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Mr John Carroll
Principal
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Dear Mr Carroll

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 15 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to Val Carroll 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?

- Success rates are generally high across the engineering CoVE's provision. On courses for students aged 14 to 16 from local schools, attendance, retention and achievement rates are high in the engineering curriculum area. Progression by these students is also good. At 16, about one third choose to continue on an engineering course at the college and a similar proportion chooses college courses in other curriculum areas.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- Engineering provision at the college has been judged outstanding in each of the college's last two inspections. Schools speak very positively about the quality of engineering courses provided to their own students. Teachers now have considerable experience of using successful teaching and learning strategies across the 14 to 19 age range, as well as on courses for adult students and company training courses. Teaching and learning are effectively adapted to meet the needs of students aged 14 to 16, by breaking the learning process down into smaller components of theory, demonstration and practice. This methodology helps to keep these students well motivated and leads to them achieving well. Good use is made of real and realistic work-related assignments for assessment purposes. CoVE teachers demonstrate a willingness to get involved in course design to ensure that particular needs of schools and employers are met. The schools consider this to be a very valuable contribution.

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

- The engineering department, of which the CoVE is a part, makes good provision for 14 to 19 year olds. There are appropriate progression routes in all major engineering disciplines. The range of courses for students aged 14 to 16 is good and includes first diplomas and NVQs in engineering and in motor vehicle. Some 150 young people from schools are currently taking engineering courses, mostly for one day per week. Open courses are largely funded through the increasing flexibility programme (IFP) or MPower, a Manchester initiative to raise aspirations and improve post-16 participation. The college has achieved an award for the scale, quality and achievements on its MPower-sponsored engineering provision.
- The department also provides specific courses for individual schools, in partnership with Skills Solutions, which takes responsibility for arranging work placements and assessment in some cases. There is full-time engineering provision for a small number of students needing an alternative Key Stage 4 curriculum and about 20 more disaffected school students have engineering or motor vehicle placements coupled with key skills and job seeking skills as part of the work and learn project. To increase capacity, a range of twilight courses for students aged 14 to 16 have been introduced by the college, including first certificates in engineering and motor vehicle. These have proved popular and the range will be extended next year. This provision is seen as something of a forerunner for the diplomas, particular in the way it requires students to move between their home school and the college.
- The CoVE's strong links with employers coupled with the college's partnership with Skills Solutions should ensure sufficiency in the range of engineering employers able to provide the volume of work placements needed for the specialised diploma if predicted numbers materialise. The

marketing of engineering courses is enhanced by the involvement of employers, who demonstrate their willingness to put across the reality of working in the sector to redress out-dated misconceptions still held by some parents and young people.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- Engineering staff are fully involved in the arrangements for recruiting and selecting young people for courses for 14 to 16 year olds. Following initial interviews carried out by school staff, college teachers normally interview young people at their school and check their suitability for the course applied for. Parents are invited to these interviews and about 50% attend. Advice and guidance are good. These students are well supported throughout their time on college courses. Their schools and parents are kept regularly informed about their attendance and progress. Engineering courses are marketed well through taster sessions for schools and an annual careers convention, in addition to the traditional methods.

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

- Decisions about involvement and leadership of the different specialised diploma lines have been taken locally by the Tameside Diploma Consortium created for the purpose by the local 14 to 19 partnership. This is building on a tradition of quite strong and well-established partnership working in Tameside. The consortium includes the college, the local sixth form college and 18 schools, as well as the local authority, Skills Solutions, Connexions and training providers. The area has submitted to introduce four of the first five diploma lines in 2008, with the CoVE leading on the engineering diploma. The self assessment in engineering is extremely positive, giving a green light rating to all aspects. There is a strong consensus behind the CoVE being the appropriate choice to lead this line.
- Clear progress has been made at strategic level in developing appropriate delivery models. In engineering, this will include one day per week at the college for the specialist components for school-based students at levels 1 and 2. At level 3, students are likely to spend all their time at the college. The preferred model will make the degree to which students have to travel across the area very manageable and there is a coherent intention of developing diploma students' independent travel capabilities alongside independent learning skills.
- There is a good range and quality of specialist engineering resources at the college. Engineering teachers have strong vocational expertise, participate in good professional up-dating and have frequent links with industry. This helps ensure that courses and teaching and learning practices are informed by a reliable understanding of current industry standards. The good proportion of female teachers in engineering provides young women in the area with positive role models and will help to encourage more female students to take up engineering.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- further work is required in the development of the area prospectus, but this is scheduled to go live in February 2007
- more progress is needed in securing the elements of common timetabling required to create the degree of synchronicity needed to support equal access to all diploma lines across the area. However, schools are quite confident that the degree of commonality needed can be achieved without detriment to the rest of their curriculum
- there is a relative lack of involvement of subject specialists in diploma developments at area level at this stage. This has been justified because detailed specifications are not yet available and little further progress can be made in developing more precise delivery models, teaching, learning and assessment strategies until they are.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the ways in which your CoVE supports 14 to 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. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector