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Ms Abigail Appleton
Principal
Hereford College of Arts
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Dear Ms Appleton

Short inspection of Hereford College of Arts

Following the short inspection on 11 and 12 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 October 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders, managers and governors have continued to provide a consistently good quality of education for students at Hereford College of Arts. Your appointment as principal and the restructure of the management team, including the new role of head of FE, have successfully ensured a continued focus on improving the quality of the student experience and student outcomes. Considerable investment has been made into the art and design workshops and recording and music production spaces. This has further enhanced the student experience with excellent accommodation. Highly skilled technical demonstrators in each specialist area enable students to complete their specialist creative arts projects to a high professional standard.

Leaders and managers have successfully implemented the introduction of 16 to 19 study programmes, which represent the majority of your provision, and provide a highly specialised programme for each individual student. You recognise that, although all students gain some element of work-related experience, not all students have an opportunity to undertake individually tailored external work experience. You continue to work with a wide range of employers and partners to develop this further.

Students continue to experience good teaching and effective assessment of their work in the vast majority of lessons and develop good, and sometimes outstanding, practical and technical skills. The vast majority of students make good progress and gain their qualifications, progressing on to further study, employment or

apprenticeships. As a result of actions taken by leaders and managers since the last inspection, the proportion of students gaining high grades has increased. However, you recognise that further work is needed to increase this proportion still further on a minority of programmes. In addition, you recognise that gaps in achievement between different groups of students, including that between male and female students, need to be further investigated and addressed, to enable all students to reach their potential.

The proportion of students who achieve GCSE grades A* to C (grades 9 to 4) in English and mathematics has increased over the last three years, but you recognise that more work needs to be done to improve achievement for students studying other English and mathematics qualifications and for adult students.

Students enjoy their time at college. The ethos of the college through the integration of college values ensures that students feel safe and are enabled and empowered to take creative risks and develop their artistic potential in a safe, respectful and tolerant environment.

At the previous inspection, it was identified that a more comprehensive analysis of students' destinations was required. Leaders and managers have worked hard to address this area for improvement and now have a comprehensive understanding of the progression and destinations of all students.

Safeguarding is effective.

Students feel safe and understand how to keep themselves safe. Staff and students understand the system for reporting safeguarding concerns, and to whom they need to report. The designated safeguarding officer and team of safeguarding leads are all trained to an appropriate level for their role, and all staff and governors receive regular training and updates.

The recent introduction of a new secure electronic system for recording and monitoring referrals has significantly enhanced the ability of the designated safeguarding officer and team to record concerns, monitor cases and identify trends, to implement swift action or make additional interventions for students. As a result, leaders and managers are acutely aware of the need for good mental-health support for their students. They have begun to pilot a programme of resilience training among a small group of students, with the intention of rolling it out across the college more extensively.

Leaders and managers have successfully implemented the 'Prevent' duty. They have undertaken the appropriate risk assessments and action plans to ensure that all staff and students are knowledgeable with regard to the risks of radicalisation and extremism. 'Prevent' has now been fully integrated into the safeguarding procedures and induction processes at the college, for both staff and students. Students undertake an extensive range of creative projects and activities, which make use of British values, 'Prevent' and safeguarding as their stimulus. As a result, students fully understand the importance of keeping themselves safe – including

online. They know what acceptable behaviour looks like, and what to do if they have any concerns for themselves or others.

