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14 December 2017

Ms Jo Maher  
Principal  
Boston College  
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Dear Ms Maher

### **Short inspection of Boston College**

Following the short inspection on 15–16 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 June 2014.

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

You and your managers have the highest expectations of your staff. Through skilful management of your staff and their work, you have maintained the high standards of provision found at the previous inspection. Teachers benefit from a wide range of professional development opportunities, and a skilled team of advanced practitioners provides effective and tailored support for teachers whose practice requires improvement. As a result of your effective management of the quality of teachers' work, several underperforming members of staff have departed. Almost all teachers now meet the high standards expected of them.

Your managers use the evidence from the observation of lessons to assess teachers' strengths and areas for development accurately. They place a particular emphasis on ensuring that teachers feel confident to try out new methods and to share novel approaches and ideas with colleagues.

You and your managers have developed very effective methods for tracking and monitoring the progress made by learners and apprentices. Managers have access to high-quality management information, and make excellent use of it to identify trends in learners' progress and achievement and to tackle any drop in standards. They use this information very well to identify learners making slow progress on their courses, and plan swift and effective ways of accelerating their learning. Through the sophisticated use of management information, your leaders hold

programme area managers to account for the achievements of learners, and ensure that they identify and deal promptly with any concerns.

A few of your curriculum areas continue to require improvement. Outcomes for learners on AS-level courses are not yet good, and the proportion of apprentices in engineering and construction who complete within the planned period remains too low. Your managers are keenly aware of these areas for improvement and they have taken well-considered improvement actions. It is too soon, however, to assess the full impact of these measures.

Your managers plan, deliver and track work experience and employability training highly effectively, using a centralised system. A substantially higher proportion of 16- to 19-year-old learners took part in work experience in 2016/17 than in the previous year. Over a third of such learners have already been on a work experience placement in the current academic year. Your staff prepare learners extremely well for the workplace, provide useful activities for them to complete during their placements, and help learners reflect on and learn from their experiences.

Your teachers and managers have developed good relationships with local employers. As a result, teachers have developed effective methods to help learners develop appropriate attitudes and behaviours for the workplace. Activities include project-based assignments, bespoke National Citizenship Service programmes, talks from guest speakers, visits to local businesses and internal work experience for those not yet ready for an external work placement. The focus on competition work helps learners and apprentices aspire to be excellent rather than merely competent.

Staff in a small number of curriculum areas have yet to provide sufficient opportunities for work experience. In a very few cases, learners do not develop the specific vocational skills and knowledge they need for employment. For example, level 3 hairdressing learners do not learn to work to an appropriate speed and standard, and level 1 carpentry learners have only limited understanding of the use of personal protective equipment.

Since the last inspection, your managers and staff have continued to seek improvement in the development of learners' skills in English and mathematics. This work has brought about a shift in the culture of the organisation, and has successfully raised learners' awareness of the importance of these key subjects.

Senior leaders have restructured the management and provision of GCSE and functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. They have brought all specialist teachers of these subjects into a single team, and have appointed a senior manager to coordinate their work and establish consistently good teaching in discrete lessons to develop learners' skills. Specialist teachers of English and mathematics plan lessons well, taking good account of individual learners' needs. They use information from initial assessments effectively to plan interesting and relevant activities that motivate learners to make good progress from their starting points.

Where learners need further help with English and mathematics, they benefit from a wide range of individual support and additional learning resources, for example through the English and mathematics 'labs' and online materials. Managers have provided additional resources to extend the support provided by the English and mathematics 'labs'.

Teachers in vocational areas have received extensive additional training and support from advanced practitioners to help them develop learners' skills in English and mathematics more effectively within their subject lessons. In addition, leaders and managers have appointed champions for English and mathematics in each vocational area to spread good practice. This has resulted in further development of high-quality resources for applied English and mathematics tailored to specific vocational areas.

Because of these improvements, teachers in most vocational areas plan carefully to embed English and mathematics in their lessons. They use examples relevant to their vocational area to help learners understand the relevance of these subjects.

As a result of these changes, the proportion of learners who achieve qualifications in English and mathematics has risen. The proportion who gain GCSE A\* to C grades is now above the national rate. However, managers remain rightly dissatisfied with outcomes and are working to improve them further. Attendance at English and mathematics lessons has improved but remains slightly lower than for other subjects.

A substantially higher proportion of apprentices achieve their qualifications than in other providers. Managers monitor closely the progress of current apprentices and the large majority are doing well. Most produce work of a very good standard. Staff assess this work carefully and in most cases provide apprentices with feedback that indicates clearly the areas for improvement.

Historically, the proportion of apprentices taking engineering and construction subjects who achieved their qualifications was low. The number of apprentices in these subject areas is small and most current apprentices are making good progress. However, a small number of motor vehicle apprentices are doing less well. Assessors have given them insufficiently detailed guidance on what steps to take to improve.

