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Ms Nancy Cookson
Principal
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Dear Ms Cookson

Ofsted Subject Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 5: Construction

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 14 and 15 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to you and all your staff for the hard work that took place to prepare for the visit and for giving up a great deal of time during the visit to meet with me. Please pass on my thanks to all those concerned.

This visit is part of a series to provision in SSA 5 graded good or better at its most recent inspection, in order to evaluate how effective/good practice has been brought about, further improved and sustained. The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey in construction. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but should we wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first. All letters, following survey visits, will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: lesson observations; interviews with staff and learners; scrutiny of the examples of good practice provided including a tour of resources. I agreed to provide a summary of the observations of good practice seen and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed

- The innovative approach to course delivery and timetabling. Learners benefit from an intensive six week programme where they gain valuable industry skills and an entry level qualification prior to commencing employment and continuing on vocational courses.

- The carefully considered and highly effective curriculum management structure. Roles and responsibilities of staff are very clearly defined and communication is good.
- The very good support for new staff. This includes the allocation of an experienced curriculum colleague as a mentor, a well planned and thorough induction programme and the close management of progress and development by the curriculum area manager.
- The very good quality teaching and learning materials used. Learning materials are well produced and information learning technology (ILT) is used effectively to enhance enjoyment and understanding. Staff have successfully developed ideas from the 'standards unit' teaching and learning resources and applied these to their own teaching.
- The well planned theory teaching. Learning outcomes are clearly defined and teachers use a variety of strategies to encourage learner participation and engagement. Theory teaching is very closely linked to related practical activities.
- The motivation and encouragement for learners provided through entry into regional and national competitions, student awards evenings and 'student of the month' awards.
- The approach to the integration of key skills. Vocationally relevant assignments with course specific assessment tasks are well produced with clear assessment criteria. Key skills are developed alongside vocational skills by curriculum teachers supported by key skill specialists.
- The good management of work-based learning. Highly effective use of management information and excellent support provided by WBL staff to learners and to vocational trainers and assessors enables good progress to be made.
- The highly effective use of assessment in the workplace. Dedicated assessors frequently observe learners in the workplace. Learners have good access to assessors and generate good evidence from the workplace.
- The good provision for 14-16 year olds. There are beneficial links with local schools. Courses are appropriate and give a valuable insight into construction careers and enable learners to gain a basic qualification. Progression rates onto post-16 construction courses are good and plans are well progressed to offer the new construction diploma.
- The extensive range of provision focused on meeting employer, regional and local community needs. The college is actively involved with a number of key partners.
- The outstanding development of learners practical skills. Learners benefit from gaining skills over and above qualification requirements which are valued by employers in the workplace.

- The exceptionally good links with industry manufacturers and suppliers. These provide learners with significant quantities of high quality, up to date materials for training and assessment activities that significantly enhance the curriculum.
- The outstanding progression into industry employment. Almost all learners gain employment within the industry during the period of their course.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- to improve tutorial provision to get a more consistent approach which includes the broader aspects of a tutorial entitlement.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop construction provision in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LLSC. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional



Paul Joyce
Her Majesty's Inspector