

22 March 2007

Ms D Dale
Principal
Wiltshire College
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Dear Ms Dale

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 15 March. I am particularly grateful to the land-based teaching 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 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, lesson observations and observation of good practice examples.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in agriculture, countryside management, animal care, equine studies and horticulture and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- the high level of specialist expertise and industrial credibility of land-based teaching staff, who make good use of up-to-date industry information and 'real-life' examples to enhance their teaching
- thorough lesson planning including a high awareness of including essential features such as checks on understanding, supported by the use of a helpful checklist included as part of the planning form

- good integration of the development of wider key skills into learning through lessons, tutorials and the wide range of extra curricular activities in which learners are involved
- good practical teaching making very productive use of the extensive practical land-based resources
- good promotion of employability through the use of work placements, including full middle year placements in several subject areas, and mandatory duties in a realistic working environment on many of the college specialist land-based units, such as the farm and the equine yard
- opportunities for learners to gain relevant and useful additional qualifications, including in first aid and health and safety, on all courses
- good promotion of environmental sustainability including through the use of an additional qualification that is taken by animal care learners
- a wide range of enrichment activities including study tours both in the United Kingdom and abroad
- good support for learners including the use of individual tutorial folders, which are used and checked frequently to record effective targets and check on progress, as well as evidence for wider key skills
- the use of a 'retention officer' to support learners at risk of withdrawal, especially on level 2 courses, as well as a strong system for identifying these learners and supporting them
- effective strategic planning to preserve the land-based identity of the campus as well as maximise the opportunities of the merged college
- well-managed land-based enterprises which provide a productive learning environment as well as operating commercially
- good development of the campus to enhance physical resources and make the campus attractive and enjoyable as a learning environment including to the wider community through the many events that are run on the campus
- very effective promotion of land-based courses through attendance at events, shows and competitions both regionally and nationally including showing of college stock and undertaking demonstrations at shows with considerable impact on recruitment to a number of areas including full-time agriculture courses
- the involvement of land-based staff in work with a wide range of land-based industries, awarding bodies, the sector skill council and in attending specialist forums for land-based work
- prompt completion of the self-assessment report
- a very effective lesson observation scheme which supports improvement in the quality of lessons
- the maintenance and development of a museum of agriculture and rural life with a full-time curator
- development of the 'Community Campus' theme across the college with high emphasis on promoting 'Every Child Matters' themes.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- further development of the use of information and learning technology in learning including through the use of electronic records of animals and increasing the resources available through the college's e-study intranet site
- the use of peer observations and developing the role of subject learning coaches
- consideration of setting minimum target grades based on academic prior attainment and initial assessment of vocational skill.

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