

25 January 2007

Mr Ian Murray
Principal
Chesterfield College
Infirmary Road
Chesterfield
Derbyshire
S417NG

Dear Mr Murray

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 8-9 January 2007. 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, discussion with three employers and with an external verifier (these by telephone).

I said I would provide a summary of my observations and of the good practice seen and to suggest areas for development.

Good practice observed

- Data provided by the college show that success rates are high. They are above the national average at levels 1, 2 and 3 on programmes for learners aged 16 -18, and at levels 1 and 3 on adult programmes.

- The high standard of students' work in practical projects, assignments and portfolios.
- Aspects of teaching and learning
 - Excellent and relevant skills development and attainment in practical sessions. In one welding lesson, students completed individual tasks using techniques designed by the tutors and agreed by the students' employers to reflect industry and workplace requirements.
 - Effective use of information and learning technology to support the teaching of theory. In one lesson in motor vehicle repair the interactive whiteboard was used to show video clips of high and low speed crash tests. The students then discussed various car designs in relation to crash impact on chassis and stressed panels, finally creating and testing their own designs. Another group provided a power point presentation on their research into stress in materials
 - Good integration of key skills in theory lessons, for example, through report writing and calculations being integrated within exercises and through student presentations.
 - Students contribute well in lessons and contribute fully both when working on their own, when working in groups and in whole class discussions.
- A wide and inclusive range of provision, with provision from level 1 through to level 4 in mechanical, electrical, electronic and motor vehicle engineering. Provision also includes entry level programmes for schools and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Courses are delivered through modes of attendance and in places which suit the needs of learners, employers and schools. Be-spoke training provided for employers is highly regarded by those employers.
- Excellent guidance and recruitment procedures. These are provided through a wide range of methods which include school visits, interviews, open days, and aptitude testing.
- Thorough initial assessment and induction for learners. All learners are screened for additional learning needs and provided with additional support if required. In-class support is presently provided for students with dyslexia or hearing impairment. Drop-in evening sessions are provided for those requiring extra mathematics on the National Certificate and Diploma programmes.
- Effective and regular progress reviews are provided for full-time, part time and work-based learners. Progress is tracked closely using electronic tracking systems. Learning targets set for each student are appropriately challenging, and their implementation monitored. Work-place reviews include employer representatives. Improvements in work-place reviews have contributed to a marked increase in apprentice framework completions.
- Engineering equipment is of a good standard.
- Teachers are provided with regular professional development, including technical updating. This helps to update the provision and the knowledge

and skills of learners. For example, one teacher, after secondment to a company in the Netherlands to update his water-based paint finish knowledge, included the new techniques into the curriculum, thereby increasing the employability of the learners.

- There are strong links with local schools. Accredited courses are provided for school pupils from 20 local schools. These courses are in some instances taught jointly by college and school staff.
- The college's intranet site is used well. It gives good support, for example, to the tracking of learners' progress, to the management of internal and external verification and to procedures related to quality assurance including self-assessment.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- retention rates which are below the national average for 16-18 learners at Level 1 and adult learners at level 2
- some inadequate accommodation in motor vehicle engineering
- insufficient direct questioning of learners during lessons to confirm learners' understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Green
Additional inspector