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Mr Martin Shelton
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Dear Mr Shelton

Short inspection of Linkage Community Trust

Following the short inspection on 15 November 2016 and 16 November 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 February 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Despite a recent period of significant management change at the college, leaders and managers have continued to provide a good educational experience for students at Linkage. Staff and managers have high expectations of what students can do and many students, including those diagnosed with more complex autism spectrum disorders, make notable gains in self-confidence and social interaction. While the proportion of students who achieved their English and mathematics qualifications declined in 2015/16, the overall proportion of students who achieve their intended long-term goal remains high.

Leaders and managers have responded well to the introduction of study programmes, although you recognise further work is needed to improve the provision in English and mathematics and expand further the range of enrichment for day students. Along with trustees and staff, you have revised the college vision and set out a clear curriculum strategy to further widen students' access to high-quality work experience. As the new principal in post since May this year, you have taken appropriate steps to ensure that the provision this academic year aligns more closely to national priorities, and along with the newly appointed CEO, have managed the changes well. Staff at both sites value the notable improvements to communication this academic year.

Leaders and managers have made good progress in tackling most of the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. Internal management issues in 2015/16 led to a large-scale restructure and a period of staff redundancy. However, you and senior leaders effectively ensured that the impact on students'

overall experience and learning was minimised throughout this brief period of instability. Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have brought about notable improvements to the range and quality of work experience. You recognise that a few areas of the college's work, such as students' progress against non-accredited learning, require better monitoring at management level to enable managers and trustees to now increase the rate of improvement even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Managers and staff work effectively to ensure that students consider their own safety and well-being. Students demonstrate a good awareness of e-safety. For example, students benefited from 'twisting your mind online' workshops run by the local police, covering the potential dangers of social media and the risks of radicalisation. Effective visual displays around the campuses and in classrooms reinforce the promotion of British values well. Students benefit from a good range of wrap-around support. For example, specialist support enables students to manage their own conduct and be aware of their own behavioural triggers. The proportion of incidents and accidents is relatively low and they are mostly minor. Since the previous inspection, the number of physical interventions has reduced notably, with staff using a range of de-escalation techniques effectively. Leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements and arrangements for implementing the 'Prevent' duty are fit for purpose and action is taken to safeguard students. Through tutorials, teachers appropriately raise students' awareness of the dangers of extremist ideologies. Managers continue to have well-established links with the local safeguarding board and all staff have received appropriate training and refresher training.

Inspection findings

- Trustees and senior leaders have a good grasp on the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment and students' outcomes. They know that there is improvement needed to increase the proportion of students who progress into supported employment, training or further education to match the very high levels reported at the previous inspection. Managers monitor most areas of the college well. Since the previous inspection, trustees have improved their oversight by the introduction of an education committee which focuses solely on the college's performance. They are now more active in testing out progress by talking to managers, staff and students directly. While trustees challenge leaders and scrutinise self-evaluation, their ability to ask really probing questions is sometimes restricted by the level of information they receive or by the fact that the information is not in an easy-to-interpret format. For example, information on the completion of mandatory staff refresher training is cumbersome.
- Teachers and support staff know their students well and plan interesting activities to help widen students understanding and develop their vocational skills. Learning support assistants provide effective guidance and encouragement which helps students enhance their own decision-making abilities and improve their communication skills. Although a few students are not sufficiently challenged to

maximise progress within lessons, most teachers are skilled at setting specific tasks which enable students to achieve well. Teaching, learning and assessment within the workplace is particularly effective. Students make very good progress in developing vocational and employability skills within a wide range of occupational sectors. They also make good progress in discrete English and mathematics lessons. However, managers recognise that further work is required to ensure that the teaching of English and mathematics skills within vocational lessons challenges all students to extend these skills as much as possible.

- Teachers promote a wide array of topics to students to help them prepare for living and working in a diverse, multicultural Britain. A rich calendar of events is followed throughout the academic year. For example, in 2015/16, students worked with their peers from other specialist colleges to extend the 'A Right Not a Fight' campaign for better information, advice, guidance and support to access specialist provision for people who have disabilities. Students are respectful and demonstrate good empathy towards others' disabilities. All staff have received training in equality and diversity, although not all trustees have received refresher training, which is planned for later this term. College data indicates no significant difference in achievement between different groups of students, including children looked after. Managers are rightly keen to strengthen the monitoring of groups further, so that greater scrutiny of any potential gaps over time can be analysed. For example, you have recently introduced the systematic monitoring of the achievement of students who are eligible for free school meals.
- The monitoring of learner progress against their individual targets took place effectively during the previous year and shows that students made good overall progress towards their long-term goals. The setting of targets and monitoring of progress within work experience and supported internship settings is comprehensive. All students in the workplace have relevant targets for improvement which are reviewed frequently by college staff and employers and then adjusted as required to ensure that even more challenging learning can take place. Due to the notable changes in staffing and management over the summer term, the recording of classroom-based learning targets onto the college's electronic system has been behind schedule this term. As a result, this has had an impact on the rigour with which teachers could formally record all steps in learning and managers could accurately assess overall progress. The recently appointed progress coaches now regularly monitor and support students' progress so that all achievement is maximised.
- The good workplace learning identified at the previous inspection has been further improved. Already this term over half of all students are currently in long-term external placements across a broad range of vocational sectors. Job coaches secure placements which are carefully matched to students' long-term goals identified within their study programme plans. For example, through students' interest in media, managers have now formed a link with a nationally recognised television company. Managers have increased the range of work placements and a significantly higher proportion of students are accessing work experience. The number of students following supported internships has also increased notably this year. These students are developing very good job-specific skills and a sound knowledge of technical language, as well as showing an eagerness to develop wider skills such as working tidily and methodically.

- You have already begun to implement your new five-year curriculum strategy, to increase further students' work-readiness for when they leave the college and to increase progression opportunities through internships and eventually, where appropriate, into apprenticeships. Initial assessment has been strengthened through managers' increased review of students' individual education, health and care plans (EHCPs). This increased scrutiny is helping to ensure that the EHCPs all accurately reflect a realistic and ambitious long-term goal along with an appropriate programme of study designed to achieve this. Initial assessment is also more rigorous in assessing the appropriateness of students entered for specific English and mathematics qualifications. Managers' tracking of students' destinations is comprehensive and managers are rightly focusing on the importance of sustaining positive destinations over time.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all areas of the college's work are monitored systematically and with equal rigour so that managers can quickly take any remedial action to improve even further
- trustees have all the pertinent information they need to be able to comprehensively review, and ask increasingly probing questions about, all aspects of the college's educational performance
- the college's curriculum strategy is implemented fully in order to increase the proportion of students moving to supported employment, training or further education, where this is appropriate for the student, and increase the proportion of students achieving their English and mathematics qualifications
- all classroom-based learning targets are in place in a timely manner so that teachers can effectively challenge students to achieve their potential in lessons and all steps in progress can be more effectively recorded.

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

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors, along with one Ofsted inspector, visited the college for two days. We carried out inspection activities across both the college sites at Toynton and Weelsby. You, as principal, assisted inspectors. We met with you, with the CEO of the Linkage trust, with curriculum managers, teaching staff, including a speech and language therapist, progress coaches, the chair and another member of the board of trustees, and with a range of teachers and students. Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, internal and external work placements

and reviewed students' work and progress records. We reviewed key college policies and documents, including those relating to self-assessment and safeguarding. We also considered the views of students and parents.