

24 January 2023

Dr Ken Thomson
Principal and Chief Executive
Forth Valley College

Dear Dr Thomson

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Forth Valley College in October 2022 to undertake an Annual Engagement Visit. During our visit, we talked to learners, staff and stakeholders, and worked closely with the senior managers.

The team found the following major strengths in the college's work.

Recruitment

College staff work well with its local authority partners to provide learning opportunities for school pupils who have become disengaged from learning. This offers an effective experience at entry level for young people who may not have previously considered continuing with their education. Support services staff have reflected on the learner journey to streamline and simplify recruitment processes and support applicants to ensure that they were better informed, and had improved personal support in completing documentation.

Retention

Based on the most recently available data, rates of learner retention for academic year 2020/21 did not vary significantly from pre-pandemic levels. Staff value and make good use of college online systems to access learner information in real time. Teaching staff make effective use of information technology resources to track and monitor learner progress, identify where further support is needed, and share information quickly regarding the impact of interventions. Forth Valley Students' Association actively supports a sense of community across all college campuses. An extensive range of social activities, campaigns, and targeted support for specific groups of learners has been effective in developing a culture of belonging which contributes to learner retention.

Attainment

Overall attainment rates for learners on further education and part-time higher education programmes are above the sector norm. Attainment rates for learners on full-time higher education programmes are around the sector norm. Staff make good use of college data and systems to identify learners 'at risk' of withdrawal or underachievement. This systematic and proactive approach ensures that support is put in place quickly for learners who are at risk of not achieving.

Progression

Rates of learner progression to a positive destination are high, with almost all learners finding a positive destination on completing their programme. College staff have established effective links with local universities and learners benefit from a wide range of articulation routes to degree-level study. Good links between college staff and employers are ensuring that learners on the majority of programmes engage in useful work placements. Learners are benefitting from these contacts and experiences to gain employment.

The following areas for improvement were identified by the team and discussed with the senior managers:

- Full-time higher education attainment rates have not improved over the last three years and do not yet meet college or outcome agreement targets.

The following main point for action was identified:

- The college should ensure that all staff receive appropriate updating training in safeguarding

What happens next?

We are confident that the college has the capacity to continue to improve and will continue to monitor progress through regular engagement with the link HM Inspector.

Dr John Laird
HM Inspector

cc Chair of College Board, SFC Outcome Agreement Manager