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Martin Ingram  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Ingram

### **Short inspection of Woking College**

Following the short inspection on 27 and 28 April 2016, 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 January 2011.

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

Since the previous inspection, college leaders have carefully managed improvements to the college to ensure that learners receive a high quality of education. The number of learners choosing to attend Woking College has increased considerably. College leaders have managed this growth well by increasing the range of courses offered in both academic and vocational subjects and developing a broad offer of additional activities. These include a wide range of visits to universities, sporting and artistic endeavours, work experience and visits from guest speakers. Through these, learners enjoy developing and practising new skills and knowledge.

College governors and senior leaders have worked very successfully to align the college's curriculum and values with the needs of the local community. They ensure that learners are well aware of the range of courses available to them and take great care in offering them a course that best meets their aspirations and abilities. The very good advice and guidance they receive ensures that a very high proportion of learners are on an appropriate course. Very few change their minds about their choice of course once they have started or fail to achieve well at their first attempt.

As the number of learners has grown, college leaders have increased and improved resources to a high standard. New buildings for the arts and sciences offer high-quality resources to learners while older buildings are well maintained. Teaching

staff are well qualified and many use their experience of working in industry well to plan and deliver stimulating lessons. The range of support for learners, particularly those with high needs and those needing guidance on what to do after their college course, has increased and is of a very high standard.

Learners achieve well at the college. A high proportion of learners who start a vocational, AS- or A-level course achieve their qualifications. Their level of attendance is high and the study skills they develop prepare them well for progression to higher education. College leaders concentrate well on raising learners' aspirations. As a result, an increasing proportion of learners progress to a higher-level course at the college or to a university.

College leaders mostly have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors and senior leaders frequently consult with learners, both formally and through frequent, informal discussions. They have established a culture in which staff are encouraged to make suggestions and to feed back on their experience of working at the college. However, college leaders do not place sufficient importance on tackling the small number of improvements that need to be made to the college.

### **Safeguarding is effective**

College leaders have established a safe environment for learners. Senior leaders have worked closely with representatives of Woking's community groups, social services and other organisations to identify risks to young people. They have acted quickly to train the staff in how best to deal with these risks and to support learners facing barriers to education.

Senior leaders have implemented appropriate systems for checking the suitability of staff employed at the college and monitoring visitors and guest speakers. College staff responsible for leading the college's approach to safeguarding are knowledgeable and well trained. They use a good range of internal and external expertise to support learners but have yet to use the information they collect about safeguarding matters to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the college's safeguarding practice.

College leaders ensure that staff throughout the college know how to keep their learners safe and, in turn, this inspires confidence in the learners; they feel safe and assured that staff will provide them with helpful advice and sensitive support.

Learners value the well-considered tutorial programme provided by the college. They enjoy the opportunities it provides to discuss issues about their own well-being, safety and other topics raised by external speakers, for example the risks of radicalisation in the local community.

### **Inspection findings**

- A high and increasing proportion of learners who study AS, A levels and vocational courses complete and achieve their qualifications. At level 2, the

proportion of learners completing and achieving a vocational qualification remains high. When taking account of their prior qualifications, learners on AS level and vocational courses achieve higher grades than expected. However, on A levels, learners' progress relative to their prior attainment is less positive and has not improved over the previous three years.

