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Mr Meredydd David
Principal
Reaseheath College
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Dear Mr David

Short inspection of Reaseheath College

Following the short inspection on 4–5 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in February 2010.

Reaseheath College continues to be good.

You, senior leaders and governors have sustained and built on the significant role Reaseheath College plays in educating and training learners and apprentices in preparation for careers in land-based and other occupations. Strong governance together with highly effective leadership and management puts learners at the centre of all considerations and makes your college successful. Learners' behaviour is good; they show respect to each other and staff, responding well to the culture of fairness promoted by the college. The vast majority thrive and develop as well-rounded individuals and are prepared well for their future careers and employment. Learners recognise the value they get from their experience with you as was evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive response to the online inspection survey.

At the time of the previous inspection you were commended for outstanding partnership work with employers. This continues to develop and strengthen with the highly effective collaborative work with the local enterprise partnership (LEP) and with other local, regional and national partners.

Outcomes were judged to be good at the last inspection; you and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education and training which enables learners to succeed. The actions you have taken to sustain and improve high standards in teaching, learning and assessment are mainly effective. You recognise there is more to do to become outstanding. Learners benefit from learning from highly competent and experienced industry specialists who you train and develop as

teachers. The large majority of learners make good progress and succeed. The very high number who enter employment or higher education after their time at college is a strong testament to the quality and relevance of your courses.

You have embraced and implemented the study programme principles particularly effectively. The programmes provide learners with good-quality external work-experience opportunities, with a rich mix of learning opportunities as well as a clear vocational focus and career direction. You and your team are working hard to improve English and mathematics provision, but results did not improve in 2014/15 and there is further work to do to ensure current learners make good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and action is taken to safeguard all learners and apprentices. You and your team are committed to ensuring that the safety and welfare of learners is paramount and that they all stay safe. Your staff demonstrate an excellent approach to ensuring that staff and learners develop a proactive approach to a culture of safe working practices. Good learning methods are in place to teach high standards of health and safety and also to help learners to develop an understanding of British values and the dangers of extremism.

Staff training, including governors, on safeguarding and the Prevent duty has been effective and learners benefit from the way staff protect them and teach them how to protect themselves. Governors are well informed and able to challenge and scrutinise safeguarding arrangements.

Your staff manage the required systems and procedures to underpin the safeguarding arrangements very well and they demonstrate in their work a good understanding of their role in safeguarding. Safeguarding cases are dealt with effectively and in a timely manner. Wider aspects of safeguarding, including links with parents, the community, the police and the local specialist partners, are very effective.

You have responded well to implementing the Prevent agenda and have planned actions to develop further how you deal with this and maintain good information and competence amongst staff to ensure learners are protected. Risk assessments are thorough. Where incidents have occurred, the response has been effective and managed well.

You and your team recognise the need to develop more support for the increasing numbers of learners with mental health problems, and you are recruiting more specialist staff and training current staff to deal better with those learners affected by such issues.

Inspection findings

Leadership and management

- Governors and senior leaders provide clear direction and carry out highly effective strategic management; they work extremely well with employers, local authorities, the LEP, industry partners and other key stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally. The impact is significant on the responsiveness of your provision to employers' needs, the facilities and state-of-the-art equipment, often sponsored by industry, which all benefit the learners as they prepare for and move into employment.
- A particularly notable recent achievement has been the work with the LEP to set up the new centre for excellence for agri-tech. High levels of investment in facilities are based on good strategic planning and sound financial management, enabling learners to benefit from excellent learning opportunities.
- In order to improve results in English and mathematics, including functional skills, you have put in place, relatively recently, a detailed strategy and action plans. You have changed the management, timetabling and staffing in English and mathematics courses, but staffing remains an issue in terms of recruiting and keeping sufficient numbers of teachers.
- The importance of learners developing their English and mathematics skills is promoted effectively during pre-enrolment sessions, on enrolment, during induction and in lessons. Industry role models, acting as learner mentors reinforce this message. More systematic initial assessment and earlier and more frequent progress monitoring are in place to monitor and review individual learner progress but the systems have not yet had any impact. Learners' attendance at English and mathematics lessons is monitored closely and rates are higher than last year.

Teaching, learning and assessment

- Teaching, learning and assessment remain strong. The overwhelming majority of learners experience good learning opportunities. Where there are shortfalls in quality, for example where teaching in English and mathematics provided in vocational areas was not of the standard required, you were aware of the need for improvement and have put suitable and effective actions in place to improve.
- Inspectors found that your judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are predominantly sound. You recognise the need to increase the amount of outstanding teaching. Arrangements for managing the improvement process, including performance management and staff development are effective.
- At the time of the last inspection, aspects of teaching and learning, including teachers' use of challenging learning opportunities and effective questioning techniques, required improvement. Managers have carried out good work to improve these aspects of the quality of teaching. Inspectors observed good examples of challenging learning activities and effective teaching techniques to stimulate and probe learners' understanding of topics in classroom-based and practical lessons, leading to more learners making good progress.

- In a minority of lessons observed, not all learners were fully engaged in the learning tasks or, having finished their work ahead of others, were not being sufficiently challenged. Very occasionally, teaching is directed too much towards one or two individuals, resulting in the other learners losing interest.
- Assessment of learners' work is good. Teachers mark work effectively and regularly. In practical sessions, effective teacher questioning checks learners' knowledge and application of learning. Most learners understand what they need to do to improve. Staff took effective actions to improve the rigour of assessment in equine management, an area for improvement from the last inspection. Learners now benefit from clearer assessment criteria and more timely teacher feedback; consequently, a higher proportion achieve high grades.
- Apprentices benefit from improved progress reviews that include all aspects of their framework. They receive focused individual support if they are not making sufficient progress towards achieving competence in vocational skills development or in English and mathematics.

Outcomes

- Outcomes were judged to be good at the last inspection and they remain so, although, as you have rightly identified, English and mathematics results are weak.
- You have improved the outcomes in all areas noted as requiring improvement at your last inspection. These include: improving the number of high grades achieved by learners; increasing the number of learners making good progress compared to their starting points; raising the success rates for apprentices and increasing the number of learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties who achieve.
- You have maintained high levels of success for the large majority of learners on study programmes; the vast majority achieve their main vocational qualification. You have sustained high success rates in agriculture, engineering and construction.
- The number of learners who leave college to take up employment, an apprenticeship or move into further or higher education is very high and a major strength of the college.
- To achieve your ambitions to become outstanding, the proportion of learners aged over 19 who achieve their qualifications needs to increase. In order to achieve this you will need to reduce the number of learners who leave college early. This is a particular problem with the access to higher education course. New, improved pre-course information, initial assessment, induction and mentoring programmes are reducing the number of early leavers; many of the adults that do leave the college move into employment.
- The proportion of apprentices who complete their programme has increased significantly and is now good. The number of apprentices who complete in their planned time has improved but still requires improvement.

Study programmes

- You and your leadership team have introduced well-considered study programmes. Learners' participation in high-quality, relevant, external work experience, work-related opportunities, enrichment activities and additional qualifications, relevant to their development of skills for future job prospects, is excellent.
- The close working relationship with industry partners and employers has supported the successful development of study programmes. Learners benefit from the help and support industry mentors provide with up-to-date knowledge and insight into employability skills and employers' requirements. As noted earlier, the quality of English and mathematics provision requires improvement.

Learners with high needs

- Managers are using the additional funding the college receives for high-needs learners very well. These learners benefit from skilful, supportive and highly individualised teaching.
- Learners achieve good outcomes in terms of the skills they master, their good progress in college and the next steps they take when they leave, which includes moving to higher-level programmes, external internships, employment, apprenticeships and higher education. However, managers do not have a detailed understanding of these learners' progress as they move to other college courses.
- Learners experience challenging learning activities which they respond to very well. This enables them to develop independence and confidence in their own abilities. They learn new skills through well-managed practical activities and highly effective teaching, and develop good skills in, for example, verbal and written communication.

Next steps for your college

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- more learners make progress and achieve success in GCSE English and mathematics grades A* to C and functional skills English and mathematics by applying the strategy for improvement thoroughly
- teaching and learning continue to improve so that more lessons are outstanding and good practice is shared across subjects; for example, teachers' use of activities and learning tasks that enable learners to develop independent learning skills, including the use of resources on the college's virtual learning environment
- more apprentices complete on time by reviewing and monitoring their progress thoroughly, by working with their employer very closely and by supporting apprentices who need extra help in achieving their targets
- learners who are 19 years old and over achieve at the same high rate as other learners by working with them to ensure they remain on programme and benefit from more individualised support.

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

Yours sincerely

Derrick Spragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the short inspection we were assisted by the vice-principal as nominee. We met with governors, senior leaders, managers and staff. We observed teaching, learning and assessment; most observations were carried out with inspectors and staff across a wide range of subjects. We discussed with learners their views on their experience at college, reviewed the quality of their work, learners' progress and the skills they had mastered. We considered the views of learners by reviewing their feedback received through Ofsted's online questionnaire.