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Ms Sue Daley
Principal
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Dear Ms Daley

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 09 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to Claire George and Dawn Telford for their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to other staff and the headteachers of the schools 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?

- Retention and achievement rates for students aged 14 to 16 are high at between 80% and 90%. Progression rates are also high, with 84% of young people moving on to post 16 provision. Attendance is very good at 92%. Schools speak about raised self esteem and aspirations and there is some evidence of the programmes helping learners in the rest of their curriculum.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- The quality of teaching and learning is considered to be good by participating schools. College lecturers have had some training to support them in working with students aged 14 to 16. Some of this has been with help from school teachers. The schools receive good support from the college, for example on assessment methods and through the sharing of good quality resources. The very good links that the CoVE has with the sector skills council (SSC) is valued by the schools in making the lessons more relevant to the world of employment. All learners have targets which are agreed jointly between the college staff and the schools. Learners have access to the college virtual learning environment (VLE) and are able to access lesson notes and assignments from home.

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

- The different models that are used give schools the flexibility to ensure that programmes suit the school, its staffing and its pupils. Programmes which are mostly run on the school premise avoid learners having to travel for up to 30 miles into the college, although it is recognised that these learners do not experience the full college environment. The good links with the SSC are being used effectively to ensure that the programme is industry-related. The very thorough recruitment process is recognised as an essential part of ensuring that learners are on the programme most likely to suit them. Excellent communications between the college and the schools ensure that any issues identified during the course are passed on to the other organisation. Schools work closely with the college to ensure that any time missed due to, for example, illness is made up. The college is leading the development of the new specialist diplomas effectively and schools recognise the college's expertise in this. It is still early in the development of this programme.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- The recruitment process represents a key factor in the success of the provision for 14 to 16 year olds. Learners receive very good information about the programme and CoVE teachers have a good level of contact with interested learners over an extended period prior to the start of the programme. They attend the school options evenings to ensure that learners and parents are involved in the decision making.
- Pre-course information for the young people is good. College teachers visit the school and meet the young people; they develop a good rapport with them before the programme starts.

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

- Schools speak about the 'excellent communications' with the college. They all feel very involved with the development of the provision including the specialist diploma. Teachers from the schools, including head teachers, attend the college to monitor the work that is going on and to gain additional sector-specific knowledge from CoVE staff. The college has a formal partnership agreement with each of the schools, which sets out responsibilities clearly and which is valued by schools. The college and the participating schools have all harmonised timetabling to enable young people to take part more easily. This is seen as essential to the success of the programme.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- there is some evidence that in some schools young people are being selected to join the programme rather than it being an informed choice by the learner and his/her parents
- future funding is seen as a potential barrier to the development of the programme by the head teachers. At present the cost is being subsidised by the increasing flexibility programme (IFP) funding. Schools believe that there is no cost saving for them when their learners are at the college for a day. There is a strategy for the future with an agreed set of principles for allocating the dedicated schools grant for this work.

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 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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