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Mrs Sue Renny
Apprenticeship Programme Manager
Superdrug Stores PLC
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Dear Mrs Renny

Short inspection of Superdrug Stores PLC

Following the short inspection on 13 and 14 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 November 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

You and your staff continue to provide apprentices with high-quality training. Achievement rates for apprentices are high and above those of similar providers. You have maintained the strengths identified at the previous inspection and made good progress in addressing areas for improvement.

Leaders have established a clear strategy that contributes to the six strategic priorities and vision of the parent corporate organisation, AS Watson Group. They promote a culture of high aspirations for apprentices' career development. Leaders provide a stimulating and challenging environment that enables young people to develop their skills and achieve their career aspirations.

Leaders and managers have successfully introduced new standards-based apprenticeship programmes in retail and team leadership, and have managed the transition from apprenticeship frameworks well. They exercise due diligence in the choice of stores where apprentices are located, and supervise closely the managers who have apprentices working in their stores.

Store managers provide good support and high-quality training for apprentices in busy retail stores. Apprentices develop good skills in communication, product sales and team leadership that store managers value. They make good progress on their programme; a very high proportion go on to secure employment within Superdrug Stores PLC, and approximately a third of apprentices gain promotion within the company.

Leaders and managers ensure that programmes meet both the business needs of the company and national skills priorities. Managers plan carefully how to develop apprentices' social, technical and digital skills. They have enhanced the delivery of standards-based apprenticeships by including an additional diploma qualification. This helps apprentices to develop a high level of technical skill and the behaviours required to do the job for which they are in training, and prepares them well for the end-point assessment test at the end of their programme.

Leaders have recently introduced new technology and learning materials for apprentices on standards-based programmes in order to offer a more flexible and personalised approach to learning. However, it is too early to see the full impact of these on apprentices' skills development.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your managers ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective, and you take appropriate actions to safeguard apprentices. As a result, apprentices are safe at work and when participating in learning activities.

Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. All staff have received enhanced checks on their suitability for employment through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), and managers record these in an up-to-date single central register. Managers review DBS checks every three years.

Leaders have implemented a 'Prevent' duty action plan after conducting a risk assessment. Staff have undergone mandatory training, and receive regular updates on safeguarding topics such as keeping safe when online, radicalisation and extremism. Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding, and they know to whom they should report safeguarding issues if they arise. Staff record centrally the small number of concerns that arise and managers closely monitor actions taken.

Apprentices are aware of the potential dangers of radicalisation and extremism. They develop their knowledge through discussions with assessors in review sessions and useful training run by external services that cover topics such as e-safety, 'what can you trust' and British values. Store managers provide apprentices with safety briefings specific to store locations in relation to safe evacuation and the reporting of incidents of a suspicious nature. A small proportion of apprentices do not have sufficient understanding of how to protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism in the context of their everyday lives.

Inspection findings

- Strategies to improve the quality of apprenticeship programmes are successful. Leaders and managers focus well on improving the quality of apprentices' experience and increasing the proportion of apprentices who complete their apprenticeships successfully. They took decisive action, following the previous inspection, to address the lower achievement rates for 16- to 18-year-old apprentices. Leaders and managers consulted with former apprentices, staff and

store managers to gain a clearer understanding of the reasons why some apprentices left early or did not achieve their qualification. They introduced a new school-leaver programme that included a work-experience period for apprentices before they committed to their training. As a result, apprentices have a better understanding of what to expect from working in a retail store.

- Achievement rates for 16- to 18-year-old apprentices, who account for approximately three quarters of all apprentices, are now high and above those of similar providers. Apprentices who are in the early stages of their apprenticeship report that programmes challenge them to fulfil their potential. They view their apprenticeships as the beginning of rewarding, long-term careers.
- Leaders involve staff fully in all stages of the self-assessment process, and take many appropriate actions to improve the quality of provision. They acknowledge, however, that they need to enhance improvement strategies further by consistently identifying helpful and challenging actions that support all staff to maintain at least good outcomes for apprentices.
- Leaders, managers and staff use data effectively to analyse and report on apprentices' achievements and progression at the end of their programme. However, they recognise that they do not monitor, analyse and report on all aspects of apprentices' progress, including the behaviours and technical skills that apprentices develop.
- Apprentices demonstrate work of a high standard. They develop good business skills and behaviours, such as reliability, pride, integrity and punctuality. They demonstrate a genuine interest in the needs of the business and use their skills well in, for example, dealing with requests and complaints from customers.
- Apprentices make good progress in developing the technical knowledge and skills required for their role. They acquire and use new knowledge about products and techniques. For example, apprentices advise customers appropriately when they try to purchase higher quantities than are permitted of over-the-counter medicines. Apprentices make colleagues aware of different brands of make-up and their correct application methods; consequently, their colleagues develop skills and understanding that are of benefit to the company.
- Apprentices understand the relevance of English and mathematics in their role. They consolidate their competence in mathematics through a range of work-related tasks, and they develop their skills to a higher level. For example, they are able to calculate mentally discounts on goods and use their numeracy skills to good effect during stocktaking. A very small proportion of apprentices do not develop their written English skills well enough. For these apprentices, assessors do not routinely identify grammatical errors or indicate how apprentices can improve their technical knowledge further. As a result, a very small proportion of apprentices continue to make mistakes and do not improve the quality of their written work.
- Assessors use assessment methods effectively to monitor apprentices' progress and to help them to achieve their potential. They set clear and helpful targets that support apprentices to remain focused and on track to complete their programme. They use questioning well to probe apprentices' understanding. Apprentices regularly access online learning materials, assessment and

organisational information through an online learning platform. They develop effective technological and independent research skills, and develop a greater awareness of the business operations of the company that enables them to make good progress.

- Leaders, managers and staff provide apprentices with thorough initial information at the start of their programme and ongoing careers guidance. This provides apprentices with a clear understanding of what they need to do during their apprenticeship. Staff and store managers promptly match apprentices to vacancies and enrol apprentices onto the right course at the right level. Consequently, apprentices quickly settle into their programme. They understand the types of jobs they may be able to do as a result of their apprenticeship. Staff use their links with external career agencies well to help apprentices to develop clear and realistic plans for their futures.
- A very high proportion of apprentices successfully gain permanent positions with the provider at the end of their programme. A very small proportion of apprentices decide not to continue in the retail industry. Staff provide helpful guidance that supports these apprentices with their job search skills, university applications, interview techniques or plans to undertake a gap year.
- Leaders, managers and staff promote British values well. Apprentices demonstrate respectful behaviour to staff, colleagues and customers. They develop their interpersonal skills well, and this helps them to respond to customers more effectively. For example, they are able to recognise body language that indicates that customers do not have time to talk about products and they know how to avoid stereotypes when discussing customers' preferences.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they identify appropriately challenging improvement actions that help all staff to maintain at least good outcomes for apprentices
- they analyse, monitor and report on the behaviours, technical knowledge and skills that apprentices develop as they progress towards the end-point assessment
- the new learning technology and resources are used well to support apprentices to make rapid progress
- all apprentices have a good understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracey Mace-Akroyd
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by the apprenticeship programme manager as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's self-assessment report and improvement plan, and the previous inspection report. They held meetings with a range of managers, assessors, apprentices, and store managers. Inspectors scrutinised apprentices' work, and visited sessions to collect information about apprentices' progress and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They spoke to apprentices and reviewed key documents.