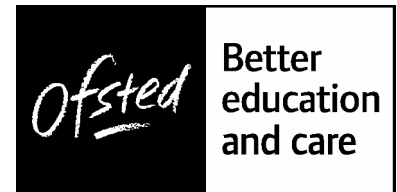


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19 December 2006

Mr Tim Jackson
Principal
Sparsholt College
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Winchester
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Dear Mr Jackson

Ofsted Subject Survey Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 3: Agriculture, horticulture and animal care

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 24 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to you and all your 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 also pass on my thanks to all the staff and students who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice subject survey in agriculture animal care, equine, horticulture. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but should we wish to include specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first. All college letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform judgements included: interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and observation of good practice examples.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in countryside, animal care and equine studies and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- extremely rigorous moderation of the results of lesson observations through regular meetings to set standards for the judgements made by observers and to discuss records of observations, as well as joint observations, including for any external consultants who carry out

observations, with a moderator at least once a year to ensure standardisation of approach

- excellent practical teaching resources with great co-operation between different curriculum areas to ensure the best possible use of practical facilities to enhance the students' experiences and with good up-keep and development of the college estate
- well-developed use of information and learning technology (ILT) through confident and effective use in teaching including the use of college produced DVDs, lively and interesting presentations and considerable progress with the development of a virtual learning environment (VLE)
- the creation of a learning environment which encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and their behaviour, where high expectations for students are set and they rise to the challenges
- high emphasis on making sure that students are focussed and attentive during lessons and particularly good use of directed questioning techniques to reinforce this approach
- teachers with excellent vocational experience and substantial industrial credibility along with strong encouragement to students to achieve excellence in their chosen land-based industry by competing for national awards, such as at the Chelsea Flower Show
- good use of practical facilities to create high quality realistic commercial environments for training and ensuring that students work under realistic commercial conditions often without having to leave the college site
- particularly good equality and diversity training using an interactive theatre group performing scenarios during which the teachers are able to intervene at any point to alter the course of action by suggesting how the various characters might behave next; this allowed teachers to test out ways of dealing with, for example, inappropriate behaviour, in a safe environment and use what they had learned to good effect in the classroom.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- continued development of the VLE in order to maximise its use in teaching and learning
- the development of ways to evaluate the usefulness of the VLE as a teaching tool and to disseminate the best aspects of its use as good practice to other teachers.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop land-based courses in the college.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Parkman
ALI