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Mr J Latham
Principal
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Dear Mr Latham

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 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to Chris Jenkins 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 joint collaborative work with a small number of schools to offer an AVCE single award, the IT practitioners certificate at level 2 and the ICT systems and networking support practitioners' course at level 2. Success rates are low but work has been done to improve the structure and delivery of courses this year. The CoVE does not have any 14 to 16 learners from local schools that attend college lessons but it works frequently with a small number of schools.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- There are good plans to share teaching and learning resources. The CoVE has developed the skills of staff in a number of schools well. A CoVE teacher team teaches at a school to develop the skills of the schoolteacher in providing specialist IT courses. Agreement has been reached for CoVE teachers to team teach at a specialist technology school next year. The CoVE's teaching materials will be made available to all Cornwall schools through the college intranet in the next two months. The CoVE was involved with developing and piloting Standard Unit materials at levels 1-3. The CoVE loaned laptops to a school and provided a teacher to deliver the AVCE and A-level business courses at a school.
- IT technicians and apprentices from four schools have attended level 3 and 4 courses at the CoVE. Twelve teachers from a primary school took the European computer driving licence (ECDL) course and two school teachers took a blended learning course.
- All schools were invited to attend three events covering vendor qualifications and general awareness raising over the last three years. Most schools attended at least one event. The CoVE recognises that few schools are aware of the extent of IT skill shortages in employment locally. The awareness raising days clearly emphasised that training is available for teachers, IT technicians and pupils through the CoVE.
- Work has recently started on preparing for the new diplomas and there is much to do. Planning for the delivery of units is at an early stage of development but the college has a rich source of learning materials and experienced teachers on which to draw. Most schools in Cornwall have sixth forms and historically these schools have been less involved with the CoVE. No work has yet been done on assessment methods for the new diplomas.

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

- There is well established joint working to develop learning pathways and curriculum design, including the use of vendor qualifications, with a few schools. The CoVE has recently reviewed the curriculum offer for schools. Changes have been made to make courses better suited to learners' abilities in an attempt to improve success rates.
- At one school a CoVE teacher team teaches with a schoolteacher at the school. Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 students at the specialist engineering school take Microsoft A plus with an IT practitioners systems support OCR qualification, plus A-levels for older students. The school sees this as an effective way of helping learners into employment by providing them with skills that are sought after in the county.
- The Cove's curriculum manager has recently been seconded to the local authority to drive the development of the new diplomas. The college will lead on the development of the IT diplomas. College teachers are planning for the new diplomas with partners using the provisional standards. The

CoVE has been actively involved in the design of the new diplomas. It held the specialised diploma development group for E-skills meeting at the college in the summer of 2006 and fed back on the specifications for the diplomas at each level to the Sector Skills Council.

- CoVE teachers are uncertain how well the existing CoVE provision links to the proposed 14 to 19 diplomas. All prospective partners met for the first time in the last two weeks. Self-assessment and fact finding has been completed. An implementation plan for each working group will be established from December. Steering groups will be established for each diploma line but the membership has not yet been set. A Web-based area-wide prospectus is partially in place.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- Prospectuses are sent to all schools annually. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 from most schools attend taster session workshops annually at the CoVE. This year taster sessions will be offered to students in Year 9 who are considering taking the IT option at Key Stage 4. At the end of the taster day, parents will be invited to speak to employers, work-based learning providers and connexions advisers who will be present at school.
- A county-wide diploma entitlement for learners has been agreed. Agreement has also been reached for schools and colleges to bid for a Cornwall-wide IT network to facilitate collaborative activity such as the use of electronic individual learning plans. No work has yet taken place on how learners will be guided or advised about the new diplomas.

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

- The CoVE communicates effectively with a small number of schools but communication with most secondary schools is too infrequent. Most schools attended at least one event organised by the CoVE in the last three years.
- In September 2006 the CoVE manager was seconded to the local authority to lead the Cornwall development of 14 to 19 diplomas. The CoVE is leading on ILT in the production of the prospectus and on the development of county-wide electronic individual learning plans. The CoVE is not sure yet of funding needs for the new diplomas.
- Partnership arrangements with a small number of schools are well established. The CoVE reports that historically schools have felt able to provide the resources and expertise needed to deliver ICT at school without sending students to college.
- Curriculum leadership changed recently when the CoVE manager was seconded to the local authority two months ago. The new manager is an experienced member of staff but is new to the present role and not yet familiar with all aspects of it.
- Communication between the Cove and employers is frequent and the views of employers are acted upon effectively.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- communication between the CoVE and most schools to develop productive links
- success rates in IT qualifications taken by school pupils through collaborative activity
- the rate of progress in the development of the new specialised diplomas.

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

Gloria Dolan
Her Majesty's Inspector