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Ms Joanne Cronin
Business and Performance Manager
Heathercroft Training Services Ltd
142 Whitley Road
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Dear Ms Cronin

Short inspection of Heathercroft Training Services Ltd (HTS)

Following the short inspection on 26 and 27 July 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 September 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Since your previous inspection, you have worked successfully with directors, managers and staff to make sure that learners continue to benefit from good-quality education and training. Staff provide high levels of support for trainees and apprentices, and have high expectations for their achievement and well-being. In turn, learners have a strong work ethic and the vast majority rapidly develop confidence in their abilities. Apprentices and trainees enjoy their training and many maintain connections with the company for some considerable time after their courses finish.

Managers and staff set demanding targets that lead to high levels of learner achievement. The large majority of apprentices and trainees make good progress, achieve their qualifications within the expected time, and many go on to higher levels of study with HTS or other local providers. Learners receive a good range of useful and up-to-date information about their next steps and possible career pathways before and during their training. As at your previous inspection, learners express high levels of satisfaction with the careers advice and guidance they receive at HTS.

Trainees and apprentices gain valuable vocational and work skills. Assessors discuss fully performance targets and achievement dates with apprentices and their employers. Such discussions help employers to play a strong role in developing relevant and up-to-date work skills for apprentices. Assessors and employers work very well together to make sure that course units are chosen to reflect business needs. Progress is monitored carefully in review meetings. Good-quality feedback and guidance helps apprentices make sure that they meet the standard required for

their qualifications and helps them to improve further. During their courses, trainees are set demanding personal targets and benefit from good-quality placements that improve their communication, interpersonal and work skills. However, trainees would benefit from the setting of behaviour and dress standards that reflect workplace expectations from the start of their course, beginning with discussion and clarification during induction week.

Apprentices and trainees improve their mathematics and English skills during training. The vast majority achieve their functional skills at the level required for their course, and a good proportion achieve above the required standard. However, you recognise that there is room to improve training in English and mathematics so that all apprentices complete their functional skills at an earlier point in their course. To further stretch more-able learners you gained approval to provide GCSE mathematics and English courses this year. A small group of learners successfully completed their courses, though the outcome of their examinations is not yet known. You are currently working to improve the use you make of data about individual learners' strengths, weaknesses and success levels in functional skills examinations.

With the two founding directors of the company you hold frequent board meetings to review thoroughly company direction and performance. Board members have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision, and carefully analyse HTS's strategic position and direction. Improvement planning generally takes good account of government policy and the national training landscape. You continue to work widely and generously with employers and vocational sector partners to help them understand policy initiatives, for example changes to apprenticeship funding and structures.

Safeguarding is effective.

Directors, managers and staff maintain safeguarding arrangements that successfully promote learners' safety, health and well-being. Staff help learners to secure and understand their own safety and well-being in the community, to work safely and avoid risks online. Careful safeguarding and health and safety checks are carried out at employers' premises before trainees attend for placements or apprentices are signed up to courses. Learners also understand their responsibilities to protect the safety and well-being of their peers and others. Apprentices on care and childcare courses have a good understanding of the particular safeguarding risks and responsibilities in these sectors.

Good records are kept of any safeguarding risks or incidents. Senior staff and assessors frequently review the progress and well-being of any learners identified as at risk or vulnerable. Staff are diligent in supporting learners who have education, health and care plans (EHCPs), and they make sure that these plans are updated frequently. Managers refer new learners to the local authority when they identify an individual who would benefit from the protection of an EHCP.

Staff make sure that learners understand the risks associated with use of the internet and social media, and the dangers of online radicalisation from those

supporting extremist ideologies. Senior staff maintain a good range of links to specialist bodies, and have strong links with the local authority 'Prevent' coordinator. In the past two years, a number of referrals have been made where staff have identified learners at risk of radicalisation.

