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Mrs Kelly Perkin
Operations Executive
Alliance Learning
The Hurst Building
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Dear Mrs Perkin

Short inspection of Alliance Learning

Following the short inspection on 23 and 24 May 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 July 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection the chief executive, you and the staff have increased significantly the number of apprentices while maintaining the good quality of provision. Senior managers have successfully eradicated most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

You provide honest, detailed and accurate information regularly to the company's board that has a governance responsibility. The information includes the results of teaching and learning evaluations and apprentices' achievements in each vocational area. This ensures that the board members are well informed about all aspects of the provision. They use this information well to support and challenge senior managers to make further improvements.

You have evaluated the quality of provision accurately in the self-assessment report and have a detailed improvement action plan. Apprentices on early years and playwork, engineering, administration and business management programmes receive good-quality teaching, training, learning and assessments. Senior managers have been decisive in removing provision from a poor-performing subcontractor. They have stopped offering traineeships because trainees for two consecutive years did not achieve well. Leaders and managers have recognised that the provision that the apprentices in health and social care receive is not good enough. Despite the recent changes, until very recently the pace of improvements in health and social care apprenticeship programmes has been too slow.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have prioritised apprentices' protection well. Managers have developed comprehensive policies and procedures on keeping apprentices safe. Staff have ensured that apprentices are well informed about the risks associated with extreme views and taking radical actions. All staff, including the board members, have received appropriate training and are aware of the signs that may indicate that an apprentice is at risk. The staff with teaching and training responsibilities have undergone Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. They promote good practices in health and safety, for example by ensuring that apprentices in welding workshops wear appropriate personal protective equipment. Apprentices feel protected and safe at the training centre and in work.

Apprentices are clear about the safe use of the internet and social media. The manager with responsibility for safeguarding monitors closely apprentices' access to websites that may put them at risk. When issues arise, apprentices feel confident to report their concerns because they are certain that the staff take their concerns seriously and support them well.

Inspection findings

- Senior managers have high expectations for the success of apprentices and have set demanding targets for their achievements. Managers and learning and development officers (LDOs) monitor apprentices' progress and take effective actions, such as scheduling extra visits, to help them progress. As a result, the large majority of apprentices complete within the planned time. In 2015/16, the proportion of apprentices who completed successfully on time on early years and playwork, engineering, administration and business management programmes was high.
- LDOs with responsibility for apprentices in early years and playwork, engineering, administration and business management assess and record apprentices' progress. The officers make frequent visits to review the quality of apprentices' work and motivate them to complete their learning tasks to a high standard. Engineering apprentices who do not complete their work on time are effectively supported to improve their work ethic. They are motivated to stay after the taught sessions to receive the help that they need from LDOs to complete their work.
- Managers have implemented successfully comprehensive quality improvement arrangements. These include regular observation of teaching and training and the evaluation of apprentices' written work. Managers use the results of their findings to improve LDOs' practices, for example through comprehensive staff development. However, in their quality evaluations, managers do not always check sufficiently how well apprentices develop their vocational skills as they focus too much on teaching activities and not enough on what apprentices learn.
- Most apprentices benefit from good discussions about treating individuals fairly and respecting differences, such as differences in beliefs and gender. Managers have ensured that most LDOs are confident about promoting values such as

democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty. As a result, most LDOs promote British values confidently and effectively by making them relevant to apprentices' experiences, for example by discussing current affairs.

- Most LDOs use their vocational experience successfully to help apprentices understand how the theories that they study link to practices at work. For example, they link the theory of child development to early years and playwork apprentices' work in nurseries. They discuss the critical role of good weld penetration in fabricated structures with engineering apprentices.
- A few of the LDOs do not always develop apprentices' depth of understanding. They do not sufficiently apply apprentices' learning to industrial and commercial practices and articulate the benefits of them developing skills and knowledge beyond that required by the apprenticeship qualifications. Consequently, they do not develop the depth of technical knowledge of which they are capable and cannot always apply their learning to different situations.
- Most LDOs provide useful feedback on apprentices' written and practical work so that they know what needs to be done to improve. However, a minority of LDOs do not check apprentices' written work thoroughly. For example, they do not identify when apprentices' work is incomplete or where there are mistakes such as writing units of measurements incorrectly. This impedes apprentices' development and progress.
- Around 10% of apprentices are on health and social care programmes. Over the last two years, managers have not been successful in improving the achievement rates of health and social care apprentices. Managers' recent actions, such as more-robust performance management of LDOs and more frequent visits to monitor the progress of, and provide extra support to, this group of apprentices, are starting to improve their progress but they are not yet benefiting fully from the changes.
- In 2014/15 and 2015/16, managers offered traineeships for a small number of trainees, but too few trainees achieved. A significant number of trainees who did not complete started other courses or gained jobs. Having reviewed the quality of traineeships and the low achievement rates of the trainees, managers at Alliance Learning stopped delivering these courses.
- The majority of apprentices benefit from regular taught sessions. Apprentices receive regular off- and on-the-job training that meets the framework requirements. However, managers have not developed reliable arrangements to record, monitor and ensure that all apprentices receive their full off- and on-the-job training entitlements.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers implement effective actions to improve the quality of teaching, training, learning and assessment that apprentices on health and social care programmes receive, so that they make good progress and achieve
- staff evaluating the quality of teaching and learning focus on the impact of teaching and training practices on apprentices' vocational skills development

- all LDOs check thoroughly apprentices' depth of understanding and knowledge and the quality of their written work to ensure that apprentices achieve their potential
- managers develop effective arrangements to ensure that all apprentices receive their on- and off-the-job training entitlements.

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

Yours sincerely

Shahram Safavi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you assisted the inspection team as nominee. We met with the chief executive, two members of the company's board, your managers and a number of learning and development officers. We visited employers and observed sessions to collect information about the quality of teaching, training, learning and assessments that apprentices received. We spoke to apprentices during our visits to collect their views. We reviewed key documents, including your self-assessment report.