

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr David Gleed  
Principal  
North Kent College  
Oakfield Road  
Dartford  
Kent  
DA1 2JT

Dear Mr Gleed

### **Short inspection of North Kent College**

Following the short inspection on 29 and 30 November 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.**

Since your previous inspection, leaders and managers have worked effectively to make sure that staff continue to offer a high standard of training and education for young people. Managers have successfully dealt with many of the recommendations made at the previous inspection.

You make sure the college plays a key role in the economic development and prosperity of the region. You provide an evolving curriculum that remains relevant and beneficial both for learners, and for local and regional businesses. For example, your staff are planning with employers how to deliver the new apprenticeship standards. This ensures that employers understand the new qualifications, and are aware of the need for apprentices to have sufficient time to learn and study during the working week.

You continue to invest in accommodation and resources, to make sure they are of a sufficiently high quality to provide a positive learning environment for staff and learners.

Your learners are very positive about their experiences at the college and on apprenticeship programmes. Most learners value the high level of support they receive and the opportunities their education and training creates for them.

A small minority of learners are less clear about how their experience at college is helping to prepare them for their futures. Even though they are on vocational

courses, these learners are uncertain about their career intentions, or their likely routes into employment. A minority of learners on study programmes are unaware of the work experience they are required to complete as part of their course, or how it will help them improve their employability skills.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding remains a priority for the college, with suitable policies and procedures in place. Staff and students feel safe around the college and work safely. Staff frequently introduce topics to help raise learners' awareness of safeguarding-related matters. For example, teachers make sure apprentices and learners know how to keep themselves safe from cyber bullying and grooming when online. Learners and apprentices know what to do if they feel at risk from extremism or radicalisation and whom to approach if they are concerned about safeguarding matters. Managers deal well with any concerns that arise.

### **Inspection findings**

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have rebranded the college, and produced a new strategic plan. The new approach has increased the focus on high-quality education and training, to improve the student experience. Managers have reviewed and rationalised provision across the two main campuses at Dartford and Gravesend, and removed courses with low demand or poor quality. They have also made significant investments in accommodation, resources and services. For example, they have set up the new hair academy, improved leisure facilities, and introduced a new counselling and welfare service. Managers have also strengthened external links, for example with local colleges, through the Thames Gateway and Kent Partnership of local borough councils, and with various local and regional employers. This has helped assure the quality of provision across the college, as reflected in learners' high level of satisfaction with their experience at college.
- Since the previous inspection, the numbers of learners on college-based courses, and the numbers of apprentices who successfully achieve their qualification, have risen each year, and are high. Managers are aware of those smaller pockets of provision where achievement rates have not improved as quickly, and are focusing particular attention on raising standards in those areas.
- As part of their improvement of the study programmes curriculum, leaders have significantly increased the emphasis teachers place on the promotion of English and mathematics. Managers have improved the processes for placing new learners on the most appropriate English and/or mathematics course. They have also invested in the development of 'learning zones' for English and mathematics, to help increase the profile of these subjects and improve the resources available to teachers. Teachers consistently emphasise to learners the importance of attending these subjects as a core part of their learning programme. Managers have also redesigned the English and mathematics curriculums to maximise the time available over the year, and to prepare learners better for the tests and examinations in these subjects. These developments have resulted in

improvements in most functional skills and GCSE results in English and mathematics. Managers recognise that achievement rates in level 2 functional skills mathematics are still too low.

- Managers have improved standards in engineering and construction through a number of new initiatives. They have made improvements to the assessment team delivering the apprenticeships in these areas. They have also improved target setting and progress monitoring so that staff have better records of the progress learners make. Learners are happy with the progress they make, and explain how assessors 'go out of their way' to carry out relevant workplace assessments whenever they can. Managers maintain strong and effective dialogue with employers, who play an active role in the development and assessment of their apprentices. As a result, achievement rates in these areas continue to rise. An increasingly high proportion of learners progress to the next level of study or to employment when they finish their courses.
- Leaders and managers have developed a wide range of effective strategies to check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the college, and to identify priorities for improvement. Staff carry out lesson observations, and accurately identify the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning. Managers accurately and critically review the quality of provision in each curriculum area annually. They produce suitably detailed quality improvement plans, and carefully monitor the progress of improvements. Managers have also improved the ways they gather feedback from learners to help identify any further areas for improvement.
- Leaders use the information from review processes well to identify development priorities for staff, and to design suitable training and coaching activities to improve provision. Leaders successfully promote a culture of continuous improvement among staff. As a result, staff are enthusiastic and willing to engage in professional development. For example, the engineering team has collaborated, through a team-teaching initiative, to help raise standards. Similarly, staff involved in teaching hair and beauty have worked closely to design a new curriculum that fulfils new course specifications. Recent training activities for teachers have included sessions to improve questioning techniques, along with sessions to improve the monitoring of learners' progress, and the ways teachers challenge the most able learners in lessons. This training has been effective. During the inspection, inspectors saw good examples of teachers using these techniques effectively in lessons.
- Teachers are highly effective at improving learners' awareness of equality, diversity and British values. Managers have integrated these themes well into the cross-college tutorial programme, and teachers frequently reinforce the subjects in lessons. For example, sports students discussed the meaning of equality in primary school settings. Similarly, teachers recently ran a campaign to raise learners' awareness of anti-Semitism. As a result, learners are familiar with these themes and are able to consider their significance in the context of the communities in which they live, and life in modern Britain.

## **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers and staff maintain their focus on promoting the importance of literacy and numeracy to all learners
- staff support more learners taking GCSE English and mathematics to achieve their qualifications
- all learners on study programmes have the opportunity to take part in meaningful work experience and understand why they are doing this
- staff place greater emphasis on career planning with learners.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Nelson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors visited the provider for two days. The deputy principal, curriculum, as nominee, assisted inspectors. Inspectors met with governors, senior leaders and managers, as well as with a number of teachers and trainer/assessors. They also met a range of learners and apprentices and spoke to employers. Inspectors visited the college campuses at Gravesend and Dartford. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, and reviewed learners' and apprentices' written work, and lesson planning documentation. They reviewed important policies and documents, including those related to self-assessment, quality improvement, performance management, and safeguarding. They also considered the views of apprentices and employers.