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Mr Graham Taylor
Principal
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Dear Mr Taylor

Short inspection of New College Swindon

Following the short inspection on 2 and 3 November 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 New College Swindon was judged to be good in December 2014.

New College Swindon continues to be good.

You and your staff have carried out the four recommendations made at your previous inspection successfully. You have effectively maintained the breadth of your curriculum, enabling learners to take courses that help them to progress well into further education and training or into employment. You have also increased appropriate study opportunities for adult learners and apprentices while maintaining the outstanding financial health of the college.

Teachers have adapted A-level courses well in light of new specifications. Teachers provide a good structure for learning through their own helpful and insightful course guides. These guides complement the useful tips and techniques about how to answer examination questions that learners acquire from teachers in lessons.

Learners continue to receive a good standard of teaching, learning and assessment. This is partly the result of improvements made since the previous inspection in how managers and teachers access and use college information to monitor learners' progress. Consequently, teachers' planning has improved and they engage learners well in lessons and learners enjoy well-planned lessons and activities.

Inspectors and your college observers jointly assessed the quality of teaching and learning in some subjects and agreed that tasks are interesting but do not cater sufficiently well for the wide ability range of learners, particularly the most able learners. Therefore, not enough learners make progress quickly enough from their starting points. Not all teachers routinely check that learners have understood important points before moving onto the next topic.

Learners who require additional help receive good support for their needs, whether these are specific to the course or for mental health or social issues. Learners looked after, young carers and disadvantaged learners perform well and achieve as well as their peers as a result of close monitoring of their progress and the help given to them by college staff.

Learners enjoy and benefit from very good classroom resources and college amenities such as the gym and excellent sports facilities. They enhance their skills through the effective use of more specialist facilities such as information communication technology and performance and rehearsal spaces.

The ambience created by bright, lively and professional displays in and around classrooms engages learners' interest well. Teachers reinforce important learning points by thoughtful use of the displays in lessons, particularly the helpful hints on English and mathematics. Relevant and clear information about careers and important employment skills raises learners' awareness of opportunities available to them.

The vast majority of learners progress onto higher-level courses within the college or to higher education or training. A high proportion of apprentices gain promotion. You have effective systems to gather the views of learners.

Your leaders and managers take careful note of what learners tell them and make improvements such as the introduction of the new tutorial programme, Upskill. Learners appreciate the integration of the elements in the programme that help them to develop good academic, personal and social skills.

Learners' attendance at college is improving, although it is currently below the college's target.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective. Procedures to ensure that learners are safe and feel safe are thorough, comprehensive and robust. Learners and staff understand the importance of health and safety. Learners know whom to contact if they have a safeguarding concern.

Staff receive updating and training regularly on current priorities such as trafficking of people, sexual exploitation and the 'Prevent' duty. Learners are able to explain the risks posed by extremist groups. They are respectful of one another and of the college facilities. In lessons and tutorials, they discuss how democracy, tolerance and the diversity of society are reflected in college and the part they play in maintaining the rule of law.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to look at how effectively apprenticeships are managed, how well the initiatives put in place in 2017 are being implemented and how effective are the arrangements to monitor the work of partners.

