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Mr Martin Tolhurst  
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Dear Mr Tolhurst

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 31 January and 1 February. 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 the students and employer representatives who gave up their time to meet with 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 show that overall success rates on Level 1, 2 and 3 courses for adults have consistently improved, and are high on many level 1 and level 2 courses.

- The success rates on NEWCAD Welding, NVQ2 Performing Engineering Operations and City & Guilds Electrotechnical Technology level 2 courses are well above the national averages.
- The NEWCAD courses at level 1 and level 2 are carefully structured to encourage learners to succeed and to progress to other nationally accredited qualifications.
- All the lessons observed were at least satisfactory, most were good and one was outstanding. Strengths included:
  - enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers who planned their teaching carefully, taking into account the needs of individual learners by making effective use of the college's recently introduced 'Learning Activity Plan' to provide extension tasks for the more able learners;
  - most lessons were well paced and included an appropriate variety of learning activity, motivating learners and maintaining their interest; for example, in a very well planned and structured practical welding lesson the teacher assessed each piece of work produced by the students and provided a mark in accordance with effort and competence; the marks were recorded on a progress monitoring sheet; learners were clearly well motivated and many strived to achieve higher marks;
  - during a lesson on hydraulic control circuits, students demonstrated confidence in using computer software to help design and simulate the operation of their circuits before constructing and testing the circuits using real components.
  
- The college has developed very effective systems for monitoring and recording the progress of engineering apprentices. The 'risk based' approach helps managers target support to those learners who are not making the progress expected of them.
- Arrangements for the delivery of the curriculum are very effective. The six week term structure provides good opportunities for teachers to carry out progress reviews with individual learners and to arrange structured 'catch up' and reinforcement activities for learners
- The college's lesson observation scheme is rigorous and the reports arising from the observations are comprehensive and include effective support for improvement.
- There is a successful and productive range of partnerships with employers and other work-based learning providers. Representatives from rail companies speak highly of the quality of engineering provision at Newham College.
- Managers and staff in the area are working hard to improve the achievements of learners and there is a very strong and successful focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Much progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report.

Areas for development, which were discussed during the feedback meeting, included:

- data supplied by the college shows a decline over the last three years in the overall success rates at levels 1 and 2 for 16-18 year olds
- some accommodation used for practical electronic and pneumatic/hydraulic engineering is cramped and noisy. During one lesson, the noise from the adjacent machine shop prevented some learners from hearing the instructions given by the teacher at the beginning of the lesson
- systems for systematically monitoring and recording the progression of learners from one level of course to the next are underdeveloped
- insufficient assessment of performance data relating to the college's engineering FE learners.

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