

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 July 2017

Mr Mark Musselle
Principal
Arden College
40 Derby Road
Southport
Merseyside
PR9 0TZ

Dear Mr Musselle

Short inspection of Arden College

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 college was judged to be good in June 2014.

This college continues to be good.

Learners continue to receive good-quality education and training. The strengths identified at the previous inspection remain and leaders have taken appropriate action to address the areas for improvement.

You and your staff set high expectations of what learners can achieve and work tirelessly and successfully to ensure that learners have a well-managed, personalised curriculum that is responsive to their changing needs and prepares them well for adulthood, independence and, where appropriate, employment.

You and your senior leadership team have developed exceptional and highly effective relationships with community organisations and employers to engage learners in activities that further develop and enhance their learning in realistic working environments. The activities are inclusive for all learners, including those with more profound and complex needs. Through these, learners develop good work-related skills, benefit from high-quality vocational resources and those with ambitions to progress into employment do so.

Outcomes for learners remain good and are improving, with nearly all learners achieving or exceeding their predicted outcomes. You have developed your curriculum around a wide range of appropriate qualifications that encompass all levels of learning and provide appropriate progression routes for the vast majority of learners. Learners are motivated well by their achievements and this has had a significant impact on their levels of progress. English and mathematics are

integrated effectively across all aspects of the curriculum, and learners are able to apply their skills and knowledge in a range of real-life settings. The development of the functional skills English and mathematics strategy has increased significantly the flexibility to develop learners' English and mathematics skills within the context of their learning activity. As a result, learners extend their skills and knowledge in these subjects and this supports their progression into further learning, independence or employment.

Learners make excellent progress in a wide range of external environments. For example, a majority of learners complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at bronze, silver or gold level.

At your previous inspection, inspectors judged that governance arrangements required improvement. Governance arrangements have improved. The recent restructuring of the parent company has had a positive impact on the governance of the college, including the development of a wider corporate governance. This is beginning to provide a support network and the sharing of good practice across similar further education organisations within the group.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective and thorough, and meet statutory requirements. Records are comprehensive and link to care and support plans. Leaders have extended recently the capacity of the safeguarding team to include two further members of staff.

All staff, including governors, have been trained in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. The governor with responsibility for quality in the college undertakes audits to ensure that staff are implementing effective safeguarding practices and that staff know what to do if they become aware of a concern or if a student wants to make a disclosure.

The culture and implementation of health and safety practices are strong. Staff work hard to ensure that learners are safe in all learning settings. Risk assessments are thorough and external work placements are risk assessed by an external agency.

Leaders provide accessible safeguarding policies for learners, for example relating to bullying and harassment. They have introduced recently an e-safety policy, which includes appropriate coaching for learners on the safe use of social media.

Leaders and the parent company work together to ensure that they follow appropriate safe recruitment practices. Leaders must ensure that the small number of minor administrative errors identified in the single central record during inspection do not occur in the future. Managers rectified these swiftly and fully during the inspection.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, managers and governors have a clear vision for the college and are

committed to a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement. New and effective working relationships between governors and college leaders demonstrate that governors are beginning to provide suitable challenge and levels of scrutiny to hold leaders to account and bring about further improvements.

- Leaders manage performance well. They swiftly identify underperformance, and implement actions and support strategies to help staff to improve. Leaders ensure that all staff receive regular observations of their teaching. All teaching staff receive action plans to enable them to improve their practice even further or to share good practice. As part of the lesson observation process, where appropriate, learners contribute their views by giving feedback on the lesson observed. College records indicate that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved over the last year.
- Staff benefit from a wide range of continuous professional development activities. Managers plan effective activities to support teachers to meet the individual requirements of learners. For example, teachers receive training on how best to support learners with autism, or how to integrate effectively aspects of English and mathematical skills in vocational lessons.
- Learners develop good work-related skills through vocational lessons and through well-planned work experience placements. They benefit from access to high-quality vocational resources. For example, a majority of learners work in Arden Café, situated in a busy high street, and gain experience of running a real business. In work placements, they learn new skills that they can use throughout their daily lives. Learners describe how they can now carry out a wider range of tasks in the workplace, for example, they develop their confidence and interact with customers more readily.
- Leaders monitor learners' progress effectively across accredited and non-accredited learning. Non-accredited learning continues to be widely used to support the development of learners' skills in communications, literacy, numeracy, and emotional, social and behavioural development. Individual targets are regularly reviewed and monitored, and teachers take swift action to ensure that learners do not fall behind. Learners review their own progress routinely in lessons. They reflect on their performance against targets for learning and record these in a range of appropriate formats. However, targets for a small minority of learners are too broad and lack clarity.
- Teachers plan learning well. The recently expanded therapy team work with teaching staff to help them plan learning. They provide specialist assessments for communication, sensory processing and guidelines for staff to meet individual learners' requirements. However, in a minority of instances, these specialist assessments are not used effectively and a very small minority of learners are unable to participate fully in their lessons.
- Initial and baseline assessments of learners are accurate and thorough. The vast majority of learners benefit from highly individualised programmes that are relevant to their starting points and aspirations. However, the newly introduced 'discovery learning' curriculum, designed for the growing, but currently small, number of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), is in

the early stages of implementation and requires further development to provide learning activities that are appropriate for this group of learners.

- Teachers utilise support staff well in lessons and most show a clear understanding of the aims of the lesson and individual objectives for learners. Support staff give learners time to process information and learners complete tasks independently. For example, a learner gathered ingredients to prepare for baking, recognising labels for sugar and flour. However, a minority of learning support assistants give too much support to learners in lessons. As a result, learners do not develop the independence skills of which they are capable.
- Learners' attendance remains good. Managers take effective action to re-engage learners when they stop attending their lessons. They work successfully with relevant agencies, for example social services or the National Health Service, to support learners back into learning.
- Learners benefit from a wide range of enrichment opportunities. They participate in shared events with other colleges and local community organisations. For example, the college rock band responded to the challenge of putting on a public performance at the 'Party in the Park' event and performed at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. Leaders and staff celebrate learners' successes widely and use appropriate forums to acknowledge the life-changing achievements that many learners accomplish.
- Staff skilfully support learners to manage their behaviour. Staff demonstrate a low-key approach to diffusing situations and gently redirect learners to enable them to participate fully in their learning programme. As a result, incidents rarely escalate into more serious events and learners re-engage with their learning quickly.
- Leaders have made improvements to quality assurance arrangements and quality improvement plans since the previous inspection. Leaders have made accurate headline judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report is not yet sufficiently evaluative. Further improvement is required to ensure effective and timely monitoring of actions to bring about continued improvement.
- In a small minority of instances, staff need further training and support to ensure that they recognise and respond appropriately to the diversity within the student body, for example using culturally appropriate resources.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further develop and build on the relatively new governance arrangements to ensure that governors routinely and effectively hold senior college leaders to account and bring about more rapid and further improvements
- they rigorously monitor the 'discovery learning' programme to ensure that it provides appropriate learning activities for PMLD learners and meets the individual requirements of these learners effectively
- teachers set learning targets for all learners that are well designed, specific and that allow them to capture clearly the progress that learners make

- support for learners promotes independence and takes into account specialist assessment strategies to allow all learners to participate fully in lessons
- the self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements support leaders to achieve the necessary improvements and the impact of remedial action is easily identified and monitored
- staff embrace the diverse needs of learners and respond appropriately.

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

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Wainwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by the vice-principal, as nominee. We carried out lesson observations and learning walks, including observations of external work placements; most of these were jointly with college staff. We held meetings with governors, leaders, managers and teachers. We spoke to learners. We reviewed documents relating to the management of the college, to individual learners, safeguarding and reviewed learners' work. We considered the views of the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires.