

02 February 2007

Mr John Carroll
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Dear Mr Carroll

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 04– Engineering and manufacturing technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 14 and 15 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to the teaching and other staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to staff and students who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey. 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. College letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and copied to the LSC. The letters will also be available to the next inspection team to visit the college and to inform your AAV visits.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with managers, teachers and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of six lessons, discussion of good practice in teaching in two further lessons, and discussions with employers.

I said I would provide a summary of my observations and of the good practice seen and to suggest areas for development.

Good practice observed

- The high pass rates on engineering courses and, in particular, the consistently high pass and success rates on the first diploma course.

- The high standard of the work produced by learners. Some of the engineering practical work and, in particular, the work produced in the motor vehicle paint and finishing section was of a very high standard
- The good quality teaching. I particularly noted the following:
 - The well planned lessons. The lessons observed and those I discussed show that lessons are carefully planned to include an appropriate variety of activity, improve key skills, and develop the theory in a logical and progressive manner. Web-CT is used to enable learning materials and planning documentation to be readily accessible to teachers.
 - The well organised workshop practical activities which benefit from spacious accommodation, good quality machine tools, a linked theory room, and teaching which combines theory and practical well. Teachers and support workers provided close support and the learners were diligent and worked well.
 - The use of simulation to enliven the teaching and enable learners to gain additional “hands-on” time which would not be possible otherwise
 - The excellent lessons I was “talked through” in robotics and motor vehicle finishing. These displayed much of the good practice recorded above. I was struck by the detailed planning, the good use of information and learning technology, including simulation, the variety of activity, the careful development of theory and practice, the close monitoring of learners’ progress and the strong links to industrial practice.
- The department’s strong links with employers and a private training organisation. These have been fashioned on a willingness to provide what the customer wants and at a time and place which suits the customer.
- The joint links with the training provider and local schools which enable some Key Stage 4 pupils to undertake work which prepares them for apprenticeships as well as enables them to continue with their core school studies.
- Learners’ progress is carefully monitored and the department is increasingly using web-CT to support this work.
- The effective support provided for learners. In particular the support staff seen, who are vocationally competent (some very highly qualified) and go that extra mile to ensure learners are well supported and, regardless of their attainment, progress appropriately
- The emphasis the college and the department place on the development of teaching and learning. This is demonstrated by, for example the work of the subject learning coaches, master classes and peer coaching, and professional updating. The good quality of one lesson on robotics was directly linked to the professional development the teacher had had in this area of work. Good practice is shared through, for example the “market place” events.

- The college is supporting the use of information and learning technology well. All classrooms are equipped with data projectors and all full-time teachers have been allocated laptop computers. The professional development programme supports this work well.
- The library plays an important role in supporting the work of teachers, for example by providing learning materials which are relevant to the assignments learners are currently working on.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- an electronic intranet-based system is being introduced as an aid to the monitoring of learners' progress; the department should continue to support this development which has considerable potential to help staff in their work monitoring and reporting on learners' progress
- lessons use a good variety of teaching activities; in the main these are well thought through, enhance learning and build well on the work of the standards unit, but one or two activities were used which were not integrated sufficiently into the teaching by, for example, summing up afterwards what the learning points were.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop engineering and manufacturing courses.

Yours sincerely

Colin Evans
Her Majesty's inspector