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Mr Mark Bramwell
Principal
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Dear Mr Bramwell

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 on 05 and 06 December 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: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and visits to a range of level 3 lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Standards at A and AS level are broadly average and above average on some BTEC courses.
- Achievement is outstanding as students enter the college with below average attainment as shown by GCSE scores but make good progress in almost all subject areas and in some, make outstanding progress. The national 'value-added' analysis system used by the college indicates that in 2007, 40% of students completing AS courses made outstanding progress. On A level courses almost all students made good progress.

- In many subjects progress is excellent with very few weak areas, although there are variations in progress between A level courses.

Quality of teaching and learning and academic guidance

The quality of teaching, learning and academic guidance is outstanding.

- Teaching is characterised by well organised lessons conducted at a brisk pace. Students enjoy the mixture of teacher directed work and more independent learning. This, together with the highly supportive and accessible approach of teachers, leads to strong student teacher relationships. Teachers take account effectively of the different needs of students. This includes their social and emotional needs so that students can access the curriculum and work towards challenging academic targets.
- Academic guidance is excellent. The formal system of reviews is supported by a highly effective electronic system which enables teachers and tutors to communicate rapidly and effectively in monitoring student's progress and well being. As a result interventions are made early to prevent underachievement setting in.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the level 3 curriculum is outstanding.

- The college offers an impressive range of courses at level 3 which cater highly effectively for students with widely differing needs, abilities and aspirations. Induction procedures are highly effective. Courses leading to a range of qualifications are supplemented by a programme of enhancement activities. These are extremely valuable in their own right but also support the main qualifications sought by the students.
- There is further curriculum provision for those level 3 students who require support with their learning. This includes those who have a learning difficulty as well as those deemed gifted and talented and who require additional provision to meet their needs.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The highly inclusive curriculum is kept under continuous review in order to best meet the needs of the students. This occurs across the whole of the level 3 provision and within subjects.
- The college's work is underpinned by a highly effective system of self evaluation. The monitoring and analysis of progress of students both individually and on different courses and programmes is robust. In addition a thorough, rigorous lesson observation programme provides high quality information on the quality of teaching and learning.

- College leaders ensure that all students are equally valued. Their inclusive philosophy means that the work of the college at all levels is successfully focused on meeting the varied needs of each individual student.

Inclusion

Inclusion is outstanding.

- The college welcomes all students regardless of their needs and the relentless drive to meet those needs is central to the ethos of the college. This is most obviously reflected in the wide range of level 3 courses provided but it is at the heart of almost all of the college's work in level 3 provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement in the few subject areas where achievement is not yet satisfactory.

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/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

Tom Winskill
Her Majesty's Inspector