

13 December 2006

Mr Keith Bate
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Dear Mr Bate

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006-07

Sector Subject Area 15: Business, Administration and Law

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 11 and 12 December 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 the visit. Please pass on my thanks to those 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 four 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 in business courses for both learners aged 16-18 and for adult learners are well above the national average for similar colleges. There is an improving trend in success rates at GCE A-Level for learners aged 16 to 18 and these are well above the national benchmark for similar colleges in accounting and business. Retention is often well above the national averages for similar colleges in AS and A-Level business provision over the past three years.

- Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are understood by learners.
- Teachers have expert subject knowledge. Staff development is effective in enabling teachers to maintain technical currency in their subject and to share good practice in teaching and learning.
- Teachers have very good rapport with learners and provide positive and supportive feedback on performance in lessons.
- Teachers' marking is very thorough. Feedback on learners' work is of consistently high quality; this leaves learners in no doubt about how well they have done against the criteria and where improvement is needed.
- Learners use information and communication technology confidently and well to support their learning
- There is a broad based range of courses with clear progression routes. Additional qualifications enhance work-readiness and provide stretch and challenge for its higher ability learners, such as awards in customer service, the certificate in financial studies, or NVQs in accounting (Association of Accounting Technicians).
- This is a highly inclusive college. The curriculum is very flexible, responsive and inclusive in providing for learners with a wide ability range and has been further enhanced with the introduction of the BTEC National Award. A significant number of learners study for a mix of vocational and academic qualifications.
- The pastoral and academic review process is rigorous and monitors progress regularly across all aspects of learners' experience in the college. The process is very effective in identifying learners' individual and ongoing support needs and in providing appropriate and targeted support, such as personal skills development and workshops. The support and approachability of teachers and tutors is particularly valued by learners.
- Employer engagement is well developed and has enabled the college to:
 - win a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in 'Professional accountancy support services'
 - provide a broad range of highly effective, flexible and responsive training for employers using both certificated qualifications and customised courses
 - support the currency of teachers' industrial experience and technical updating
 - provide extensive careers information for learners both prior to their entry to the college and during their programmes, such as the 'Jobs Fair'.
- Teachers and managers embrace a culture of continuous improvement. The monitoring of college performance is highly effective in identifying areas for improvement. The resulting actions are equally effective, as is clear from the successful focus on raising framework achievement in work-based learning. Strategies for bringing

about improvements in courses which have not met challenging targets, such as addressing a decline in achievement rates in AS Levels, are appropriate and well considered.

- The college has strong links with feeder schools; the college delivers the vocational GCSE in business at two local schools as part of its 'increased flexibility'/ 14-19 Pathfinder work.

Areas for development included to:

- maintain the improving trend in the proportion of learners achieving higher grades at A-Level
- continue to address declining achievement rates at AS Level
- although individual progress tracking is well embedded, develop further the use of value added for the overview of learners' progress in the curriculum area, and across the college, against national benchmarks.
- develop further the use of information learning technology in classroom-based learning activities to accommodate more fully the range of students' learning styles.

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

Russell Jordan
Her Majesty's Inspector