- Learners' progression to further education and training is very good. Over two thirds of learners who study a level 2 course at the college progress on to a level 3 course. The college provides very good advice and guidance to those who aspire to attaining an apprenticeship and supports them well if they wish to continue their education or training elsewhere. A very high proportion of learners progress to university once they complete their course. Managers have concentrated successfully on increasing the number of learners progressing to the most prestigious universities. Through internal initiatives, such as the 'Target A\*' project, visits to universities, guest speakers and very high-quality advice and guidance, they have successfully increased this number at the same time as increasing the proportion of learners who apply for university and who secure a place on their first-choice course.
- Staff provide very good advice and guidance to those considering applying to university. They closely monitor learners who have yet to make a decision about what to do once they complete their course and provide timely support to help them decide. Staff have a good knowledge of what happens to their learners when they leave college, including the very small number who leave before completing their course. Nevertheless, managers do not use this information sufficiently to monitor and evaluate trends in learners' progression.
- Staff effectively identify gaps in learners' English and mathematical skills when they enrol and place them on appropriate courses to teach them the missing skills. Staff are particularly adept at identifying the literacy skills that learners who have passed GCSE English with grades A\* to C need to develop in order to achieve their potential on an A-level programme. Learners for whom English is not a first language are given good support by teachers to develop the linguistic skills needed to cope with other subjects, such as mathematics. When necessary, teachers place them on courses specifically designed to teach English to speakers of other languages that prepare them well for progression on to functional skills or GCSE English courses.
- Teachers provide good support for learners to develop English skills in each subject. They are particularly good at teaching learners how to write academic assignments and analyse information. Teachers use a well-considered marking policy consistently to improve learners' written English. Support for learners' mathematical skills is less well developed and teachers are less assiduous in planning to develop these.
- Most learners make rapid progress in developing English skills and progressing to higher-level qualifications. However, the proportion of learners achieving a functional skills qualification in English has fallen over the last three years and managers were slow to identify how to reverse this

trend. Of the learners who have taken a functional skills examination in English in 2015/16, a higher proportion than in previous years has been successful. A slightly higher proportion of learners achieve their functional skills qualification in mathematics but this proportion has also fallen over three years.

- Standards of teaching in the college are high. Teachers plan their courses well and ensure that the resources they use are carefully tailored to the specific needs of each group of learners. For example, teachers and learners collaborate to plan revision sessions and materials to ensure they focus on the specific topics and knowledge learners need to revise.
- Teachers are able to use a broad range of strategies to motivate learners and apply these judiciously. Learners respond by attending well, working hard in lessons, completing homework and studying independently. They are very positive about their time at college and the quality of teaching they receive. They recognise that teachers make considerable effort to support them and respond well by, for example, attending the workshops provided by teachers that supplement their lessons.
- College leaders know the quality of the teaching and learning in the college well through a range of activities such as collecting feedback from learners, dropping into lessons, monitoring learners' progress and checking the quality of assessments. Their observations of lessons are frequently too narrowly focused on the activities of the teacher and do not consider sufficiently other factors that influence learners' progress. Reports on observations do not focus sufficiently on informing teachers and managers about how to raise standards further.
- Teachers track learners' progress closely and ensure learners know how well they are progressing and what they need to do to fulfil their potential. This contributes to learners planning their use of time well so that they complete assignments and homework on time. Recent improvements in the system used to track learners' progress help teachers to identify any barriers to learners succeeding.
- Teachers and managers are quick to act when learners fall behind in their work. They involve parents and carers appropriately and draw on a wide range of strategies to establish a clear plan for learners to get back on track.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take a more critical approach to analysing the features of the college that need to improve and ensure that improvement plans, improvement targets and reports on improvements are fully focused on achieving consistently high standards

- they identify the reasons for the fall in achievement of learners taking functional skills examinations over the last three years and take action to reverse this trend
- they identify the reasons why learners do not make the same high levels of progress relative to prior attainment at A level as at AS level and implement the necessary improvements
- they evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment more effectively and provide reports to teachers and senior leaders that clearly inform them of how to improve further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Steven Tucker  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection we were assisted by the deputy principal as nominee. We met you and your senior leaders, teachers, other members of staff and four governors along with the clerk to the governors. We visited lessons, mostly with members of the management team, to collect information about learners' progress and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. We spoke to learners during lessons, in a meeting that you arranged and in social and study spaces in the college. We reviewed key documents, including those in which college leaders evaluate the quality of provision and standards achieved, the college's evidence of safeguarding and reports on learners' satisfaction with the college.