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28 November 2007

Mr N A Goffin
Principal
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Dear Mr Goffin

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 and students, during my visit on 21-22 November 2007 to look at work in level 3 provision.

The visit 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: discussions with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

- Students achieve well. Most begin level 3 courses having attained standards considerably below those usually expected nationally. They make good progress and the large majority gains at least pass grades from A and AS-level courses. Attainment of grades A and B is well below average.
- Many students succeed on level 2 courses and progress to level 3 where they continue to be successful. Some have no GCSE qualifications when they join the college, but make very good progress to achieve level 3 qualifications.
- The percentage of students completing level 3 courses is in line with that of similar colleges. The large majority of students are punctual and attend regularly.

Quality of teaching and learning, including academic guidance

- Teaching and learning are generally good. Teachers are competent subject specialists, usually set clear learning objectives for students and conduct lessons

at a brisk pace. Work does not always fully stretch the most able students. Students have very positive attitudes and enjoy learning because relationships with teachers are very good.

- Learners are well supported. Staff and students have confidence in the improved system for review of progress and targets with tutors, but subject teachers do not always advise students in detail how to improve prior to the termly reviews with tutors.

Quality of curriculum

- The curriculum is good and gives entrants a choice of 35 AS and A-level courses. A good range of BTEC National courses extends the range of opportunities.
- Students say how much they appreciate the extra-curricular opportunities available, including opportunities for residential experience. The college's location gives no scope on site for outdoor sport, but arrangements are made for students to use neighbouring sport and leisure facilities. Sports teams compete well in fixtures that must always be played away.
- Students find the educational and vocational guidance they receive helpful and the large majority continue to higher education, often to the neighbouring university.

Leadership and management

- Level 3 provision is well led and managed. Self-evaluation is effective and gives an accurate view of performance. Good links are in place with schools, and the college is actively collaborating in the development of the 14-19 curriculum.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is managed through a system initiated by the college with University of Leicester School of Education. College managers are increasingly participating in monitoring, and findings are then used to share good practice across subjects and management divisions.
- Leaders have gained approval in principle to relocate the college on a different site with new, purpose-built accommodation in 2009.
- The college has good capacity to improve further because achievement and the quality of education provided are consistently maintained at a good standard.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is outstanding. Students from a very wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds achieve well and relationships across the college are harmonious.
- The college enables students to succeed on level 3 courses although their attainment prior to starting these courses is low. Many have few qualifications from school when they first join the college, but progress successfully through lower levels of study to succeed at level 3.
- Many students do not have English as their first language, but their good progress enables them to achieve well. Students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities appreciate the impressive support they receive and they achieve well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- maximising the use of the methods available to enable students of higher academic potential to reach the highest grades in examinations
- ensuring that all teachers give clear advice to students on how to improve in the subject, prior to review with tutors
- sustaining collaboration with schools to enhance curricular progression 14-19, to benefit students' learning and their opportunity to gain worthwhile qualifications.

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 Learning Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tony Beaver
Additional Inspector