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Ms Jenny Sims
Principal
Sutton College of Learning for Adults
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Dear Ms Sims

Short inspection of Sutton College of Learning for Adults

Following the short inspection on 16 and 17 March 2016, 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 June 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

Governors and senior managers have maintained the good quality of provision seen at the previous inspection. You and your team have instilled successfully in your staff and learners an ethos of collaboration and high expectations. Your strategic direction for Sutton College has focused strongly on providing high-quality learning that enables learners to achieve well.

Governors and staff at all levels have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement for learners' outcomes, and for teaching, learning and assessment. Management reporting is highly effective and monitored unremittingly. At all levels of the organisation, staff focus sharply on taking quick action to improve the learners' experience. This has ensured that the quality of provision at the college remains good during a time of significant financial budgetary reductions.

Managers and staff use feedback from learners effectively to understand the concerns that learners may have and to respond appropriately, for example, by providing additional in-class help and study assistance for learners working towards GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Learners feel and are very safe at Sutton College and in the workplace. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when online and using social media. Staff encourage learners to use their own laptops and tablet computers in lessons so that they can benefit from the college's secure network system to work on tasks and research subject topics safely.

Senior managers meet their obligations under the new Prevent duty effectively. Staff ensure that learners develop a good understanding and knowledge of British values and life in modern Britain through lessons and session topics. However, not all staff have an effective understanding of the dangers of radicalisation. Managers recognise that more training is required to ensure that all staff, including subcontractor staff, have a good understanding of the Prevent duty. Managers continually review the functionality of the college network to ensure that it meets the security standard required.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders and managers effectively identify the causes of underperformance on programmes, where they exist, and take timely and effective action. Management actions are sustained well through continued and close monitoring. Current learners make good progress in their learning, including young learners, a weakness at the previous inspection. The proportion of learners who achieve grades A* to C in GCSE English and mathematics is improving rapidly. Learners' attendance and punctuality are good across the college. Staff at all levels monitor learners' attendance patterns well and follow up any non-attendance quickly. Managers and staff have been highly effective in providing flexible learning opportunities to ensure that learners have the maximum opportunity to attend and succeed well. For example, most qualification-based classes are scheduled to enable learners to attend at another time should they miss their usual class; all subject teachers take a shared approach to the learning materials they use in class, and the weekly topics they teach.
- The standard of teaching, learning and assessment remains high. Most teachers are skilled practitioners who use a wide range of strategies to make learning lively and fun. Learners work purposely and diligently in their lessons and develop good skills and knowledge in their chosen subject. Targeted staff development has helped more teachers to develop their information and technology (IT) skills better; the majority of teachers now use IT very effectively to enhance learning in and outside the classroom. Managers use learning walks successfully to identify and share existing good practice in teaching.

- Senior leaders and managers have made good progress in improving the management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on GCSE English and mathematics courses. Pre-course guidance and assessment of learners' knowledge and skills have been much improved. Learners benefit from high-quality teaching, learning and assessment and very effective individual help in class. However, actions to improve the development of learners' English and mathematics skills within vocational lessons have not been as rapid. Managers are currently piloting a range of approaches in health and social care to develop learners' skills and knowledge in English and mathematics, but it is too soon to judge how effective they may be.
- Governors and senior leaders subcontract the apprenticeship provision to three external providers. Management oversight of the small but growing apprenticeship provision is insufficient to ensure that the quality of learning is good for all apprentices. Managers' limited understanding of the full requirements of the apprenticeship programme prevents them from holding their subcontractors to account fully. In 2014/15, the largest subcontractor ceased trading and subsequently, the proportion of apprentices who achieved their qualification declined dramatically and is now very low.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to review the security of the college network
- they ensure that college and subcontractor staff at all levels have a good understanding of the potential dangers posed by radicalisation
- teachers and assessors have the skills and expertise to ensure that learners on vocational programmes make good progress in developing their English and mathematical skills and knowledge
- management oversight of the apprenticeship provision is rapidly improved.

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

Jules Steele
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors. We were assisted by the principal as nominee. We visited three sites to observe teaching, learning and assessments and to look at learners' work. We met with members of the local authority, governors, learners, senior managers, tutors and assessors, and telephoned apprentices, employers and subcontractors. We reviewed key documents, including the provider's most recent self-assessment report, development plans, and data related to the performance of learners currently on programmes and that related to safeguarding. We considered the views of learners and employers by reviewing the results of Ofsted's online questionnaires.