarly, there are few differences between achievements of the different groups of apprentices.
- However, while remaining above comparable national rates, apprenticeship performance declined slightly in 2015/16. Analysis of in-year performance data shows that current learners' performance has improved, most apprentices develop their skills and knowledge well and are now making good progress to

achieve by their planned end dates.

- Almost all apprentices who join the programme without GCSEs at grade C or better pass their functional skills examinations in English, mathematics and IT at level 2 at the first attempt.
- A large majority of advanced apprentices benefit from the opportunities to gain additional qualifications such as a higher national certificate in engineering. Correspondingly, most apprentices broaden their technical capability and usefulness within the workplace by attending extra industry-specific training courses in such areas as electrical wiring and testing, pneumatics, hydraulics, welding and lean manufacturing. While virtually all apprentices secure permanent employment at the end of their course, arrangements to obtain and analyse wider progression data such as the number who gain increased levels of responsibilities, pay or promotion are not effective enough and so require improvement to enable a full evaluation of the impact of the apprenticeship on learners and their employers

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- adult apprentices have a well-developed and secure understanding of the importance of the 'Prevent' duty and how to keep themselves and others safe from the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism
- all tutors and TDAs provide comprehensive and detailed written feedback that enables apprentices to understand what they need to do to improve, including their progress against agreed interpersonal and employability targets
- prompt support is provided to the few TDAs where the quality of spelling and grammar in their written work does not meet MGTS's high standards
- managers improve information systems so that the destinations of all apprentices who leave their course are routinely collected, tracked and evaluated so as to provide detailed information on the effectiveness and impact of apprentices' career planning.

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

Yours sincerely

Victor Reid
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The chief executive officer, as nominee, assisted a team formed of three Her Majesty's Inspectors and three 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.