

04 April 2007

Ms Heather Maxwell  
Principal  
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Dear Ms Maxwell

Ofsted Subject Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 5 – Construction

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 26 and 27 February 2007. 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.

Good practice observed

- The innovative use of information learning technology (ILT). Learners and teachers have excellent access to computing facilities. The use of ILT in theory classes is well established and effectively engages learners and makes learning more interesting. Innovative teaching of key skills and other initiatives aimed at improving teaching benefit students and improve learning.

- The good use of a virtual learning environment (VLE). Learners have access to a good range of support materials on the college's VLE. Teachers ensure that class presentations and handouts are available on the VLE and students can also access a range of interactive quizzes to test their topic knowledge.
- The innovative approach to producing evidence in the workplace. Work-based assessors carry cameras, computers and printers to provide learners with instant evidence records for their portfolios. Colour coded computer-based tracking systems provide an easy to understand record which details learners' progress. Computer-based individual learning plans are in use which are continually updated.
- The highly effective employer and external links. Successful and beneficial external links have been established with employers and industry bodies. The employer advisory group makes a significant contribution to curriculum development. They provide generous sponsorship for the work of the section and for the annual celebration of learners' achievements.
- The good provision of short courses to meet the needs of industry. The college is responsive to employers' needs and has provided a number of specialist short courses for them. A newsletter keeps employers and other partners well informed about the availability of courses and about construction developments.
- The strong links with schools. Pupils from up to 10 local schools apply for places on the link days for 14-16 year olds. The college undertakes many initiatives to encourage school pupils to consider a career in construction and to encourage more female participants to enter the sector. It is the lead institution for the development of the new construction diploma.
- The highly effective leadership and management. The quality of leadership and management has recently been recognised through a Beacon Award for Innovation in Curriculum Leadership Development and through commendations for the construction team in the Star Awards. Staff morale is high and they work well together. Communication is excellent with roles and responsibilities clearly defined.

No areas for development were identified during this visit in relation to the areas of good practice highlighted by the college.

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 inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Houghton  
Additional Inspector