- Leaders and managers have expanded the number of apprenticeships provided directly by college staff and by partners. They have taken decisive action to remove poorly performing apprenticeship partners without detriment to apprentices. Apprentices gain good technical skills during their apprenticeships and the proportions completing their apprenticeships are above those at similar providers. However, proportions of those who do so within agreed timescales are below national rates.
- The newly appointed apprenticeship management team know what they need to do to improve the quality of training and achievement of apprentices. They take action from regularly monitoring the progress of apprentices and the skills they are developing. For example, they have enabled apprentices to improve their functional skills in mathematics and English by providing more opportunities for them to practise and develop these in their workplace or at home.
- Managers provide good support and training for partners. They carefully scrutinise partners' compliance with the college's standards. However, this monitoring does not pay close enough attention to analysing partners' evaluation of their own performance and the progress of their groups of apprentices.
- My second line of enquiry looked at the actions that leaders, managers and teachers are taking to increase the pace of learners' progress, improve stretch and challenge for all learners, and increase the achievement of high grades.
- The process introduced by leaders and managers of formally and regularly reviewing learners' progress and achievement is having a positive impact on ensuring that learners continue to do well and improve their performance.
- Teachers and learners are benefitting from the effective professional development that teachers receive on topics such as mentoring, target-setting and questioning techniques in teaching. This contributes to learners and teachers engaging in productive and stimulating discussions in lessons and learners improving their speaking and listening skills.
- Learners know their target grades and what they have to do to achieve these grades. However, the targets and work learners receive do not challenge them to achieve as highly as they might and not enough learners gain high grades in examinations.
- Managers have strengthened the college's 'High Flyers' programme to encourage the most able learners to aim for and achieve high grades in their examinations and raise their aspirations. The impact of this programme is not yet evident, but learners on the programme are responding very positively and reviewing carefully their aspirations and potential.
- My third line of enquiry was to look at the progress that has been made in raising the standards in English GCSE and functional skills.
- Managers and teachers have made good progress in raising standards and achievements in English GCSE and functional skills. The proportion of learners who now achieve high grades has improved since the previous inspection and is now above the rate of similar providers. Learners are improving their speaking and communication skills and putting into practice new ideas and writing

techniques in creative writing.

- Teachers have successfully integrated strategies to improve learners' English language skills in lessons. Teachers help learners to understand how to improve by providing constructive feedback and explaining to them how tests are assessed.
- Teachers consistently check learners' subject vocabulary and routinely focus on improving their spelling and English, resulting in learners developing a good range of relevant vocabulary and skills. They make effective use of the good interactive learning resources to supplement what they learn in class.
- The fourth line of enquiry looked at the progress that has been made in raising the standards in mathematics GCSE and functional skills.
- Learners gain confidence in mathematics because teachers provide a clear structure for their learning to help them during the course and they explain mathematical terms in simple language. In GCSE mathematics and other courses, learners develop appropriate understanding of mathematics. Teachers integrate mathematical concepts well into the subject content of their courses.
- The proportion of learners who now achieve high grades in GCSE mathematics has improved since the previous inspection and is now above the rate of similar providers. Teachers motivate learners to make good progress in mathematics by assessing their progress frequently and reviewing their targets.
- The next line of enquiry looked at the progress that has been made in securing more work experience for learners on vocational courses.
- Learners gain relevant and good skills for employment through the new tutorial programme, Upskill, and the many improved opportunities for work experience provided by the new business services and employer engagement team. The numbers of learners undertaking substantive work experience have increased greatly. Their highly positive feedback shows its impact in helping them to improve their understanding of work and employment.
- My final line of enquiry looked at the actions being taken to improve achievement rates of learners in business administration and law.
- Leaders have reorganised the management of business administration and law and have appointed several new teachers. Managers in this area are implementing the college's performance management procedures rigorously and are making sure that teachers monitor learners' progress closely and take action promptly when it is needed.
- Teachers in this area have received much support to improve their teaching and assessment. As a result, lessons are well planned, teachers set clear learning objectives and high expectations, and learners respond positively to the constructive feedback they receive.
- Learners' progress in business administration is still variable because the work teachers set does not always take full account of the range of learners' abilities and teachers do not check that learners fully understand the information they present in class. Learners' punctuality and attendance in lessons is still not good enough in some instances.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers provide suitable activities and opportunities in lessons which take appropriate account of the different abilities of learners and enable the most able learners to make faster progress and achieve high-grade passes in their examinations
- teachers are meticulous and rigorous in checking learners' understanding and grasp of important details in lessons
- managers responsible for apprenticeships:
 - improve the rate at which all apprentices achieve their qualifications within the agreed timescales, and
 - improve the use of partners' evaluation of their own performance and the progress that their apprentices make.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Green

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by the director of curriculum, quality and college information systems as nominee. We met with you, governors, senior managers, teachers, learners and apprentices. We observed teaching and learning; some of these activities were conducted jointly with your college observers. We scrutinised key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to self-assessment, quality assurance, safeguarding and the college's performance. We analysed information on learners' and apprentices' achievements. We also analysed feedback from learners and apprentices gathered during the inspection.