

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
Holborn
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Paul Hannan
Principal
Hadlow College
Hadlow
Tonbridge
Kent
TN11 0AL

Dear Mr Hannan

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 17 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 learners 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, 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 and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- a strong emphasis on celebrating the success of students and staff
- particularly good communication throughout the college and externally with partners and stake-holders both in the community and in the land-based sector, ensuring that the college keeps pace with the requirements of the industries it serves
- the development of particularly good work books for animal care students containing a good mixture of records of actual work

completed, including routine and supervisory duties, and also work sheets which students complete to develop their knowledge, all of which form a useful record of achievement which can be taken to interviews and shown to prospective employers

- effective team teaching during key skills sessions ensuring that key skills are delivered in a vocational context and are seen by students as an integral part of their programme of study
- a strong emphasis on the development of good practical skills, with a significant allocation of course hours to practical work which supports students in reaching industry levels of competence
- good staff development and a rigorous and effective monitoring process for teachers whose lessons are less effective, which is ongoing and ensures improvement
- particularly high quality marketing materials that are re-assessed annually to ensure they reflect the college's current focus and position in its market
- an innovative and good approach to sustainability through the college's whole approach to education and including through the design of new buildings and as the first college member of the Chicago Climate Exchange
- strengthening of the emphasis on equality and diversity including through increasingly embedding understanding and raising awareness through teaching, the use cultural diversity days where different cultures are regularly celebrated and the appointment of a governor from a minority ethnic group.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- further embedding of both key skills and equality and diversity into all teaching sessions and more effective evaluation of the success of this work.

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