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Ms S Hasty
Principal
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Southend Adult Community College
Southchurch Centre
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Dear Ms Hasty

Short inspection of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Following the inspection on 31 October and 1 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 the provider was judged to be good in October 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

College leaders have an accurate overview of the quality of provision and have taken decisive action to tackle weaknesses. Recommendations from the last full inspection in 2014 have been addressed. Following a recent restructure, leaders have been effective in realising the potential which many middle managers and teachers clearly display. Governors are now well placed to scrutinise critically the performance of the college and its senior managers and to plan for the future. They are confident and increasingly well informed about the progress the college is making and where further improvements are needed.

Learners are enthusiastic and make good progress. They work well and respectfully together and value each other's cultures. Adults, who form the majority of learners, achieve well; however, there has been a slight decline in achievement rates for the small number undertaking functional skills programmes. Learners aged 16 to 18 on study programmes, many of whom are vulnerable, make good progress in their personal and social development; however, their achievement and attendance rates require improvement.

Where needed, learners benefit from good-quality learning support, which helps keep them on track. Managers deploy learning support assistants effectively.

Teachers plan and execute lessons carefully, taking learners' starting points and any specific concerns or barriers to learning, including personal issues, into account. As a result, learners complete activities and tasks that are relevant and achievable,

maintain their interest and attention, and boost their confidence, skills and knowledge.

The college continues to offer an impressive range of educational provision which engages diverse groups of learners well, including from countries such as Syria and Somalia or economic migrants from eastern Europe. Learners on community learning courses improve their health as a result of increased understanding of healthy lifestyles. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners make rapid progress in their language skills. Young apprentices develop their employability skills in, for example, the health and social care sector. A revised programme for over 100 students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities effectively focuses on developing their independent living skills. Young people with high needs who attend a dedicated centre run by the college benefit from an interesting and stimulating education programme.

College leaders are aware that there is yet more to do to consolidate the recent significant organisational changes and communicate these to staff and learners, for example, the need to increase learners' understanding of how to access information, advice and guidance (IAG) and to promote preparation for work and employability skills. College leaders' curriculum planning does not give sufficient priority to developing learners' work, enterprise and employability skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

Managers continually review and refresh safeguarding procedures in the light of experience and external guidance. Investment in new software is enhancing their ability to apply and monitor procedures. Managers communicate well the ethos that all college staff have a responsibility for safeguarding. Following the previous inspection, managers have taken effective steps to ensure that referrals are well tracked and monitored. Site security is thorough but unobtrusive. Staff have worked together well to create a caring culture. Learners report that they feel safe in college.

Managers have introduced recently a simple personal and social development self-assessment tool designed to 'help us help you'. This invites learners to indicate, voluntarily and confidentially, any personal issues which may be of relevance to their life at college, attendance or well-being. The scheme is still at an early stage but has already alerted pastoral staff to learners with concerns about issues such as domestic violence. For vulnerable learners, including those with an education, health and care plan, the assessment tool systematically informs the actions teachers need to take to ensure their well-being.

Teachers and support staff know learners very well and provide good ongoing pastoral support. Staff are confident to raise concerns about safeguarding with their managers. Referrals to external agencies, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty, are few, but made when necessary and followed through to resolution. Managers adhere to safer recruitment procedures.

Teacher induction raises awareness about procedures related to the 'Prevent' duty, with continuing professional development and new resources building their understanding of radicalisation and extremism. As a result, they are increasingly effective in introducing topical, and at times potentially controversial, issues into lessons.

Inspection findings

- Having reviewed its inherited position, the relatively new senior leadership team has introduced significant strategic and operational changes across the college. They have streamlined the management team structure to tackle duplication, increase accountability and provide fresh opportunities for staff to progress in their careers. Managers have revised aspects of the curriculum to meet learners' needs better. The collection and analysis of data have improved and now allow leaders to understand trends and patterns in learners' performance and that of departments. Taken together, these changes are having a positive impact on outcomes for learners and achievement rates. Managers intervene at an early stage where data suggests likely underperformance. Senior leaders are updating teaching resources and the fabric of the building in order to improve learners' experience of the college. Registration and reception staff have gained basic IAG qualifications in order to better signpost learners as they first enter the college.
- In their 2015/16 self-assessment report, leaders noted accurately that leadership and management required improvement and set out the new principal's intentions to introduce strong and decisive developments. Many of these plans are having an impact; leaders have put in place secure foundations for improvement.
- The governing body has a good breadth of expertise. Its members are increasingly well informed about the college's progress and where further improvements are needed. They challenge and hold the principal to account well. Meetings are regular, well attended and effectively supported by an experienced clerk. Board members are playing an important role in planning for the future. They contribute well to the life of the college by attending awards events and being linked to particular departments. Governors' decisions are informed by the college's quality improvement plan which is accurate, current and with a strong focus on outcomes for learners.
- The local authority supports the college well and maintains a position on the governing body through its delegated arrangements. Local authority officers value the college's contribution to Southend Borough Council's strategic requirements in relation to skills development and regeneration.
- Senior managers have developed robust quality assurance arrangements to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are effective. A team of staff, led by the vice-principal, carries out periodic internal quality reviews of curriculum areas. These are evaluative, objective and learner focused and accurately identify areas for development. Senior managers are aware that attendance rates require improvement and are taking appropriate action, especially in subject areas such as study programmes, where the problem is more acute.

