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Dr Anne Murdoch  
Principal  
Newbury College  
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Dear Dr Murdoch

### **Short inspection of Newbury College**

Following the short inspection on 23 and 24 May 2017, 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 college was judged good in January 2015.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

You have worked with governors, managers and teachers to make sure that the college continues to provide good education and training for students. Staff share a culture of high expectations for students. This encourages students to work hard, enjoy their learning, and have a good level of confidence in their abilities. Students and teachers work well together. You make sure that the college provides a harmonious and supportive environment for the young people and adults who attend.

In the two years since your previous inspection, leaders have improved the quality of provision. More students now complete their courses, and attendance has improved each year. Achievements for adult students at all levels are excellent. Students aged 16 to 18 achieve well at levels 1 and 3. You recognise that courses for 16- to 18-year-olds at level 2 need further improvements so that students can achieve as well as they should. Achievements on these courses rose a little last year but still require improvement. You have also made a very good range of further improvements during this year, but it is too early to judge their full impact.

Curriculum managers and senior leaders work well together, and all managers provide good support to teachers. Managers know the quality of provision well, and monitor students' progress well. Progress is now good. Quality assurance and self-assessment arrangements are searching and realistic, with high standards set and met. Students benefit from improved teaching and learning and better levels of support because teachers enjoy thoughtful and wide-ranging professional

development activities that improve their practice.

Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of provision. They visit the college often and they are enthusiastic in their contacts with students and teachers. Senior managers provide governors with a good range of information about the college's performance. This allows them to question and support leaders, and to ensure that students make good progress. Senior leaders and governors have a good understanding of the college's strategic position. They also understand the skills needs of the region. With governors and your senior team, you put in place a coherent strategic plan that prioritises the improvement of students' work-related skills. You take good account of government policy, and take appropriate account of the financial challenges facing the college sector.

With governors, the leadership team keeps the college in good financial health. You ensure that the college campus provides a secure, modern and inviting place for learning. Physical and learning resources are very good. Over the past three years leaders have improved college resources with the building of a new sports hall, a new construction centre, a plumbing workshop, hair salon, foundation learning centre, training restaurant, and an animal care unit. Responding to students' and employers' feedback you have also created an engineering solutions laboratory that prepares students well for the high-technology industries of the Thames Valley region.

Students enjoy their surroundings and treat the college campus and buildings with respect. Their behaviour is excellent, and they respect their teachers and each other. The large majority of students make good or better progress. Most achieve their qualifications in the time expected and are ready to move on to university or into employment. Progression between levels is good and you prepare students well for their next steps in learning.

Students enjoy a very wide range of enrichment and sporting activities, many of which are employment-focused. A high proportion of students on study programmes take up work experience placements. Those students who do not take part in formal work placements benefit from a very wide range of talks and workshops given by employers, or from an exceptionally broad range of vocationally relevant educational visits. Students take part very enthusiastically in an interesting and challenging tutorial programme. This helps them to develop discussion and negotiation skills, and develops their understanding of the diverse society they live in. Managers make sure that the tutorial and enrichment programmes give good attention to the 'Prevent' duty. In tutorials and during lessons, teachers and managers make sure that students discuss and debate the values of their college community.

Senior leaders, managers and governors are proud of the fact that the college is good and steadily improving. You have dealt successfully with almost all the recommendations made at your previous inspection. You have also maintained strengths in provision but you recognise that you have more work to do. The relatively slower progress of students on vocational study programmes at level 2

continues to slow your journey towards being an outstanding college. Such courses make up a small proportion of the college's provision, but you are working hard to bring their performance up to that in other areas. You rightly identified the need to improve attendance and achievement in English and mathematics classes so that students can make better progress. You have put in place a wide range of strategies for improvement. Later this year you will be able to judge the full impact of your work.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Staff are confident about safeguarding and have received good levels of training. Governors and staff have a good understanding of the vulnerable groups in the college community who need extra support and protection. Staff maintain good oversight of 'at risk' students. Full-time 14- to 16-year-old students wear blue sweatshirts and are identifiable. Levels of vigilance are good. Duty managers are visible about campus and serve as a reassuring support for students.

Leaders and governors make sure the college meets its responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty. Students value tutorial discussions and guidance about ways to avoid radicalisation and extremism. Teachers check and refresh students' understanding often. Staff routinely check online activity, for example students' web searches. The information technology manager reports these weekly to the safeguarding team and head of human resources. They check whether questionable searches were curriculum related. Leaders recognise the need to deepen students' understanding and begin discussions about national identity and Britishness, the role of the state in promoting identity, and other more advanced aspects of the British values agenda.

### **Inspection findings**

- Senior leaders have placed considerable emphasis on improving attendance during the past year. As a result, attendance has improved and is now good. Attendance at English and mathematics classes has risen considerably to 80% in the year to date. Students whose attendance declines are subject to disciplinary processes, and parents and employers more rapidly involved, ensuring a quick return to good attendance. Staff have received a good range of training and development to gain confidence in challenging lateness and attendance problems. Students now benefit from teachers' strong emphasis on work and study readiness in classes.
- Staff and governors continue to make sure the college provides a comprehensive programme of engagement with local and regional employers. The principal and other leaders host monthly employer breakfasts on campus. These are well attended and valued highly by employers. Students value and enjoy employers' visits to college and value highly their work experience and other visits to employers. Many students benefit from extra qualifications gained alongside their main course, for example Construction Skills Certification Scheme cards that are available to level 1 and level 2 construction and engineering students. Transition across levels is good in vocational subjects. Teachers and managers prepare

students well for their move to a higher level of study. For example, during inspection level 1 students were beginning work on units from level 2 courses, and higher national certificate students in engineering were beginning modules from the higher national diploma.

- College staff currently deliver several projects with local authorities, businesses and community groups to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematic (STEM) subjects. These include the 'Elevate Project', which improves students' employability, and the 'Gearing up for STEM' European Social Fund project. College leaders host and chair the west Berkshire skills and enterprise partnership whose members are all employers and employer representative groups. Leaders and staff work closely with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to raise participation in apprenticeships and higher STEM skills training. Leaders and governors also secured LEP funding for an engineering research and development facility to support the delivery of a new degree apprenticeship in design engineering.
- Leaders and managers have worked successfully to improve the confidence and competence of vocational tutors so that they can properly meet their students' English and mathematics skills needs. Leaders have also invested in a specialist curriculum manager and a new team of English and mathematics teachers. These new staff are well qualified in English and/or mathematics, and many have additional subject specialist qualifications. Leaders and managers also make sure that staff observe and share good practice in English and mathematics teaching. Staff have attended external conferences for outstanding teaching and the use of technology in maths; GCSE and functional skills webinars; external professional days to observe good practice at other providers; and taken part in peer observations across college subject areas. Attendance at English and mathematics lessons has risen sharply during the past year and students' skills have improved in these subjects.
- Leaders have provided a professional development programme for teachers to improve levels of challenge and achievement in students' work. Curriculum managers analyse their department's lesson observation outcomes and link them closely to students' achievements rates. Senior leaders also scrutinise any discrepancies between observation outcomes and achievements to ensure the validity of observation arrangements and then establish themes for college development days.
- Students receive better challenge to aspire towards high grades or higher levels of work. Teachers are more confident and adept in showing students how to improve their work. Leaders require all teachers to carry out yearly industry placements to ensure their teaching knowledge reflects the latest industry practice. Students now benefit from much higher expectations in lessons, and they write assignments against stretching objectives. However, in a small minority of lessons, the pace of learning was too slow, and students were not required to move sufficiently quickly between challenging tasks.
- Leaders and managers have raised the standards required for students to progress between levels of courses. Students value this challenge and recognise the ways it has encouraged them to aspire beyond a simple pass in the

coursework or examinations. Teachers give students challenging tasks in lessons that lead them towards these higher achievements. Leaders require teachers and managers to report on achievement of high grades in course, curriculum area and college self-assessment reports. Improved student progress reports now show progress towards achieving higher grades so that parents, guardians and employers can more closely monitor progress.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to support specialist and vocational staff to build on improvements in level 2 study programmes, and especially in English and mathematics, so students in these areas make the progress of which they are capable
- staff and students receive support to further develop their understanding of British values in relation to vocational subject areas, and to engage in discussion about what college, community and societal values mean in a national and international context
- the areas of existing good practice in teaching and learning are further shared across academic and vocational areas to improve teachers' and observers' skills in promoting the very best progress for students.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Beynon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors plus two Ofsted inspectors visited the college for two days. The deputy principal as nominee assisted inspectors. We met with you, as the head of college, with curriculum heads, the chair and other members of the governing body, and with a range of teachers and students. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, and reviewed students' written work. We reviewed key college policies and documents, including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We also considered the views of students.