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Miss Emma Clark
Principal
Heart of Birmingham Vocational College
19a Cato Street
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Dear Miss Clark

Short inspection of Heart of Birmingham Vocational College

Following the short inspection on 27 and 28 June 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 2015.

This provider continues to be good.

You, and most of your senior leadership team, are new to the college. Despite significant changes in staffing at the college you, senior leaders and the directors, have worked hard to ensure that learners continue to benefit from high-quality education and training for employment.

Trustees, though few in number, are committed to the continuous improvement of the college. The challenge they provide to you and your team has improved further since the previous inspection. They have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement.

You have changed the name of the college from Culthorpe Vocational Trust since the previous inspection. The provider is now a college with its own identity rather than an extension of Calthorpe School. Learner numbers have increased significantly. At the previous inspection, in 2015, there were 17 learners on roll; you now have 52.

You and your leadership team have addressed the areas for improvement identified at your previous inspection, but further improvement is needed in some areas. You, your leadership team and directors have set out clearly the priorities for the college in the strategic plan; for example, the acquisition of additional premises. You recognise that the plan is too focused on operational points rather than on strategic planning. You are intending to review and strengthen strategic improvement planning with directors for the 2018/19 academic year.

Learners continue to make good or better progress from their starting points. Most staff use the results of assessment of learners' starting points well to plan teaching and learning. Written and verbal feedback provided to learners is clear and detailed and now helps learners to improve their work. However, a few staff do not support learners consistently to improve their spelling, which means that learners continue to repeat their mistakes.

Since the previous inspection you have reviewed self-assessment processes and the self-assessment report. Strengths are clearly identified and supported by a range of evidence. Weaknesses sit within the quality improvement plan. You monitor the quality improvement plan monthly, signing off actions when improvements have a positive impact on teaching and learning. You recognise that the self-assessment report for 2017/18 needs to be sharper and more focused on the key strengths and weaknesses of the college. You have already started work on the improved self-assessment report and associated quality improvement plan.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and directors continue to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

You, senior leaders, directors, and all staff place the highest priority on making sure learners feel safe and are kept safe. The swift actions you take in response to safeguarding concerns ensure that learners remain well protected at all times, both in and outside of the college. Learners are very clear about what they should do if they have any safeguarding issues or concerns. The tracking, monitoring and recording of safeguarding concerns through the 'MyConcern' system is meticulous. Managers ensure that safeguarding records are maintained very efficiently. The designated safeguarding lead and designated safeguarding officers are appropriately qualified. Referrals to external agencies, such as the police and the local authority designated officer for safeguarding, are swift.

All staff have received training from West Midlands Police and the Home Office coordinator for the 'Prevent' duty. Learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the threats associated with radicalisation and extremism. Leaders and managers have received training and regular updates on safer recruitment practices, which they implement well.

Inspection findings

- You, your senior leaders and directors identify staff underperformance swiftly and act to improve performance. If staff do not improve quickly, you and your leadership team begin capability processes. Since the previous inspection, several staff, including middle and senior managers, have left the organisation due to underperformance.
- You received external support to help with self-assessment in 2016/17. The 2016/17 self-assessment report accurately identifies strengths, but the report

does not include any weaknesses. The weaknesses are contained within the quality improvement plan. You have not found the format of the current self-assessment report and quality improvement plan particularly helpful. You have already started working on an improved 2017/18 self-assessment report. The new format identifies key strengths and weaknesses clearly.

- Governance of Heart of Birmingham Vocational College (HBVC) has seen a number of changes since the previous inspection. HBVC now has a new identity and is an independent entity to Calthorpe School. A few of the original directors of Calthorpe Vocational College did not have the skills or experience necessary to challenge leaders and managers appropriately or to hold them to account. Consequently, these directors resigned from the board shortly after Calthorpe Vocational College became HBVC. The current board of directors is small; however, you are working hard to expand it and have six expressions of interest to join the board. You will be interviewing prospective directors very shortly. Current directors have appropriate experience of working with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Directors challenge leaders and managers well and effectively hold them to account. However, minutes of directors' meetings lack a clear focus on what has been discussed or actions arising from the meetings. It is difficult to ascertain if actions from previous meetings have been completed.
- HBVC internal data shows that most learners achieve their qualifications. However, issues with returning individual learner records (ILR) and difficulties in accessing the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) portal have resulted in published achievement rates of 0%. This issue was raised at the start of the short inspection and was resolved with the ESFA by the end of day one. Data for 2016/17 will not show on the ESFA portal until the publication of qualification achievement rates for 2017/18.
- You have recently strengthened processes for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment. Observation rightly focuses on the learning and progress that learners are making. Observation is linked closely to staff supervision sessions, appraisal and targeted staff development.
- Learners make good or better progress from their starting points. Most learners improve their English and/or mathematics by at least one level and often by two or more levels. Most staff use the results of assessment of learners' starting points effectively to ensure that classroom teaching and learning are personalised to meet their individual needs. The use of a new electronic tracking system enables staff to record learners' progress using photographs and videos alongside written text. Verbal and written feedback to learners is comprehensive, instructional and helps them to improve and develop their skills. A few teachers do not consistently identify spelling errors in learners' work which means that learners continue to repeat their mistakes.
- Targets set with and for learners link closely to their education, health and care plans. Behavioural, employability, independence, communication and academic targets are regularly discussed and reviewed between staff, learners and their parents and carers. You recognise that the recording and monitoring of targets are insufficiently thorough. For example, staff record learners' targets on tablet

computers, but this information is only available to leaders and managers when staff synchronise the folders on the tablet computers. They do not do this frequently enough, which means that leaders and managers do not always receive the most up-to-date information about learners' progress. You are currently piloting a new system to record and monitor learners' progress, which you hope to implement in September 2018.

- Almost all learners benefit from work experience placements in a range of settings including a recycling centre, shops and the local tennis club. Targets set by staff for learners at work experience placement are specific to the employment but not personalised for individual learners well enough.
- Learners receive good, independent, impartial careers guidance from external careers advisers. Learners receive good and realistic careers guidance to help them consider their next steps after leaving HBVC. However, careers action plans completed by learners when they start at college with HBVC's employability team are not reviewed by the employability team frequently enough. Learners' work experience placements are not linked closely enough to learners' aspirations for independence, volunteering, supported internships or employment after leaving the college.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the ILR is completed accurately and sent to the ESFA in good time to ensure that data is recorded on the ESFA portal, to provide a true and accurate reflection of learners' achievement of qualifications
- targets set with and for learners are matched to individual learners' starting points and potential, and are recorded accurately and updated regularly so that they inform the development of learners' personal and wider employability skills, including the planning of work experience placements
- careers action plans set by learners and the HBVC employability team are reviewed regularly to ensure that learners' career aspirations are considered when planning work experience placements
- all actions from directors' meetings are addressed effectively and strategic improvement planning is strengthened to improve further the quality of education and training for employment and independence at the college.

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

Yours sincerely

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors were assisted by the principal, as nominee. We met with senior managers, directors, managers, staff and learners. We reviewed learners' work and tracking systems. We observed teaching, learning and assessment at the college and in work experience placements. We reviewed key documents, including those relating to strategic planning, self-assessment, teaching, learning and assessment, performance data and safeguarding.