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Mr Richard Beales and Mr Steve Gooch
Heads of College
Coulson Sixth Form College
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Dear Mr Beales and Mr Gooch

Short inspection of Coulson Sixth Form College

Following the short inspection on 20 and 21 March 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 April 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

Since your previous inspection, leaders and managers at the sixth-form college have worked effectively to ensure that learners continue to enjoy a good standard of education. Staff are strongly committed to maintaining the quality of the programmes. Leaders and managers have ensured that the curriculum offered meets the diverse needs of individuals, by introducing more vocational courses to develop the skills learners need to progress to higher education or apprenticeships.

Since the previous inspection, you and your colleagues have worked closely with leaders and managers in order to continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders and governors have maintained a good overview of the quality of the provision offered.

Staff are strongly committed to supporting learners in having clear aspirations of what they want to achieve and how their course will support this. Leaders and managers place a strong emphasis on learners receiving good information about the options available to them at the end of their course. For example, learners benefit from a well-attended careers fair, regular careers bulletins and support through the tutorial programme. Staff have developed positive relationships with local employers to support students to understand what it is like to work. For example, employees of a large local shopping centre regularly speak to students about the skills they need to be successful in applying for jobs. An apprentice at this employer gives students helpful information about what it is like to be an apprentice and the benefits of doing an apprenticeship.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have maintained effective safeguarding policies and procedures since the previous inspection, to help ensure the safety and well-being of learners. Learners feel safe in classrooms and around the college. College staff carry out appropriate checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with students. They also do suitable checks on visiting speakers.

In the event of any safeguarding concerns, staff provide suitable support to learners and maintain accurate records of any issues. All staff have received training on the 'Prevent' duty since the previous inspection. Staff have ensured that most learners are aware of the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation and know how to keep themselves safe online. However, a small minority of learners do not fully understand or appreciate how these dangers affect their daily lives.

Inspection findings

- Teachers and managers set high expectations for learners. The vast majority of learners are motivated and keen to learn. They work well together in class and are supportive of each other in group tasks.
- Learners on vocational courses, who make up the majority, mostly achieve the grades expected of them relative to their prior attainment. Learners on all courses know their target grades, how well they are progressing and what they need to do to improve. A high proportion go on to higher education or apprenticeships. In 2016/17, not enough learners on A-level programmes achieved the grades expected of them.
- Teachers support learners to develop a high level of skills. For example, learners in engineering confidently explain how to use timers to control traffic-light sequences and know how operational amplifiers are used to amplify electrical signals. Biology learners gather data on the respiration rates of locusts, and use the information well to inform statistical analysis of the differences between carbon dioxide and oxygen on rates of respiration.
- Learners routinely complete independent work and homework outside lessons. The large majority of teachers provide good feedback on learners' work. In a small minority of cases, however, teachers' feedback on learners' work does not support them to develop the skills they need in order to achieve their qualifications. Where this is better, for example in English, teachers' feedback on learners' written work provides guidance on sentence structure, proof-reading skills and the development of learners' vocabulary, as well as their spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Most teachers use strategies effectively to explore subjects and new topics. For example, learners in a psychology class reviewed carefully different societies in prisons and mental health institutions and considered the ethics behind such behavioural modification. As a result, learners deepen their understanding of topics well and can apply learning to other situations.
- A small minority of teachers do not use strategies effectively enough to check

that learners understand the topics being taught. For example, where teachers ask questions of the whole group, a small minority of learners answer most of the questions.

- Leaders and managers have not enabled sufficient numbers of learners on vocational courses to participate in external work experience. Students on subjects where work experience is mandatory, such as health and social care, gain valuable skills by attending placements in nurseries and care homes. However, not enough learners on other vocational courses have the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom at work.
- Leaders and managers continue to identify effectively the areas for improvement within teaching, learning and assessment. Because of the support leaders and managers have provided, teachers have developed their good practice. For example, teachers use effective strategies to assess learners' prior knowledge and learning through a range of activities at the start and end of lessons. In GCSE English lessons, teachers break down activities into three sections and assess learners' understanding at each stage. This allows learners to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Teachers make effective links for learners to essay-writing techniques and the examination requirements.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have implemented a more rigorous approach to quality assurance. They gather information from observations of teaching and learning, attendance, learners' termly progress reports and teachers' assessments of learners' attitudes to learning. They use this information to plan specific actions to support teachers to increase the proportion of students who achieve their qualification. Managers use performance management effectively to support weaker teachers either to improve their teaching, or move on from the college.
- Leaders and managers mostly assess accurately the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, at times, they focus too much on what teachers do and not enough on the impact of this on learners' progress. Consequently, the actions leaders and managers identify for teachers to improve do not focus sufficiently on the impact they have on students' learning.
- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of learners who achieve their qualification has continued to increase and is high. The majority of learners study a level 2 or level 3 vocational course, and the proportion who achieve their qualification has increased and is high. The proportion of learners who achieve A-level qualifications has increased and is high. However, the proportion of learners who achieved AS-level qualifications in 2016/17 decreased slightly.
- The proportion of learners who achieve GCSEs in English and mathematics at grades 4 to 9 is on an upward trend and is comparatively high, against the low national benchmark.
- Leaders and managers have a good overview of the progress of current learners. They identify learners who are at risk of not achieving and provide effective support, such as the Learner Improvement Programme, and coaching and mentoring by senior leaders. As a result, the proportion of learners who make at least the progress expected of them is high. Learners perform particularly well on courses in fashion, law, media, biology, engineering, sport, and travel and

tourism. However, the small minority of learners on courses in public services, photography, computer science and applied science do not perform well enough.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' feedback on learners' work is specific enough so that learners know what they need to do to improve
- they support teachers to develop further the skills and strategies to help them check that learners understand the topics being taught
- they increase the proportion of learners who attend external work experience so that these learners apply what they learn in class to the workplace.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Lambert
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors visited the provider for two days. One of the heads of college, as nominee, assisted inspectors. Inspectors met with senior leaders and managers, as well as with a number of teachers. Inspectors visited lessons and met with learners. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, and reviewed learners' 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 learners and employers.