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Professor Tim Middleton
Vice Chancellor
Writtle University College
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Dear Professor Middleton

Short inspection of Writtle University College

Following the short inspection on 13 and 14 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 January 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

Your team has continued to ensure that the majority of students make good progress in their studies. A high proportion of students and apprentices achieve their vocational qualifications, qualifications in English and mathematics, and move on to employment, further training or higher education. Your links with local and regional employers and organisations help to ensure that students benefit from high-quality work experience placements, particularly in land-based subjects, during which they develop very good practical skills and skills for work, such as team working and communication.

Students and apprentices enjoy their learning. They have very high rates of attendance at college and at work. They receive very good support from teachers and assessors to help them be successful in their chosen subject. Teachers and assessors make good use of their industry knowledge and experience to teach lessons that help students and apprentices develop well their vocational and subject knowledge, and their problem-solving, research and analytical skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

Managers responsible for safeguarding continue to ensure that students and apprentices feel safe while at college, on work experience and at work. Staff use their training in safeguarding effectively to identify students who may have a safeguarding or welfare concern. They investigate safeguarding concerns thoroughly and sensitively, seeking further advice from external agencies, such as

the Local Safeguarding Children Board, to ensure appropriate support for students and apprentices.

Students and apprentices feel safe at college and they know who they should contact if they find themselves in a situation where they do not feel safe. They know how to keep safe online. They have a basic awareness of how to keep safe from the dangers of those who hold extremist views, but are less aware of the specific dangers that may exist in their local area or in the land-based industries.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have identified accurately the causes of the small decline in the proportion of students and apprentices who achieved their qualifications in 2016/17. They have put in place a series of effective actions to mitigate this. As a result, leaders' in-year data for students' and apprentices' attendance, achievement of their qualifications and progress indicate much improvement.
- Students and apprentices make good progress towards achieving qualifications in English and mathematics. Students enjoy lessons for these subjects and say that they are fun. They are developing the skills and knowledge they need to help them achieve GCSE examination passes at grade 4 or higher in these subjects. A high proportion of apprentices improve their skills; most of those who need to achieve functional skills qualifications as part of their framework pass at their first attempt.
- Students and apprentices develop very high standards of practical skills as a result of the opportunities they get to complete high-quality work experience placements or training at work. Managers and teachers use the college's extensive links with local employers and industry organisations to ensure that all students complete an external work experience placement. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in practical lessons at college does not consistently match the high standard of practical skill development that students achieve during work placements. Teachers do not model industry best practice, including their personal presentation, in a few practical lessons, particularly in equine and agriculture.
- Students exemplify the British values of respect, tolerance and democracy in their everyday lives at college. They value the contributions their colleagues make in lessons; they listen to and consider a wide range of views in their learning and they behave with respect and courtesy in lessons and in social spaces. For example, equine students work collaboratively to organise a show on site as part of their qualification, considering a range of different views from those in the group.
- Students receive good-quality feedback from teachers on their work that helps them to improve the quality of assignments and achieve higher grades. Teachers give students very relevant feedback on improving their English skills, such as paragraph structure, writing in the third person and annotating diagrams. This helps to prepare those who aspire to degree courses well for the standards of writing that will be required to be successful at this level. Assessors' feedback to apprentices helps them improve further and achieve within the planned

timescale.

- Teachers do not enable enough students to develop their mathematics skills further in vocational lessons. Floristry students and apprentices receive very good teaching to help them improve their mathematical skills through calculating accurately the costs of flowers for arrangements, and through producing complex budgets for larger floral displays and projects. However, too many teachers of vocational subjects do not help students develop the mathematics skills they will need for their chosen career.
- Where teaching is less effective, such as in sport and amenity horticulture, teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are too low. Teachers do not provide teaching that enables their learners and apprentices to make swift progress or work to commercial standards or industry work rates. In contrast, students and apprentices in floristry are set very high standards by their teachers, which they achieve consistently and often exceed.
- Students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on study programmes receive very good careers guidance from their teachers and specialist careers staff. As a result, most students know what their next step in education or employment is and what further work they need to do to achieve their career goals. Level 3 students receive particularly effective support for their applications to university. Almost all students move on to purposeful employment or further or higher education on completion of their courses.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers and assessors use the college's extensive and high-quality estate to ensure that students and apprentices develop high standards of practical skills while at college
- teachers and assessors enable students and apprentices to improve their mathematics skills in vocational lessons
- all staff model the very best working practices and standards of personal presentation, especially in practical lessons
- teachers help students develop a wider understanding of the specific dangers from those who hold extremist views that may exist in the land-based industries and in the local area
- leaders and managers share the best practice that exists in subjects which include floristry and garden design to all subject areas, so that students and apprentices experience the highest quality teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Pemble
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors. We were assisted by the pro vice chancellor, as nominee. We held meetings with teachers, the chair of the governing body and managers. We observed teaching, learning, and assessment in classrooms and in specialist practical facilities, 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 apprentices through face-to-face discussions.