Students have developed a strong awareness of safe working practices; the attention paid to health and safety in all specialist workshops and studios is very high.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, managers and governors know the college well. They have accurately identified areas of poor performance and areas for further development. Effective action has led to ongoing improvements, and the majority of areas identified for development at the last inspection have been dealt with and strengths maintained.
- New electronic systems have been introduced since the last inspection. As a result, managers and lecturers are now more able to identify and tackle issues around attendance, work completion, and progress in a more timely manner; however, leaders and managers recognise there is further work to do to secure timely interventions across all provision.
- Standards of students' work are high. Leaders, managers and lecturers have high expectations of their students, who achieve well on vocational programmes and develop highly effective practical and technical skills of a professional standard.
- The large majority of students achieve their qualifications and progress to further study, employment or apprenticeships. However, leaders and managers recognise that students' achievement on a small minority of programmes is still too low, and that achievement gaps for a few groups of learners exist. As a result, leaders, managers and governors have taken decisive action and made changes to awarding bodies, accommodation, timetabling and teaching teams to prioritise these areas for improvement.
- GCSE English and mathematics achievement at grades A* to C (grades 9 to 4) for students aged 16 to 18 have improved over the last few years and are good, sitting above the very low national rate of other similar providers. GCSE English and mathematics achievement for the very small number of adult students who take them are too low.
- Students continue to develop their English and mathematics skills well within the majority of their vocational lessons. In a minority of art and design lessons lecturers do not sufficiently promote the use of evaluative language in discussion or effectively mark spelling and grammatical mistakes within the students' portfolio work; as a result, mistakes remain uncorrected.
- Leaders and managers have successfully implemented the 16 to 19 study programme, which provides a comprehensive range of specialist programmes enabling students to make good progress in their academic and artistic development.
- In the vast majority of vocational lessons, the levels of student participation and concentration are high, because lecturers have exacting expectations of the

academic and professional standards that students must attain; this results in productive use of lesson time. However, in a few lessons lecturers do not consistently provide appropriately challenging activities to fully extend students of all abilities; as a result the most able students do not always progress at the pace they are capable of, or achieve the highest grades.

- Students benefit from educational visits to performances, exhibitions and locations from which to work, which greatly enrich their experience and motivation. For example, first-year level 3 art and design students visited the Sidney Nolan Trust and Gallery; as a result, their subsequent work was impressive in scale and conceptual ambition.
- The college has extensive partnerships with creative organisations that provide work related opportunities for groups of students, for example the National Trust. Links with higher education institutions in creative subjects are strong, and students are well equipped to progress to further specialist study. Currently, however, not all students have the opportunity to undertake individual external work-experience placements; further work is needed by leaders and managers to increase these placement opportunities.
- Personal target setting is good. Students set useful academic, subject-specific and engagement targets that enable them to understand and evaluate the progress they are making. Lecturers explain lesson objectives well at the start of lessons so students understand what key knowledge and technical skills they will develop. Students receive useful formative feedback in lessons, and they complete personal learning logs each week so that they can track and monitor their own progress against key themes. Reviews of work at the end of projects (critiques) enable students to grasp their strengths and areas they could improve in their practical work, which informs their target setting for the following project. Students use peer- and self-assessment well to inform their own self-reflections.
- Leaders and managers have taken decisive action following the recommendation at the previous inspection to record, track and monitor students' progression and destinations better. Leaders and managers now have a comprehensive record of the internal progression and the external destinations of students. They effectively analyse this data to inform future curriculum development decisions, to tailor current programmes to the needs of the industry, and to enable students to progress to the higher education institutions of their choice. Over three quarters of the students who leave the college successfully progress on to further study.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders and managers further develop methods to more rigorously monitor student attendance, progress and gaps in achievement to drive improvement and increase the speed with which interventions can be put in place to secure further positive outcomes for students
- leaders and managers secure improved student achievement on a small number

of programmes, including English and mathematics, which are currently too low and close gaps in achievement which exist for some groups of students

- managers increase the number of students benefiting from individual specialist work experience with external partners
- lecturers provide appropriate challenge and activities in lessons for students of all ability, particularly the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Judy Lye-Forster
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspection team were assisted by the head of further education as nominee. We held meetings with you, your senior leaders, governors, managers and teaching staff. We observed teaching, learning and assessment in classrooms and specialist workshops and studios, at times accompanied by members of your staff. We looked at learner work and portfolios. We spoke with learners, lecturers and technical demonstrators. We reviewed key documents including those relating to safeguarding, performance and improvement and self-assessment. We reviewed assessed work and tracking systems. We considered the views of students through face-to-face discussions.