

30 November 2006

Dr David Collins
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Dear Dr Collins

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006-07

Sector Subject Area 15: Business, Administration and Law

Thank you for your college's hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 22 and 23 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to your staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to learners who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey in business and administration. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but should we wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first.

The evidence used to inform judgements included: interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of learners' work and observation of seven lessons.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in business and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed

- Success rates on Association of Accountancy Technicians (AAT) NVQ courses, A-levels, foundation courses and the BTEC National Diploma are consistently high compared to the national averages in FE colleges.
- Action has been taken to address underperformance in the Level 2 full-time business studies course and the success rate on the BTEC First Diploma was outstanding in 2006.

- The business department is very inclusive. A very good range of courses are available from Entry Level to Level 4; students' progression is good. The business staff have worked closely with learning support staff to offer a very successful Level 1 course, based around employment skills and personal development, to meet learners' needs.
- Students benefit from and appreciate high quality teaching. They experience a variety of approaches in lessons; a good mix of teacher input, student activity and directed study, all enriched by current business examples to illustrate the theory taught. Teachers provide good structure and pace to lessons using a range of well thought out activities which are closely linked to the development of learners' examination and assignment skills. In some lessons insufficient attention was given to providing relevant extension work for students who finished an activity early.
- Students' learning is supported by well written handouts, regular tests, often using interactive power point quizzes and highly effective teacher questions during lessons. Students are set regular written work and appreciate the use of email to obtain extra guidance from their teacher if they are struggling.
- Students' enjoyment and understanding of business and law courses is enhanced by a good range of enrichment activities. These include residential visits to Wales and New York, day trips and visiting speakers. Students are encouraged to participate in Enterprise Projects and competitions; in 2006 a group were the north of England regional winners in the Shares 4 Schools competition.
- Teachers are well qualified and have expert subject knowledge. Staff development is effective in sharing good practice in teaching and learning and updating teachers' business skills. Many staff are examiners and external verifiers and use this expertise well in supporting students.
- Teachers' marking of students' written work is very detailed. The assessment cover sheets used throughout the department makes sure that students are very clear about where they have done well and where improvements are needed to meet criteria.
- Students' progress is regularly and closely monitored. Students target grade, informed by their prior attainment, is used by teachers and personal tutors to encourage them to achieve their potential. A newly introduced electronic monitoring system enables staff to communicate and monitor the progress of individual students in more detail but it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative. Students who fall below the standard expected are now required to attend additional sessions to improve their understanding and progress.
- Teachers and managers embrace a culture of continuous improvement. In the termly course reviews, data is used well to identify areas of underperformance. There is a good balance

between empowering staff to take ownership of their work, sharing good practice through the advanced practitioner and management arrangements to monitor performance.

Areas for development

- Improve the declining success rates on AS law and business studies courses.
- In AS and A-level law and business studies improve further the progress of learners in relation to their GCSE grades on entry.
- Improve access to appropriate resources to develop further the use of information learning technology in classroom-based learning activities. The college's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is used well in A-level law and its potential for further development is recognised by business staff.
- Some employer involvement is evident. A whole college strategy has been developed in recognition that there is scope for further engagement of employers in the delivery and assessment of courses.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business 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 at the end of the half-term following the inspection. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Bev Barlow
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools