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Mr D Boynton
Principal
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Dear Mr Boynton

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 20 and 21 November. I am particularly grateful to 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

I have provided below a summary of my observations, the good practice seen and suggested areas for development.

Good practice observed

- Improving and now high success rates for many courses. Provisional data shows that success rates in 2005-06 are significantly above national averages.
- Marked improvement in key skills success rates. College data shows that the overall success rate is well above the national average.

- Aspects of teaching and learning:
 - excellent use of ILT in support of learning; in one lesson the internet and interactive white board were used well to demonstrate the working of the diesel engine
 - good links are made, during the teaching, with industrial application to illuminate the teaching
 - lessons are planned well; the planning includes the consideration of learning support needs and key skills development
 - lesson generally include a good range of activity and are well supported, for example, by visual aids, hand-outs, and demonstration equipment
 - one particularly good lesson involved learners undertaking a range of practical activities; the teacher managed the lesson well and struck up a productive relationship with learners, drew upon their own learning and experience to increase motivation and confidence.

- Excellent partnerships with schools and industry. For example, training is delivered at 12 in-company learning centres, bespoke training is developed and delivered to suit company needs. Comprehensive arrangements with local secondary schools enable school students to sample the provision.
- Effective involvement of employers in curriculum development. Employers, for example are fully involved in the design of the curriculum through the college-employer fora.
- Good support for learners. Recruitment, initial assessment of basic skills, assessment of practical competence, induction, the monitoring of learners progress and additional support to ensure all progress appropriately are strong features of the department.
- Very good progression opportunities. There is a good range of provision and the college has implemented wide ranging change to the portfolio to ensure it is matched well to the needs of employers and learners.
- Good commitment to CPD activities. Activity includes industrial placement and commercial training courses to ensure staff skills are updated regularly.
- Some excellent facilities to support learning. Workshops are generally well resourced and much of the equipment is up to date and reflects good industry standards.

Areas for development, which were discussed in my verbal feedback, included:

- the sharing of good practice across course teams
- the use of measurable targets in some action plans
- health and safety signage in one motor vehicle workshop.

Please note that these findings do not constitute a full evaluation of the quality of the department and are based on a short visit.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colin Evans". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Short
Additional inspector