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Mr Peter Birkett
Principal
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Dear Mr Birkett

Ofsted Survey Programme 2006/07

Aspect: The contribution made by CoVEs to the development of vocational work, including preparation for the specialised 14-19 diplomas, in schools.

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 21 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to Donna Barnell for her hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up her time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to other staff who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey into CoVEs' work with schools. Where published reports cite specific aspects of good practice it is usual practice to name the colleges involved. However, where reports identify common issues which represent barriers to progress, individual colleges will not be named.

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

Good practice observed included:

How well do learners achieve?

- There is some evidence that the performance of young people is improved by their involvement on college programmes. Schools report that learners' motivation and self esteem are improved and that their performance in other subjects improves. There are some examples of learners whose attitudes have been changed significantly by inclusion on the programme and where teachers consider that it has helped to re-engage some learners in education and training.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- Schools state that the teaching at the college is good. On the vocational GCSE, schools each provide a teacher to sit in the college lessons. These teachers value the specialist knowledge they gain from this and their exposure to different ways of teaching. The teacher also acts as a link with the rest of the course to ensure coherence. College teachers have received a range of staff development, some of which has addressed the particular challenges of teaching 14 to 16 year olds. The good specialist resources of the CoVE are used effectively to improve the quality of the learners' experience and the professional atmosphere within the CoVE is valued by both school teachers and the learners.

How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

- The CoVE's close links with the SSC at both national and local level have been used effectively to ensure that the issues affecting the industry are included within the programme to ensure that learners are better able to take up employment within the sector. Since recruitment onto the VGCSE programme is solely the responsibility of the school and not the college, the CoVE has no influence on ensuring that the programme meets learners' goals and aspirations. However, the working relationship between the teachers at the CoVE and those at the school ensures that the learning needs of individual learners are communicated effectively and are met.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- Recruitment onto the programme is the sole responsibility of the school and not the college. Learners receive appropriate information about the course from the school but value the additional information that they receive about attending the college each week.

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

- The flexibility of the college in working with and supporting schools is recognised as good by schools. Schools say that the college will, as far as possible, put on whatever the schools want. This includes the support being given by the college to a teacher responsible for a first diploma course who has never had any involvement in working with a vocational awarding body such as Edexcel. Communications between the college and participating schools are particularly good. The regular formal meetings between the college and the schools are seen as effective by the schools. The offer of the CACHE course by the college, although not taken up by many, is seen as a useful alternative by the schools.
- The CoVE is using its links with the SSC and employers effectively to lead on the development of the specialist diploma in this area.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- schools and the college do not currently have harmonised timetables. Both the college and the teachers in the schools consider this to be a significant barrier to the development of the provision in general and the specialised diplomas in particular. This issue is widely recognised and there are well developed plans for the schools and the college to harmonise timetables for 2007/08
- some schools are not giving their pupils an equal opportunity to opt for a college course and are selecting the young people who will be informed about the provision. It is yet to be decided if this will be a requirement for schools wishing to take part in the new specialist diploma
- future funding for IFP is unclear and both schools and the college consider this to be crucial to securing further development of 14 to 16 vocational provision.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the ways in which your CoVE supports 14-19 curriculum development in the area.

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 visit. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Handscombe
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