

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr Richard Chambers
The Principal & Chief Executive
Lambeth College
45 Clapham Common South Side
London
SW4 9BL

Dear Mr Chambers

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 22 and 23 January. I am particularly grateful to teachers 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 them and the 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 cite specific aspects of practice and attribute them to particular colleges we will contact those colleges prior to publication. 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, observation of four lessons, and general observation of resources.

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

Good practice observed

- Data provided by the college during the inspection shows that success rates on many courses are high. Of particular note are the high success rates on the first diploma, performing engineering operations, electrotechnical technology, national diploma and access to higher education (HE) courses.

- Progression rates to HE from the national diploma and access courses are high.
- The standard of some of the work seen was high and all was at least satisfactory.
- Of the lessons observed, one was outstanding, most were good and all were at least satisfactory. Strengths included:
 - enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers who plan their teaching carefully, and in most lessons take account of the needs of individual learners
 - lessons are well structured and include an appropriate variety of learning activity, motivating learners and maintaining their interest
 - in the motorcycle workshop, learners make good progress with the practical tasks; instructions are clear and learners understand what is expected of them; the teacher carefully monitored the progress of learners and checked their understanding through close questioning and supervision.
 - in the classroom, engineering teachers make good use of demonstrations, computer software and information and learning technology (ILT) to enliven the topics being covered.
 - in a first diploma lesson, the students worked in pairs on a risk assessment task; the teacher introduced the concepts of hazard and risk through the use of photographs; the examples were carefully prepared, ensuring students were able to answer the questions as they progressed onto more subtle and challenging work-related exercises
 - in a lesson on electro-magnetism, the teacher managed a group experiment effectively to involve all learners and engage them in productive group discussions
 - in the well-equipped sound engineering workshop, the teacher made very effective use of ILT to demonstrate the concept of equalisation methods
 - teachers have a very good rapport with students; the behaviour of younger learners during lessons is particularly good; teachers demonstrate respect for their students and students clearly respect their teachers
 - health and safety are effectively reinforced
- Assessment is well planned. External verifiers reports often congratulate the college on good assessment and verification practices. Examples of assignments set for the electro-technical technology courses are imaginative, using work-related scenarios to help motivate students. Teachers provide helpful and constructive comments on students' work and return marked work to students promptly.
- Students speak highly of the support they receive from their teachers during lessons and outside formal timetabled sessions. There is very effective pastoral support, and the individual learning plans for national diploma students show that tutors set challenging targets during the

termly individual progress reviews. Attendance and punctuality are monitored closely.

- The resources provided for motorcycle engineering are outstanding. The workshop is very well managed and maintained.
- The curriculum is very well planned to meet the needs of learners and employers.
- Quality assurance is very effective. The key priorities are understood by team managers and staff and strongly focus on continuous improvements in teaching and learning, student attendance and retention.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Managers work well as a team and have a clear vision for the engineering school. Teachers take pride in their subjects and in their teaching. Managers and staff are well motivated and strive to continually raise standards.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- retention rates on some courses
- the recording of learners' progress as they complete practice exercises in the motor vehicle workshop
- availability of practical extension tasks for the more able learners in the motorcycle engineering workshop
- insufficient use of ILT in electro-technical lessons and lack of access to a virtual learning environment
- the shabby appearance of a few classrooms, and some rooms and corridors which are inadequately heated.

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.

Yours sincerely

Bob Avery
Additional Inspector