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Ms Natalie Davison
Principal
Bishop Auckland College
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Dear Ms Davison

Short inspection of Bishop Auckland College

Following the short inspection on 19 and 20 April 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in November 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

- College leaders and governors have a clearly articulated vision, supported by well-defined strategies, that Bishop Auckland College will deliver high-quality learning programmes that meet the needs of local people and employers. They communicate this well to staff and learners. Leading by example, you and the leadership team have created a culture of high expectations. As a result, learners enjoy their time at college and recognise how the knowledge and skills they are gaining will help them to be successful in their future lives.
- You and senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of education and training provided across all aspects of the college's work. Some aspects have outstanding features. These include apprenticeships for learners aged 16 to 18, the programmes provided for unemployed adults to help them obtain employment, and the provision in the community to re-engage adults in education. Although a few areas for improvement remain in study programmes, English and mathematics, and apprenticeships for adults, leaders are aware of these and have plans in place to bring about the required improvements. You and other leaders demonstrate a clear ambition that Bishop Auckland College will provide outstanding provision for all learners. As such, you are very focused on addressing the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of provision.
- You have made good progress in addressing most of the areas for improvement from your previous inspection. Links with employers have improved significantly. Through these, you have successfully increased the number of apprenticeships that learners of all ages can access. The majority of these are with small to medium-sized businesses where apprentices' employers welcome the college's

assistance in meeting the skills development needs of their businesses. The vast majority of young people on study programmes benefit from purposeful work experience. You have put a range of measures in place to improve attendance at lessons and learning activities. However, although these have resulted in an overall improvement, the attendance of a small minority of learners, particularly those on study programmes, is still too low. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been reduced, although not entirely eliminated, through the rigorous application of the lesson observation process, subject area quality reviews and regular staff development. Teachers now closely monitor learners who are at risk of not achieving and put a range of actions in place to support them. They also closely monitor the progress of learners who have targets to achieve high grades and provide additional support and challenge where they are identified as being at risk of not achieving them. However, teachers need to do more to monitor the progress of other learners, particularly in the vocational, English and mathematics courses within 16 to 19 study programmes, to ensure that they plan teaching and assessment activities that stretch and challenge learners to achieve their potential.

Safeguarding is effective.

- The leadership team of the college has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that action is taken to safeguard learners. Leaders actively promote a culture of safety and respect, to which staff and learners respond well. Safeguarding policies and procedures are clear and managers communicate them effectively to staff and learners. As a result, staff have a very good understanding of how to report any incidents or safeguarding concerns. Learners know that if they have concerns they will be listened to and action will be taken. All senior leaders, one of whom is always on site as a duty manager, have taken appropriate safeguarding training. They respond immediately to, and deal with, any incidents or disclosures. Confidential incident logs are detailed and record actions taken, including where referrals are made to external agencies such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- All staff and governors have had training in the 'Prevent' duty and received detailed briefings from the local police counter-terrorism liaison officer. Leaders understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism well in the context of the communities where the college's learners live. As a result, they ensure that staff have had the training and support they require to promote British values well around the college, during lessons and through the tutorial programme.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders are ambitious for the college to be successful and to provide a high-quality curriculum that enables learners, many coming from disadvantaged backgrounds or with low prior attainment, to achieve and progress to further learning, apprenticeships or employment. Leaders and governors have maintained a strong focus since the previous inspection on ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of learners, local communities and employers.

Leaders and managers have improved their links with local employers. These links are strong and used well to plan a curriculum that provides learners with good progression opportunities into work. The college's strategic plan sets clear delivery and improvement priorities for the college. Leaders and managers regularly review the college's performance against these and implement actions swiftly where the college is in danger of not achieving its targets. Governors understand their role well and support and challenge senior leaders effectively.

