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Dr Mark Dale
Principal
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Dear Dr Dale

Short inspection of Portland College

Following the short inspection on 17 and 18 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 March 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

Leaders and managers continue to provide a good educational experience for learners. You have managed the transition from a residential college to a day college with some residential provision very effectively. The recent restructuring of the college provided you with a good opportunity to review the purpose of the college. Your skills, employability and enterprise initiatives with local businesses, employer groups and local authorities demonstrate your commitment to improving the life chances for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities when they leave education and training. Your current progression rates for learners into employment are low, but improving.

You, your leadership team and your managers have made good progress in developing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You have made a considerable investment in staff development, with an emphasis on developing the skills staff require to meet the complex needs of the learners. This has resulted in the learners being well-prepared for adult life and more able to influence decisions regarding their future lives after college.

You have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the college. This results from your good use of data, an open and self-critical culture and useful systems for monitoring and reviewing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and managers have made good progress in improving the safeguarding arrangements and in implementing the 'Prevent' duty. The use of safer recruitment practices is well-established and rigorous. All staff have responded well to the changing nature of the student group and the challenges involved in making the 'Prevent' duty relevant and comprehensible to learners with complex needs. Teaching staff make good use of their safeguarding training to integrate safeguarding into learners' everyday activities. Learners have a good understanding of what is acceptable behaviour and how to avoid putting themselves at risk. College staff have a responsive approach to adapting risk assessments. For example, after the Manchester bombing incident staff and learners reviewed and amended the risk assessment for a visit to Wembley Stadium.

Learners feel safe and are confident to speak with staff if they have any concerns. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of e-safety and the risks associated with using social media and other websites. Tutors constantly reinforce good health and safety practices with learners, for example routinely wearing personal protective equipment and moving safely around the campus. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep safe. Learners on work experience on the college campus take pride in ensuring all visitors and non-college staff follow correct health and safety procedures and challenge visitors if they are not wearing the appropriate visitor identification.

Inspection findings

- Governors and the senior leadership team have managed the transformation from a residential college to a day college with a few residential learners very effectively. Senior leaders managed the restructuring of the college with sensitivity and professionalism.
- Behavioural support for learners has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The use of restraint has substantially reduced since 2015. As a result of training in assessing behaviour, de-escalating and defusing situations that could result in physical aggression and the use of low-impact restraint techniques, staff are now skilled and confident to deal with potentially challenging physical behaviour. Learners benefit from good management of the learning environment to reduce levels of anxiety and decrease sensory stimulation. For example, teachers and/or learning support assistants (LSAs) provide learners with ear defenders and weighted blankets when appropriate, or encourage learners to use quiet rooms if they need to be on their own.
- The strong investment which senior leaders make in staff development is increasing the capacity of teachers and LSAs to meet the needs of learners. It is also improving the retention of staff by providing them with opportunities for career development or promotion. For example, two LSAs are now physiotherapy assistants, having completed the necessary training. The revised induction for new staff provides a memorable and well-structured programme that covers the training necessary to carry out their duties. The 'passport to practice' lists the required training modules; staff remain on probation until all induction activities

are complete.

- Following the implementation of the new English and mathematics strategy and extensive staff training, teachers are routinely integrating English and mathematics skills into their lessons. They are making the development of these skills more relevant to learners.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to develop a wider range of resources, including a library, to support English and mathematics across the curriculum and to improve the achievement of GCSE mathematics.
- Success rates for functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology have risen considerably and are now very good. However, GCSE mathematics results are still low. Managers are aware of the changes needed to support learners more effectively and current learners now benefit from more time to complete their GCSE course.
- The wide-ranging and thorough pre-enrolment assessments that take place identify learners' starting points, their potential barriers to learning and their interests well. This process overcomes the variable quality and value of the education, health and care (EHC) plans received by the college. The ambitions and aspirations recorded in EHC plans are often vague or too general.
- Teaching staff devise medium- and long-term targets for learners that are highly personalised and link well to their individual aims and aspirations. Generally, teaching and support staff make good use of the management information system to record achievements and review progress. Teachers are skilled at adapting tasks to support individual learning targets. They give learners good opportunities to develop and practise new skills and reinforce established skills.
- The vast majority of teaching and learning activities across the college are of a good or better standard. Established teaching staff have a high level of commitment to achieving even higher standards and new staff are keen to develop their skills and learn from the best practitioners in the college.
- All teaching and learning support staff make good use of the college campus to prepare learners for community activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and external work placements. Learners take responsibility for the welfare of the goats, pigs, donkeys, poultry and other animals on the college site. The vast majority of learners move around the extensive estate with confidence and minimal support. However, for the very small number of learners with sight loss, there are no contrasting textures to show where paths connect with roads or other adaptations to increase mobility and reduce the need for learning support.
- All staff promote and reinforce fundamental British values through a range of activities that often link with events such as national elections, the Queen's birthday and news items. The student council is active in advising managers on changes that would improve the college and representatives from the council are involved in the appointment of senior staff.
- Reports to commissioners give a good overview of how well learners achieve and the progress they make. However, reports to parents and carers are too descriptive. They detail what a learner has done without making clear the new skills the learner has developed, the standards they have achieved and the

potential for further progress.

- Senior leaders recognised that the work of the therapies team was not fully effective. Speech and language and occupational therapists and physiotherapists now work closely with teaching staff, resulting in greater collaboration when planning and reviewing learning. They have also improved the skills of teachers and LSAs in supporting learners in areas such as communication, improving posture or pain management.
- The development of careers advice and guidance is a priority for the college. As a result of the appointment of job coaches, better links with employers and a stronger emphasis on work-related learning, the learners for whom it is appropriate are improving their understanding of potential career opportunities. However, it is too early to judge the impact of the job coaches on learners' progression into paid, supported or voluntary employment.
- Teaching and support staff reinforce employability skills and make good links with the world of work. They use naturally occurring opportunities to discuss job roles and the relevant skills needed. The vast majority of learners now have access to internal or external work experience opportunities where appropriate. High-quality work placements support learners to develop good employment practices. However, job coaches do not use the external work experience logs to record the skills learners develop and the targets they achieve.
- The number of learners for whom it would be appropriate to move onto employment was low at the previous inspection and remains low; the majority of learners move on to social services provision after leaving the college. The proportion of learners progressing to other further education provision has improved from just under a quarter of leavers in 2015/16 to almost a third in 2016/17.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- relevant staff continue to focus on increasing the number of external work placements for learners in order to improve their future employment prospects and prepare them for adult life
- managers continue to build on the skills and qualities of teaching staff by identifying and sharing effective practice and supporting new staff to improve their teaching and learning management skills, so that all learners benefit from the highest possible standards of teaching and learning
- teachers improve the reporting of progress and achievement of learners to their parents and carers so that reports detail more clearly learners' skills development, increased confidence and independence and their ability to make choices about their future lives
- managers suitably adapt the college estate and facilities for learners with sight loss so they can improve their independent mobility skills and confidence.

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

Yours sincerely

Nigel Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector visited the college for two days. We carried out inspection activities across the college site. Your head of quality, learning and teaching assisted inspectors. We met with you, governors, curriculum managers, therapists, and with a range of teachers, learning assistants and learners. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, internal and external work placements.