- Managers review the curriculum well and seek to meet community interests and needs and the economic and employment priorities of the area. Learners attending the job club receive good personalised support from the tutor. Teachers, however, do not routinely develop learners' employment and enterprise skills within lessons.
- Learners make good progress during their time at the college. Those with health difficulties comment positively on the personal benefits of attending music or art courses. Commonly, learners following a GCSE biology course do so to enable them to progress to, for example, a foundation degree or employment. A few are in their second year of study, having previously achieved the English and mathematics qualifications necessary to access the GCSE course. ESOL learners confidently offer their opinions or answer questions. Learners on a customer service study programme gain good insights into the retail sector.
- Learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities learn how to identify signs and symbols used around the college, with a few confidently identifying the safeguarding sign and what it means. Effective teaching and a relevant curriculum enable learners with high needs to take small but defined steps in their learning. For example, they learn about healthy eating and how to conduct themselves safely in a kitchen.
- Achievement rates and attendance on study programmes are not yet good. Achievement rates for adults taking English and mathematics functional skills qualifications have declined, although they are still above the national rates for all providers. Managers are aware of these shortcomings and are taking appropriate action. GCSE English and mathematics rates are above the national rates for all providers. A very high proportion of adult learners on community learning programmes successfully achieve their aims.
- In their 2015/16 self-assessment report, leaders judged that learning support required improvement. Rapid progress has been made since that point, with learning support assistants (LSAs) deployed effectively across all areas of the college. Learners value and benefit from this in-class support. Bespoke support from LSAs improves the confidence of learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and accelerates their development of English skills.
- Assessment of learners' skills at entry is good, which means that they are placed on the right course at the right level. This assessment has had a positive impact on improving outcomes in GCSE and functional skills programmes.
- Many teachers plan lessons that are lively and industrious; consequently, learners take part well and are motivated to learn. Teachers' feedback to learners is generally clear and identifies accurately what learners did well and what they need to do to improve. However, not all teaching is as effective. While all teachers set targets for learners, in too many instances these are not sufficiently precise or tailored to the needs of the individual. This limits how well learners' progress can be measured. Teachers do not always organise a range of activities to extend the skills of the most able students.

- Managers have taken recent and effective steps to monitor learners' destinations better when they leave the college. Information from a recent comprehensive sample of past learners has yet to be processed, but plans are in place to review this data and consider any implications from the results on the curriculum offer.
- The college's IAG strategy has recently been reviewed, an element of which includes reception and registration staff receiving basic IAG training. As a result, they are very competent in reassuring learners and dealing with their enquiries from the outset. More specialist IAG are also available. Teachers continue to provide good information and guidance to their learners through their day-to-day engagement. However, too many learners are unfamiliar with the new IAG arrangements and how to access the specialist support independently.
- The majority of teachers plan the promotion of British values well through day-to-day activities within the classroom. They integrate relevant topics, such as age discrimination and perceptions of the elderly, into lessons with apprentices and study programme learners to build their understanding. Teachers adapt their resources to encourage discussion about culture and values. As a result of sensitive teaching, learners show respect for each other, recognise and value diversity, and acknowledge each other's contributions to discussions. In a few instances, teachers provide poor explanations about current or historical events which do little to deepen learners' understanding.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers take continued steps to improve the attendance and achievement rates of learners aged 16 to 18
- fluctuations in achievement rates in functional skills are tackled in order that they reach the high rates of other subjects across the whole college
- teachers set targets for learners which are precise and tailored to the needs of the individual
- there is a greater strategic focus on developing learners' skills for employment
- learners' access to information, advice and guidance is promoted and communicated better.

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

Yours sincerely

Tony Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors, assisted by the vice-principal as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with managers, staff and governors. They observed lessons and reviewed key documents, including those related to management, curriculum, quality improvement, learners' achievements and safeguarding.