- Through good planning, managers have ensured that all of the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes have been met. In addition to taking a main learning aim at an appropriate level based on their prior attainment, all learners who have not already achieved GCSE at grades A* to C in English or mathematics take qualifications in these subjects. Learners following study programmes in subject areas such as sports and catering have good opportunities to take additional qualifications that improve their chances of obtaining work when they complete their programmes. Almost all learners, when they are ready, take part in relevant work experience. Learners who are not yet ready have work-related and employability training activities within the college before being allocated a work placement.
- Study programmes prepare learners well for their next steps and the large majority make good progress towards achieving their goals. All learners have a clear long-term target, recorded in their individual learning plan, to progress to further or higher education, an apprenticeship or employment. The plan sets out clearly what they have already achieved, and what they still need to do to reach their long-term target. Teachers closely monitor learners at risk of not achieving their study programme goals and put a range of actions in place to support them. They also effectively monitor the progress of learners who have targets to achieve high grades, providing good additional support and challenge where they are at risk of not achieving them. However, teachers do not monitor the progress of other learners consistently well enough to enable them to plan teaching and assessment activities that stretch and challenge them to achieve their potential. Despite a concerted effort by managers and teachers, the attendance of a small minority of learners is too low.
- Managers revised the college's English and mathematics strategy for the start of the 2015/16 academic year. They put in place a range of actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for learners in these subjects after recognising that they required improvement. This has resulted in significant improvements to most, but not all, of the weaker aspects. Specialist English and mathematics teachers are now linked to subject areas. They work more closely with vocational teachers who, as a result, are more confident in integrating English and mathematics into vocational lessons and learning activities. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics lessons has improved. Revised initial assessment procedures are much more rigorous, ensuring that staff identify learners' starting points accurately. As a result, the vast majority take qualifications at the correct level. For those placed on GCSE qualifications, not all who are capable have the opportunity to take the more challenging examinations that would enable them to achieve A* to B grades. Although managers have implemented new processes in 2015/16 to monitor the progress that learners are making in English and

mathematics, these require further improvement. Particularly in mathematics, managers know what activities learners have completed but the information recorded is not detailed enough to enable them to provide additional support for those who are struggling, or to provide the most able with more challenging teaching and assessment activities.

- College managers maintain very effective links with local employers. They use these well to develop apprenticeship programmes that meet employers' skills development needs and to provide opportunities for learners of all ages to improve their skills, achieve qualifications and progress into sustained employment. The college's marketing strategy promotes apprenticeships well. Since the previous inspection, the number of apprentices has increased markedly. The very large majority of apprentices aged 16 to 18 achieve their qualifications in the planned timescale and almost all remain in jobs with their employer, often gaining promotion. The large majority of apprentices aged over 19 achieve their qualification. Although the proportion that complete within the planned time is still well above the national average, around one third of these apprentices take longer than planned to achieve. Although the apprenticeship provision is managed well overall, aspects of apprentices' programmes, particularly for adults who do not attend the college for the off-the-job training element of their programme, require closer attention by managers. Although the requirements for off-the-job learning are recorded in apprentices' individual plans, managers do not routinely monitor the quality of its delivery by trainer assessors, or check to ensure that apprentices are receiving their full entitlement.
- Learning programmes for unemployed adults are particularly effective in providing learners with the skills and confidence they require to obtain work. Managers use their extensive and good links with a variety of employers, recruitment agencies and Jobcentre Plus to design programmes tailored to meet the needs of unemployed adults and to provide them with the skills that employers require. Learners have good access to work tasters, arranged through a work placement officer, if they require experience in a particular role prior to applying for a job. A good proportion of learners obtain employment as a result of participating in programmes. A high proportion of adults achieve qualifications in English, mathematics and employability skills. The college's community learning provision is very responsive to the needs of local communities. Learners who engage in community learning programmes increase in confidence and many progress to further learning.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers and teachers of study programmes, including in English and mathematics, take a more consistent and rigorous approach to: setting learners' targets; planning activities that stretch and challenge learners to achieve their potential; and monitoring progress, taking prompt and effective action where learners are at risk of not achieving
- staff place learners on sufficiently challenging English and mathematics qualifications

- attendance improves for the small minority of learners where it is still too low
- managers apply the same rigour of monitoring and quality improvement to apprenticeship programmes for those who do not attend the college for off-the-job training as they do for other apprentices, so that the proportion of adult apprentices who achieve within planned timescales improves.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors were assisted by the director of quality as nominee. We met with senior leaders and spoke to governors. We observed lessons and assessments taking place at the college and apprentices' workplaces. We held meetings with or spoke to managers, tutors and learners. We spoke to apprentices and employers. We scrutinised learners' work and assessment records. We scrutinised key documents relating to the provider's strategy and implementation plans, self-assessment and improvement planning and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners through discussions during learning sessions and through the responses received through Ofsted's online questionnaire.