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Mr David Croll
Principal
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Dear Mr Croll

Ofsted Subject Survey Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 3: Agriculture, horticulture and animal care
Subject area: Land-based subject areas

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 12 December. I am particularly grateful to all the teaching staff for 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 other 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, horticulture and animal care. 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, observation of good practice examples, a tour of equine resources and lesson observations.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in land-based subject areas and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- strong leadership and management in ensuring the preservation and quality of land-based provision in the main subject areas on the Broomfield Hall campus following a complex merger, with clear and effective strategic direction to overcome significant difficulties of viability and sustainability of this provision

- productive work in reviewing and broadening the land-based curriculum including by the introduction of level 1 provision, a review of entry requirements, unitisation of some adult provision and a review of the appropriateness of additional qualifications to meet each students' needs
- productive development of generic teaching and learning skills in specialist land-based teachers using well-established cross college workshops, including dedicated staff development to support the teaching of Key Stage 4 pupils; this ensures that teachers are working towards and achieving teaching qualifications and sharing of good practice through the work of learning directors and a newly formed 'learning community' focus group
- a well-established and thorough lesson observation scheme ensuring that teachers graded satisfactory are developed and that teachers graded good or better are used to spread good practice
- effective linking of theory and practical teaching using 'real life' practical settings on the college estate and effective utilisation of teachers' land-based expertise as well as learners' land-based experiences
- good use of information and learning technology in lessons including effective use of a learning portal, an electronic database of plants, video projection and DVDs
- good promotion of equality and diversity matters through a dedicated college intranet page, careful consideration of integration in each lesson plan, use of opportunities that occur through subject teaching and a high awareness of the performance of different groups of students
- a proactive approach to promoting environmental sustainability through a campus action plan and reinforcement within the curriculum, especially in agriculture, horticulture, floristry and countryside courses
- successful widening of participation to non-traditional learners through work with the probation service, work with pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11 and various projects including those with students with mental problems as well as from minority ethnic groups
- effective short and long term target setting in individual learning plans.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- consolidation of the significant work that has occurred in equine studies through the development of an equestrian centre which has made very efficient use of a redundant dairy unit, including establishing a team of college horses to be used for teaching and learning and setting up a yard duties system to ensure that students develop good employability skills
- strengthen arrangements to measure value added and distance travelled to include clarifying the procedure for establishing a minimum target grade; and giving consideration to the skill-based starting point of students on vocational programmes to track improvement compared to potential

- establish electronic records of animals, including the team of horses.

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

Philippa Francis
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools