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Mr Martin Simmons
Deputy Principal
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Dear Mr Simmons

Short inspection of Sparsholt College

Following the short inspection on 1 and 2 February 2018, 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 the previous inspection, leaders, managers and governors have continued to provide a consistently good quality of education for students at Sparsholt College. You have successfully improved the quality of the student experience and student outcomes. You have improved achievements for students on 16 to 19 study programmes for the majority of adult learners and for those apprentices on programmes directly delivered by your staff.

Senior managers have acted swiftly and decisively to protect the progress of the apprentices affected by the collapse of three subcontractors. They are working hard to ensure that the apprentices achieve successfully. You have suitable processes in place to ensure that subcontractors meet performance and quality targets.

As a result of highly effective partnerships, you have secured considerable investment to improve and extend the facilities and teaching areas of the college. The new agricultural engineering and motor vehicle centre on the Sparsholt campus and the new future skills and technology centre at the Andover campus have greatly enhanced the students' experience. They offer excellent accommodation and specialist equipment. Consequently, you have been able to increase the range of specialist provision. For example, you now provide courses in electrical trades in Andover.

Leaders and managers have successfully introduced 16 to 19 study programmes, which now make up most of your provision. These provide a highly specialised

programme for each student. All students gain some element of work-related experience, which teachers carefully tailor to their ambitions and aspirations. You continue to work with a wide range of employers and partners to develop these opportunities further. Since the previous inspection, you have also given students aged 16 to 18 with appropriate prior attainment the opportunity to take GCSE English and mathematics qualifications.

Students continue to experience good teaching and effective assessment of their work in the vast majority of lessons. They develop good, and sometimes outstanding, practical and technical skills. The vast majority make good progress, gain their qualifications, and progress to further study, employment or apprenticeships. Since the previous inspection, the proportion of students gaining high grades at A level has increased. Outcomes for students on land-based programmes continue to be high. However, you recognise that you need to increase the proportion of high grades still further on a minority of courses, for example in GCSE English and mathematics.

The focus on professional development across the college is leading to improvements in teaching and learning. Staff value highly the training that they receive as a result of the lesson observation and performance management process. New teachers benefit greatly from mentoring when they join the college. Teachers are now more willing to experiment with their practice and, as a consequence, student satisfaction and achievement have improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

Students feel safe and understand how to keep themselves safe, including online. Staff and students understand how to report safeguarding concerns. Staff and governors are appropriately trained according to their roles and responsibilities. They receive regular update training.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff and students understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism. The vast majority of students have a good awareness of how the 'Prevent' duty relates to their everyday lives, although a very small minority of apprentices show less understanding.

Staff place significant emphasis on safe working practices. Students demonstrate a strong awareness of these in a wide range of high-risk working environments. For example, on the animal management unit students understand and comply with the requirements of animal risk assessments to keep themselves, their colleagues and their animals safe.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers know their provision well and have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the student experience. They ensure that action planning is rigorous enough to bring about rapid improvements in areas identified as requiring further development. Where

teachers or assessors are unwilling to engage with professional development to secure effective practice then leaders and managers take decisive action.

- Leaders and managers have effectively embedded British values into the ethos and values of the college and, as a result, students demonstrate good levels of respect and tolerance for each other and visitors to the college. Students benefit from a comprehensive induction and a bespoke tutorial programme that challenge their perceptions and extend their understanding of cultural diversity. The newly introduced pastoral tutor role has significantly contributed to this.
- Comprehensive and high-quality careers advice and guidance help students to make well-informed decisions about which course best suits their needs. Assessors give very effective advice and guidance to apprentices on their next steps and options for further study that will enhance their career opportunities. For example, assessors support veterinary nurses to identify appropriate continuing professional development opportunities that will develop their clinical practice; and business administration apprentices take additional courses that will prepare them well for taking on management responsibilities.
- Apprentices develop new skills well during their off-the-job training. These enhance their practice and their progression opportunities at work. In business administration apprentices have taken responsibility for developing the social media within their marketing company.
- Assessors and teachers encourage apprentices to consider the ways they can apply new skills to their own workplaces. For example, animal care apprentices look after exotic animals and tube feed sick and injured animals. They participate in discussion forums during their off-the-job training where they reflect on their practice with their peers effectively.
- The standard of students' and apprentices' written work in most areas is good. Students and apprentices take pride in their work, which is mostly well-presented, detailed and well-ordered. This is particularly evident in animal management, equine, sport, and for A-level students.
- Most vocational teachers are well qualified, they have extensive industry experience and good industry contacts, which benefit students greatly. Teachers demonstrate their strengths in theory and practical lessons where they use real-life examples to enliven learning. These teachers have high expectations of their students; as a result, students work to industry standards.
- The new level 2 vocational skills academy programme is not meeting students' aspirations, learning is often too slow and the students' understanding is not routinely checked. As a result, attendance is often poor and students lack motivation.
- The majority of students benefit from effective target-setting, they are clear about their short and long-term targets and appreciate the support they receive from their pastoral tutors, assessors and subject teachers. They make good progress. For a minority of students, the targets they are set make it difficult to identify what they need to do to improve their work and maintain momentum with their studies.
- Assessors support apprentices well, particularly those at risk of dropping out or

who find elements of the programme particularly challenging. For example, horticulture apprentices, who find plant identification difficult, have targeted support from the assessor and their work colleagues.

- Leaders and managers have worked effectively with partners, including the local enterprise partnership and local councils, to respond to local and regional skills gaps. They carefully design the curriculum to meet these needs.
- Leaders have worked closely with a leading global software company to develop an academy on the Sparsholt campus. This has resulted in significant investment in digital skills and information technology for students and staff. Staff are now equipped with new mobile devices that allow them to make good use of technology in classrooms and in workshops.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve achievement rates for apprentices on sub-contracted provision
- improve the content of the level 2 vocational skills academy programme to make sure that it meets students' needs and ambitions
- identify and share good practice so that all teachers and assessors can help students to reach their potential.

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 deputy principal, as nominee, assisted the inspection team. We held meetings with your senior leaders, governors, managers and teaching staff. We observed teaching, learning, assessment and progress reviews in classrooms, in specialist workshops and in the work place, at times accompanied by members of your staff. We spoke with students, apprentices, teachers and assessors. We reviewed key documents including those relating to safeguarding, performance and improvement, self-assessment, outcomes, work experience and student progression and destinations. We considered the views of students and employers through face-to-face discussions and through online questionnaires.