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Mrs Suzanne Duncan
Principal
East Durham College
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Dear Mrs Duncan

Short inspection of East Durham College

Following the short inspection on 11 and 12 January 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.

Governors, senior leaders, managers and staff have sustained the good quality of education and training at the college that was seen at the previous inspection.

You and your team have strengthened further the attention on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Consequently, almost all learners are making at least the progress expected of them. Lesson observations carried out by your team of observers accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement across all aspects of your provision. Timely interventions ensure that any underperforming aspects of your provision continue to improve.

In conjunction with governors and senior leaders, you have a clear strategic direction. You work particularly well with employers, the local enterprise partnership and other partners to ensure that your provision is responsive to local and regional priorities and demands. For example, you have expanded the college's engineering provision, introduced barbering courses and invested substantially in the land-based provision at the Houghall campus. As a result, almost all of your learners progress to further study, higher education, apprenticeships or meaningful and sustainable employment.

Learners benefit from excellent practical resources at the college. Governors and senior leaders ensure that the substantial investment in physical resources has a positive impact on enabling learners to gain the skills that employers value and need.

Governors provide critical and comprehensive challenge and support to you and your senior leadership team. They probe, question and review the accurate and detailed information that they receive, and compare outcomes for learners with your agreed targets. Consequently, they are very well informed and know well the strengths of the college and the areas that require improvement. They contribute effectively to the improvement processes that you and your senior managers implement.

Since your previous inspection, you have implemented the 16 to 19 study programmes and full-time provision for 14- to 16-year-olds very effectively. Well-considered progression routes are in place at all levels and you provide a wide range of vocational and academic programmes that prepare learners well for their future, be it further learning or employment. You have a strong focus on helping learners to improve their English and mathematics skills, particularly on vocational and academic courses.

Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes develop good practical skills through relevant work-related learning tasks and work experience appropriate to their career aspirations. High-quality practical resources at the college support this very well.

Governors, senior leaders and managers have identified correctly that they need to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for learners on English and mathematics courses. You have appropriate strategies in place to address this concern, such as the closer monitoring of learners' progress, more effective timetabling and the strengthening of the English and mathematics management and delivery teams.

At the previous inspection, actions to bring about improvement that inspectors identified included improving work with employers to increase the proportion of work placements for learners, ensuring that short-term targets for learners were more specific and reviewed more regularly, ensuring that teachers shared good practice and enabling apprentices to achieve within their expected timescales. You and your leadership team have taken decisive actions to improve most of these aspects, which has benefited learners.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and senior leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Staff take highly effective actions to ensure that learners are safe. Governors, senior leaders and staff have undertaken appropriate training and are extremely aware of their responsibilities to protect learners from the possibilities and risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Learners behave very well at college and demonstrate high levels of respect for each other and college staff. They know how to keep themselves safe and say that they are safe.

Managers and staff have good relationships and work very efficiently with external organisations and local agencies to ensure that all learners are safe. They work particularly well with local authorities and local schools to identify young people at

risk, particularly those with high needs and the growing proportion of learners aged 14 to 16.

Inspection findings

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good across the vast majority of subject areas and provision types. Consequently, a high proportion of learners achieve their qualifications and progress into either employment or further study. Leaders and managers evaluate the performance of teachers effectively and often. Systems and processes are rigorous, and managers make accurate judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the progress that learners make towards the completion of their qualifications.
- Governors and senior leaders have ensured that full-time provision for 14- to 16-year-olds has been implemented effectively to meet the expectations for younger learners. Leaders have established a comprehensive curriculum that concentrates well on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science alongside a good vocational offer, such as hairdressing, construction and engineering. Learners benefit from personalised programmes of study that are aligned well to their career aspirations and which re-engage them effectively in meaningful education. They benefit from their experience at the college and the opportunity to expand their understanding of the different options open to them on completion of their programmes, while learning in a safe and dedicated environment.
- Governors, senior leaders and managers review the quality of the provision rigorously and effectively. This results in an accurate self-assessment report and a detailed quality improvement plan which is reviewed and scrutinised regularly. Senior leaders intervene appropriately when they identify poor performance. For example, they implemented a thorough review of apprenticeship achievement and took rapid action to increase the proportion of apprentices who achieve within the planned time. As a result, a much higher proportion of apprentices are currently making the progress expected of them.
- Staff benefit from a wide range of professional development opportunities. Managers use the feedback from lesson observations well to identify accurately the skills that teachers need to improve, and provide timely and accessible training and support. Teachers use their improved skills well to help learners make good progress.
- Most teachers plan and deliver a good range of activities to ensure that learners enjoy and participate well in lessons and make good progress. Learners gain good practical work-related skills that employers value, and improve their knowledge and understanding.
- Most learners have a good understanding of the need to improve their English and mathematics skills further in their quest for employment. Teachers take every opportunity to encourage learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills alongside their chosen subject. For example, learners are able to make effective verbal presentations while improving their communication and spoken English skills, they discuss with confidence the use of angles when cutting hair

and they are careful to be very accurate when weighing small animals as part of animal health checks.

- Learners, including apprentices and those aged 14 to 16, work well in most lessons. Teachers have high expectations and challenge learners to make good progress. Through good planning and the good use of detailed learner profiles, teachers ensure that learners are clear about what is expected of them in each lesson. The large majority of learners know what progress they have made and work collaboratively to good effect. However, a few teachers do not challenge learners, particularly on level 3 land-based programmes, to make more rapid progress and expand their knowledge and understanding to a higher level.
- Learners on GCSE English and mathematics courses in 2016/17 did not make the progress expected of them and too many failed to achieve their aspirations for a high grade. Leaders did not ensure that the delivery of English and mathematics courses was of a consistently high standard. Following leaders' more recent actions, the teaching of English and mathematics is more stable and of higher quality. However, too few learners routinely attend their English or mathematics lessons, which hinders their progress.
- In the majority of subject areas, attendance is good. However, in a small minority of vocational subjects, such as construction and hairdressing, attendance is too low.
- Learners benefit from effective careers education, information, advice and guidance which are provided by well-qualified college staff. Leaders have a clear strategy and focus to provide a wide and comprehensive range of activities and events which raise the aspirations of learners. A very high proportion of learners go on to further study or gain employment on completion of their programmes.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve within the planned time frame fell in 2016/17 and was too low. As a result of a very recent restructuring, senior leaders and managers have made effective and positive interventions to track and monitor the progress that apprentices make more effectively. Consequently, a higher proportion of current apprentices are making the progress expected of them towards completion of their programmes within their planned timescales.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of learners who achieve high grades in English and mathematics improves further
- teachers challenge learners on level 3 qualifications in the land-based provision more rigorously to make more rapid progress, reach their potential and achieve high grades
- a greater proportion of learners attend their learning sessions, particularly on English and mathematics courses

- a much higher proportion of apprentices complete their programmes within their planned timescales.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Hunsley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by the vice-principal for curriculum as nominee. We met you, your senior leaders, middle managers and governors, including the chair of the governing body. We visited lessons with members of your management and lesson observation teams to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at learners' work. We spoke to learners, held meetings with them and staff and reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners, employers, parent and carers by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking the views of learners during the on-site inspection activity.