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Mrs Sara Mogel
Principal
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Dear Mrs Mogel

Ofsted survey inspection programme – a comparison of the effectiveness of post 16 providers

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit to the college with Glad Capewell Additional Inspector, to look at work in level 3 provision.

The visit, on 7 October 2007, provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and short visits to seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of Level 3 provision was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good. Standards and success rates are broadly in line with national averages. The most recent results show the college has continued to improve at a fast rate. Retention rates are generally satisfactory although the college is aware that in some subject areas they are low. Student achievement is good and the majority of students achieve their targets. Many also achieve additional qualifications including English and mathematics. The college is successfully raising students' aspirations. As a result, a high and steadily increasing proportion continue their education at university and the college reports that many students take up employment.

Quality of teaching and learning of Level 3 provision

The quality of teaching and learning at Level 3, including support and guidance is good. Teachers are well qualified with very good vocational experience and this, together with good resources and realistic work environments, promote students good understanding and development of vocational skills. Teaching and effective learning support meet the needs of all students very well. Teachers' good planning takes account of learning styles and students' prior knowledge. Students recognise that teachers have high expectations of them and independent learning, research skills and key skills are well developed in most lessons. Good support systems meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities well and are effective in enabling them to move on to the next stage of learning.

The tracking and monitoring of individual student progress are good. All students have individual learning plans and regular review meetings help them to manage their work responsibly, set targets, discuss progress and identify what else they need to do to help them achieve their learning and career goals. This helps them to keep on track. However, the rigour of attainment targets and consistency in setting them vary across courses.

Quality of curriculum

The extent to which programmes and activities meet students' needs and interests is outstanding. Progression rates from Level 2 to Level 3 courses and from modern apprenticeships to higher levels are good. Students settle smoothly into their studies as a result of their high quality induction which has been strengthened in response to student feedback. Collaboration with employers is excellent and many courses are delivered with them and are well matched to vocational and industry sector needs. Students have a wide choice of courses, extensive opportunities to study additional qualifications relating to their vocational area and a good range of trips and visits. These opportunities enhance students understanding of the professions and careers they choose to enter, and contribute to their enjoyment and very high levels of satisfaction with their courses.

Leadership and management of Level 3 provision

Leadership and management are good. Communication between senior and middle managers is good and the college vision and key aims are shared. Good collaboration with employers has benefited students significantly. It has led to improvements in the curriculum, improved student access to work placements and better understanding of skill needs. Self-evaluation is effective and is well supported through good monitoring and evaluation. The teaching and learning observation scheme is rigorous and evaluative. Consequently leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in provision and take action to tackle them. Consistent systems to support to students through the vocational plus programme and to monitor student progress have been established. However the tracking of those students who leave courses early and

the take-up of employment at end of Level 3 courses are not firmly established across all subject areas.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good. Recruitment to level 3 provision is inclusive, reflecting the wide range of students' prior attainment. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported. Students and staff say support is timely and meets needs. Teachers monitor and track individual students' progress extremely well and take timely action to address under-achievement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the challenge and consistency in setting challenging attainment targets
- improving self-evaluation through tracking destinations of learners who leave courses early and those who move into employment at the end of level 3 courses
- improving the retention rates on some courses.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop level 3 provision in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector