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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Diana Bird
Director
Swarthmore Education Centre
2–7 Woodhouse Square
Leeds
LS3 1AD

Dear Mrs Bird

Short inspection of Swarthmore Education Centre

Following the short inspection on 3 October 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.

The high staff-to-student ratio at Swarthmore means that students receive substantial support from the well-qualified and committed teachers and teaching assistants. Many students have had very negative experiences of education before coming to the centre; being at Swarthmore transforms their education and employment prospects and their lives in general. Parents, carers and partner agencies speak very highly indeed about the quality of provision.

As students progress towards their next steps in education or employment, staff successfully introduce them to appropriate external agencies that offer continued support to help students to increase their independence, and opportunities for sustained employment and life chances.

Staff offer continuing support to their former students after they have completed their study programmes, and this helps to foster a strong sense of community and self-esteem for Swarthmore students. Many students return regularly, both to access further support that enables them to sustain positive destinations, and to take part in social events at the centre. They are positive role models for current students.

Leaders and managers ensure that information, advice and guidance about careers and progression to further education are central parts of the study programme. The quality of advice and guidance is exceptionally high, and these are very well personalised to meet the needs of each individual learner. This maximises the chances of positive destinations for the students.

Safeguarding is effective.

Swarthmore's human resources (HR) staff continue to maintain good management and control of all staff records relating to safeguarding. All staff undergo relevant checking, which is repeated every three years. Records include all details of checks on identity, qualifications, training and references. HR staff also carry out the same checks for all volunteers and trustees.

All staff take part in annual update training covering key aspects of safeguarding, including any new requirements. All staff have a good understanding of how to manage and report safeguarding issues. Swarthmore has good relationships with external agencies, which provide advice, guidance and support when needed. All areas of the building have appropriate systems in place to ensure the safety of students and staff at the centre. Internet safety is a high priority at Swarthmore, and relevant and appropriate systems prevent access to inappropriate sites. Staff frequently discuss and refer to safe practice in using social media sites, and students are able to express the dangers of using these sites.

Managers have implemented a 'Prevent' duty action plan since the last inspection. Information about the 'Prevent' duty is included in student handbooks, and staff promote this well around the centre, using posters and signs. Although staff introduce students to the 'Prevent' duty, a few students struggle to understand how it affects them. Others have difficulty expressing what they have learned about the threats and dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have introduced very effective and well-managed study programmes that cater extremely well for the needs of young people who have found it difficult to access education elsewhere. Study programmes focus strongly on the development of students' skills for employment and further education. As a result, students make very good progress in improving their confidence, self-esteem, social skills, maturity and independence, as well as essential skills such as those in mathematics and English.
- Staff assess the needs of students at the start of their programme expertly and thoroughly, and make good use of education, health and care plans in the process. These individual assessments are then used to very good effect to plan personalised learning programmes. Students have their own ambitious yet realistic targets, and staff monitor students' progress towards these targets well.
- The development of, and focus on, improving students' employability are excellent. The exceptionally well-designed work-experience component of the study programme suits individual needs, abilities and ambitions very well. The centre's staff introduce work experience gradually and provide on-site support so that students settle into new environments with confidence. As students become accustomed to their placement, staff slowly reduce the support so that students increase their independence and self-reliance. As a result, students become much better equipped to enter adult life and work as resilient and confident individuals.

- Employers who offer work placements provide high-quality support and are very involved in reviewing students' progress and in setting targets. Some of these placements lead to apprenticeships, voluntary work or employment.
- The self-assessment report for last year's provision is more evaluative and realistic than in previous years. The director recognises the need to develop the process further, and she plans to devolve responsibility to curriculum teams in future years. However, the proposed process does not include fully other stakeholders such as students, parents, employers and trustees.
- The process of observing and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is currently being revised. The new director of Swarthmore recognises that the current system is not wholly fit for purpose and has plans to revise the process and link it more closely with the professional development of staff and their performance management. These plans are appropriate, but it is too early for them to have had any demonstrable impact.
- Although the quality of teaching is not consistently high across all the work of the centre, there are many examples of very effective teaching. Managers envisage that the plans for a more rigorous observation process will identify and tackle weaknesses in teaching with greater speed.
- Outcomes for students remain good overall. Qualification achievement rates for students aged 16 to 18 across all levels are good. Many students achieve qualifications in English and mathematics at more than one level. All students achieve a wide range of non-regulated qualifications and individual units from full qualifications. However, the achievement rates for students aged 19 and above on entry-level and level 1 courses declined quite significantly last year.
- For the relatively small number of students who sit GCSE examinations in English and/or mathematics, the proportion who achieve a grade A* to C is very high. A significant outcome for most students at Swarthmore is the successful development of personal confidence in both social and employment settings, as well as the development and enhancement of their potential to function effectively at work and gain employment. This aspect is life changing for many learners and, in many instances, their parents or carers.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they halt and reverse the decline in achievement rates for adult students
- they take further steps to ensure that students fully understand and can explain the threats and dangers linked to radicalisation and extremism
- the revised system for observation of teaching is launched and acts as a key driver for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning for all staff
- the planned changes to the self-assessment process ensure that it is rigorous and evaluative, supports future improvements effectively, and includes all relevant stakeholders.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Gardner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two inspectors and the director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. During the inspection, inspectors met with managers, parents and employers and observed teaching activities, and met and talked to staff and students in meetings and classrooms. Inspectors also reviewed a number of documents, learner files and records.