All staff have received good levels of recent training and nearly all hold level 2 awards in safeguarding and/or 'Prevent' awareness. However, although training has increased staff awareness and understanding of topics such as abuse and radicalisation, a minority of assessors still lack confidence to discuss these areas more broadly with their trainees and apprentices. In public areas of the main training building there are few up-to-date posters or visual displays providing information about British values or ways to recognise and report concerns about extremist behaviour.

A small minority of assessors lack the confidence to lead discussions with learners about living and working in a diverse society. In particular, such assessors do not explore with learners sufficiently, the implications of working in a care environment with clients of different races, beliefs and cultural practices. Too often, discussions tend to centre on the location in which learners work, rather than preparing them for employment in a wider range of settings with a diverse client group.

Inspection findings

- Apprentices in all subject areas still develop strong employment skills that prepare them well for their chosen careers. This was a strength identified in the previous inspection report. Employers continue to value highly the considerable skills gains that many apprentices make. They also value the ways that managers and staff from HTS encourage them to play a major part in selecting qualification units and shaping the apprenticeship structure to meet the needs of their businesses. In particular, employers appreciate the ways that apprentices can communicate well with clients and customers, and the ways that apprentices provide good levels of customer and client care. Employers were able to cite many examples of apprentices being able to work well and with little supervision on complex tasks. In a range of workplace settings, apprentices also performed strongly as team members, making a good contribution to care teams and to customer service teams, even early in their training. As at the previous inspection, assessors' very good vocational knowledge and skills are employed to develop productive assessment activities. Apprentices benefit from detailed and constructive feedback following assessments. In most cases, feedback directs apprentices clearly to consider employers' needs, and reflects workplace circumstances. Apprentices continue to develop important English language and mathematics skills well.
- Managers have taken successful steps to ensure that more trainees stay until the end of their courses, and that more trainees gain jobs or apprenticeships as a result of their traineeships. During 2015/16, a small group of trainees taking sports-related qualifications with a subcontractor did not achieve well, and a number of trainees left the course early. Managers took decisive action to support the trainees, and ended the contracting arrangement. Retention and

achievement rates for trainees during 2016/17 are high, with nearly all remaining to the end of their courses and around three-quarters achieving a positive outcome. Of these, around 40% moved from their traineeship into an apprenticeship. Trainees enjoy their courses and make rapid gains in skills. During employment placements they develop a good range of work and personal skills that allow them to apply successfully for jobs or apprenticeships. Though staff do instil in trainees a good understanding of expected behaviours at work and on the course, they do not do this rapidly or early enough. Too many trainees in the very early stages of their courses, for example during induction week, behave unprofessionally because high standards of behaviour and punctuality are not made clear and upheld from the start.

- Arrangements to observe and assure the quality of teaching, training and learning do help staff to improve their practice. Professional development activity is closely and productively linked to training observations, and helps staff to better meet learners' needs. The observation process is wide-ranging and takes in almost all forms of staff-learner engagement. Staff value the observations and the feedback they receive. Staff would benefit from increased opportunities to observe best practice within and across teams, as well as beyond HTS. The outcomes of observations also provide managers with a reliable view of the quality of classroom training, reviews and assessments. However, observation reports still focus chiefly on the performance of the teacher or assessor and only partly on the progress learners make during training. At the time of inspection, the observation process was being improved further to capture more evidence about the ways that training and assessment activities help learners to make and sustain progress.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and managers should ensure that:

- all assessors are confident to lead discussions about working in a more diverse society and setting than those apprentices currently occupy
- posters and visual displays around the training centre are more frequently refreshed to reflect the latest online communication systems and risks
- staff are supported to set and discuss with trainees clear expectations for good professional and workplace behaviours from the start of the traineeship induction week
- staff are supported to share good practice across teams and to seek examples of best practice from other providers outside the immediate locality.

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Richard Beynon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors, plus two Ofsted inspectors visited the provider for two days. The business and performance manager, as nominee, assisted inspectors. We met with one of the company directors, with a range of staff and with learners and employers. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, and reviewed learners' written work. We reviewed key policies and documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We also considered the views of learners.