

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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14 November 2017

Mr Kevin Hamblin  
Group Chief Executive and Executive Principal  
South Gloucestershire and Stroud College  
Filton Avenue  
Bristol  
BS34 7AT

Dear Mr Hamblin

### **Short inspection of South Gloucestershire and Stroud College**

Following the short inspection on 17–18 October 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 November 2014.

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

Your managers have high expectations and have maintained the relentless drive for quality improvement reported at the previous inspection. This drive is leading to increasingly good learning experiences for learners, and is slowly improving their outcomes.

Your learners continue to receive high-quality education and training. Many make good progress and achieve their qualifications. They become proficient in a range of vocational skills and develop a clear understanding of the needs of employers. Their learning takes place in good-quality accommodation using resources of a high standard.

Through self-assessment and regular quality reviews, managers have accurately identified strengths and areas for development. They have taken a number of actions that have led to improvements. For example, as a result of improved initial advice and guidance, students are helped to examine their future plans and choose programmes that closely match their aspirations. A clear strategy for improving students' reading comprehension has yielded improved outcomes in English qualifications.

The previous inspection identified a number of areas in which students' outcomes were less than satisfactory. Managers have taken a number of actions and these have led to improvements in some, but not all, of these areas. For example, achievement rates for level 2 programmes for adults have improved substantially and English results are better. However, as you and your managers acknowledge,

learners' outcomes need to improve in other areas, such as foundation mathematics and AS-level courses.

You have invested significant time and resources in professional development for teachers and introduced the 'Learning excellence framework' and the complementary 'Step up' teachers' toolkit. These actions have led to better lessons. Most lessons are well taught, interesting and appropriately challenging. Teachers explain topics well, make good links between theory and practice, check that students have understood the information they have received, and provide useful feedback on assessed work. However, this is not yet consistent and a small minority of lessons include too much unproductive activity and too few opportunities for students to think deeply about topics.

Since the previous inspection, you have substantially increased the number of apprentices studying at the college. Your managers have successfully met the challenges that such an increase brings. As a result, they have not only maintained but have improved outcomes for apprentices. They have also improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their programmes is high. However, improvements have not been uniform across all subject areas. The quality of teaching and learning is not high enough in business subjects. Apprentices' outcomes in construction and engineering subjects require improvement.

You have introduced a small traineeship programme since the previous inspection. Initially, these programmes were not as effective as you would have liked but managers have made improvements and the programmes are now well designed and effective. Trainees follow a highly structured programme that allows them to develop their confidence, resilience, and personal skills and attributes. Work placements are well planned and help trainees develop their skills in real work environments. Staff successfully help those who need to develop their English and mathematics skills. However, traineeship programmes are not individualised. All trainees undertake the same initial training and all complete the minimum of 100 hours of work experience, regardless of whether they would benefit from different training or more work experience.

The college continues to be an integral part of the local community and a key player in the economic development of the region. Managers have continued to develop excellent and close relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, including three local authorities, two local enterprise partnerships, employers, schools and community organisations. This work enables college staff to develop a curriculum that is highly responsive to both existing and expected local and regional needs. Students benefit from these links through very good work experience opportunities and a highly relevant curriculum that places a strong emphasis on employment.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and action is taken to safeguard learners.

You have ensured that members of your safeguarding team are well trained to lead and manage safeguarding within the college. Members of the team are very alert to the varying risks to students with different characteristics and at different sites. Other staff are appropriately trained and receive frequent updates. As a result, students are safe. They report that the highly visible presence of managers across all sites and the strong emphasis on security make them feel safe.

Your staff work well with external agencies. They participate effectively with three separate local safeguarding children boards and have strong relationships with a range of service providers such as those that support young people with mental health difficulties.

Staff discharge the 'Prevent' duty effectively. However, your staff need to do more to help students understand fundamental British values fully, and how these relate to the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

You have effective systems for monitoring and examining frequently the online activity of students. While staff identify and pass on serious concerns to members of the safeguarding team, you have not yet implemented a regular reporting mechanism that enables members of this team to be sure that all concerns are tackled appropriately.

### **Inspection findings**

- Managers continue to maintain and develop excellent relationships with local stakeholders. These relationships are both extensive and close. This work, coupled with extensive use of local and regional employment data, informs curriculum development. As a result, your curriculum meets the needs of employers and the local community, and the college is a key player in the development of the regional economy.
- Since the previous inspection, managers have maintained their focus on improving outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Self-assessment is thorough and accurate, and managers have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. Managers have taken a broad range of actions to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for learners that are leading to steady improvements. However, they acknowledge that their actions have been more successful in some areas than others.
- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains good. Most teachers pace their lessons well to challenge students appropriately. They explain topics clearly and use a good variety of activities that help maintain students' interest and encourage them to think hard about topics. However, a small minority of lessons are less successful. In these lessons, students spend too much time on unproductive tasks. They receive too much support from teachers who thereby deprive students of the opportunity to wrestle with difficult concepts.

- Managers have improved the quality and success of apprenticeship programmes during a time of significant growth. The proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes, both overall and on time, has increased and is above the rate for other providers. Managers have successfully tackled English and mathematics performance at a number of subcontractors that deliver advanced apprenticeships in sporting excellence. However, not all subject areas have seen improvements. Teaching and learning require improvement on business programmes. Apprentices' outcomes in construction and engineering require improvement.
- Managers have made significant improvements to the quality of teaching in English and mathematics through the implementation of a three-year action plan. This has led to improvements in outcomes for learners, particularly in English. However, progress in mathematics has been slower, particularly at level 2. Attendance at GCSE English and mathematics lessons remains too low.
- After some initial challenges, managers have implemented a small but successful traineeship programme. Trainees follow a well-structured programme that develops their personal and employability skills successfully. Work placements provide good opportunities for trainees to develop these skills in the workplace. Most trainees progress to further learning, apprenticeships or employment. However, traineeships are not sufficiently individualised. For example, all trainees undertake 100 hours of work experience, regardless of whether they would benefit from more.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the small minority of teachers whose lessons are less effective receive appropriate support so that they improve their practice
- they use the existing quality improvement approaches to focus on and improve those areas where outcomes for learners have remained consistently low. These include foundation mathematics, AS levels and apprenticeships in construction and engineering
- they build on the existing strengths of traineeship programmes so that trainees undertake programmes that are tailored to their own individual strengths and areas for improvement
- they implement a mechanism for regularly reporting concerns about the online activities of students so that they are sure that risky or inappropriate behaviour is tackled
- they support staff to improve the extent to which they promote fundamental British values and link these to the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

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, quality, staff and learners' services, as nominee. We met with your management team, teachers and learners. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment and reviewed learners' work. We reviewed a range of documents and data, including those related to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding.