

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



18 January 2011

Ms J Machell
Principal
Alton College
Old Odiham Road
Alton
Hampshire
GU34 2LX

Dear Ms Machell

Ofsted 2010–11 best practice survey: value for money in colleges

Thank you for your cooperation, and the hospitality of your staff and learners, during my visit on 6 January 2011 to look at work in securing and developing best value for money.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in value for money in colleges. The publication will include case studies about individual providers. If your college is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment prior to publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included scrutiny of documentation and meetings with senior managers and other staff.

Features of best practice

- The consistently high rates of achievement in most curriculum areas for students aged 16 to 18, and particularly for adult students and 14 to 16-year-olds studying part time at the college on vocational programmes.
- The good progress made by students and the high-grade attainment, especially on advanced level courses, which is above national figures.
- The high rates of progression by students to further and higher education, and employment.
- The effective use of high-quality learning resources through information and communication technology that enables learning to take place in a cost-effective manner.
- The broad range of provision that meets the needs and interests of students aged 16 to 18 and adults in the local community.

- The strong partnership work that aims to raise educational attainment in the area, including the East Hampshire Education Improvement Partnership, which also enables staff training to take place cost-effectively.
- The rigorous evaluation to judge whether it is cost-effective to deliver individual courses before deciding to run them. This decision-making is based on a wide range of factors, including the number of teaching hours required and the income gained from each course. Some courses with low enrolment of students are subsidised by more popular courses where this will broaden the range of provision available and ensure progression opportunities are maintained.
- The careful forward planning by senior managers to ensure, as far as possible, that employees enjoy security of employment in a context of reduced funding.
- The efficient deployment of staff through effective timetabling that ensures pay costs are controlled tightly and staff time and rooms are utilised effectively.
- The transparent way budgets are agreed and expenditure is controlled and monitored.
- The good value for money obtained when purchasing goods and services through the use of procurement services. Procurement is used for non-pay costs, such as cleaning and maintenance, and the purchasing of goods, such as stationery and advertising. All purchases made through procurement are monitored closely to evaluate the savings made.
- The environmental policy that aims to have a positive impact through practical measures, including the reduction of waste and encouragement for recycling, decreasing the use of power and water on campus with the aid of technology and the environmentally-friendly transport policy which subsidises students' use of public transport.

Areas for development

- To develop more innovative and cost-effective methods of teaching and learning that encourage more independent learning and so prepare advanced level students for higher education.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop your approaches to securing value for money in your college.

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tony Noonan
Her Majesty's Inspector