Since the last inspection, your managers have introduced a traineeship programme that attracts a small number of learners. This excellent programme provides a flexible, individualised route to employment or further study. It is highly effective in helping young people to identify their strengths and interests and develop their skills, including in English and mathematics. Trainees develop their confidence and their preparedness for work, with several describing the programme as 'life-changing'. The large majority of trainees progress to positive destinations including apprenticeships, full-time employment and full-time further education.

Your managers have ensured that learners have access to high-quality careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG). Staff have developed a central set of resources to support CIAG sessions and this helps ensure that learners receive a consistently good service. This service includes not just careers advice and guidance but, for example, support to help learners prepare for work placements, help with CV writing, UCAS preparation, and assistance with developing skills in English and mathematics where this is beneficial. CIAG sessions themselves are of very good quality. Knowledgeable advisers use the college's electronic systems to share information about learners with teachers and personal tutors. This helps them prepare well for sessions so that they are able to respond effectively to the needs of individual learners. Learners arrive at sessions well prepared and this helps them to make best use of the expertise of advisers.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that action to safeguard learners and apprentices is prompt and proportionate. Learners know how to keep themselves safe from bullying and discrimination. They know to whom they should speak if they have concerns about their safety or that of others.

All staff, including volunteer workers and governors, are subject to appropriate background checks, which the head of human resources renews every three years. The safeguarding team maintains this information in an appropriate single central register.

You and your managers have implemented a detailed and highly focused 'Prevent' action plan to reduce risks to staff and learners. New and current staff receive training in safeguarding and on the dangers of radicalisation and extremist ideology, which helps them to recognise early signs of potential risk or harm. Your managers reinforce this training frequently. Consequently, staff are knowledgeable about the actions they must take if a colleague, learner or apprentice discloses a concern to them. Your managers have successfully introduced the promotion and reinforcement of British values, and raised awareness of the risks posed to learners and apprentices by the threat of radicalisation and extremism. As a result, learners and apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from these threats.

Staff responsible for safeguarding have appropriate qualifications and experience. Your staff and learners have confidence in reporting concerns to your designated safeguarding leads, who deal promptly with concerns and make good use of links with external agencies.

You issue identity badges to all staff and learners, and staff challenge individuals who do not wear them. This contributes to learners and apprentices feeling safe when on college premises. Learners know how to stay safe online.

## **Inspection findings**

- Leaders and managers have continued to strengthen quality improvement and performance management. Managers make good use of data to identify areas in which learners do not make enough progress, and intervene promptly and effectively. Through the use of quality assurance processes, they are highly effective at identifying good practice in teaching, learning and assessment, and those aspects of teachers' performance that require improvement.
- Most teaching, learning and assessment are good or better. Teachers make good use of a wide range of professional development opportunities and a team of advanced practitioners provides continuing support that leads to improvements.
- The vast majority of learners following 16 to 19 study programmes participate in useful, relevant work experience. Their placements are well planned and learners are prepared effectively, enabling them to make the most of their experiences. In a few curriculum areas, not enough work experience opportunities are available.
- Teachers make good use of their relationships with local businesses to develop a wide range of activities that help learners understand the expectations of employers.
- The focus leaders and managers have placed on English and mathematics has brought about a shift in attitudes towards these vital subjects. The quality of English and mathematics lessons is good and vocational teachers incorporate relevant aspects of these subjects in their lessons. As a result, attendance at English and mathematics lessons has risen and an increasing proportion of learners achieve qualifications in these subjects.
- The proportion of apprentices who complete their qualifications within planned timescales is high and the large majority of current apprentices make good progress. Most produce work of a very good standard that assessors mark carefully, providing clear feedback that helps apprentices to make improvements.
- The small number of individuals who are not quite ready for employment or further study follow very well-designed, flexible traineeship programmes. Trainees grow in confidence and develop the attitudes and skills they need for employment. Most trainees progress to positive destinations, including apprenticeships, full-time employment and further learning.
- Learners have access to high-quality CIAG. Advisers are knowledgeable and liaise effectively with teachers and tutors to provide an effective personalised service.

## **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they implement actions to improve the outcomes in a small number of underperforming areas, including AS levels, hairdressing, and apprenticeship programmes in engineering and construction
- learners benefit from purposeful work experience and other work-related learning in the very small number of subject areas where this is not yet the case

- staff continue to improve provision in English and mathematics so that attendance at lessons continues to increase and the proportion of learners who achieve good passes in these subjects continues to rise
- the small number of apprentices who are behind schedule benefit from thoughtfully planned actions to bring them back on track
- apprentices have access to, and benefit from, the same high-quality careers information and guidance that is available to other learners.

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

Yours sincerely

Russ Henry  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors were assisted by the vice-principal, curriculum and quality, as nominee. We met with your management team, teachers, learners and apprentices. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, and reviewed learners' and apprentices' work. We reviewed a range of documents and data, including those related to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding.