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Dr Paul Phillips
Principal
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Dear Dr Phillips

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 23 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to Andrew Williams and Emily Herringshaw for their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and for giving up their 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:

- well-established partnerships
- the establishment of good relationships with schools and the local authority over time
- clear responsibilities for strategic and operational management and curriculum design
- a good co-ordination network between the college and the schools
- the flexible and responsive approach of the college.

How well do learners achieve?

- There is no evidence yet available in respect of 14-19 diplomas.
- College data indicate good retention and achievement rates at around 80% on increasing flexibility programme (IFP) courses.
- Eleven learners from eight local schools are currently following the catering programme at level 1.
- A hospitality and catering programme at level 2 is offered to seven learners, all from one local school.
- A high proportion of learners on the level 1 programme move on to the level 2 course. Of those, the majority move into a job in the hospitality industry.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- Teachers work on a variety of programmes at the college and are able to see clear links between the IFP and other progression routes.
- Some teachers carry out teaching in partner schools to improve links between the CoVE and schools. They also provide some school-based specialist vocational teaching where this is not available in a school which particularly supports learners from special schools to make the transition to the college.
- Development work to date has not addressed specific curriculum content as this is not yet available. However, it has addressed more general issues such as the legal position of 14 to 19 year olds. Staff development has been provided.
- There is a good understanding of the format and intentions of the new diploma. The CoVE manager has good links with the sector skills council (SSC) and the national and local CoVE networks.
- No specific progress has yet been made in developing teaching and learning strategies for the diploma. The college has given consideration to differentiation and different learning styles.
- Current learners have not been involved in development work, though comments from current IFP learners are fed back to the CoVE networks and SSC where appropriate. Learners will become involved as the diploma begins to be developed.
- The college plans to use additional CoVE funding to develop vocationally related IT systems and e-learning materials, which will be shared with partner schools. The e-learning facilities will enable learners based some distance from the college in this semi rural area to complete some aspects of the theory work on line. There are plans to share resources and learning materials between the two joint CoVE members. The college comments that there are few available teaching materials in this area. Whilst there has been no development of specific teaching and learning materials for the diploma to date the practices being developed for the earlier diplomas will be extended to the hospitality diploma.

- There has been no development work on assessment methods as the diploma line has not yet been developed, but there is an awareness of the need to adapt assessment to different abilities and learning styles.

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

- The college works closely with partner schools through its co-ordinators of school links to tailor the CoVE provision to meet the curriculum needs of the schools and the learners, the vocational requirements of the examining boards and the industry, and the specific needs of its 14 to 16 learner groups on the IFP, many of whom are disaffected and have little interest in school.
- The college is awaiting more information on how some of the other existing vocational qualifications will integrate with the diplomas. In the interim, it is designing a flexible and learner-centred programme into which it plans to fit the diploma.
- The college has offered support to schools to develop its extended schools offer. The planning for this came rather too late, this year for there to be significant take up of these opportunities. The college has also sent some vocational specialists into schools to support vocational teaching.
- Good progress has been made in developing links and establishing partnerships. General work has been done to provide an area-wide structure which could support the delivery of diplomas jointly by local schools and the college. Work has also been carried out to develop shared resources. A joint skills centre capital project is about to be ratified and will be located on the site of a school which is to be re-built.
- The Hospitality Services CoVE does not appear to have had a particular impact on these developments. General work is being undertaken in relation to all the main areas of learning, most of which are not CoVE related.
- The college has effective links with the awarding body and the SSC. The CoVE manager meets regularly with the SSC representative who feeds back at national level.
- Aspects of good practice are reflected in the well-established and well-managed partnership, which has built effective links over time, the flexible and responsive approach by the college and the good coordination network between the college and the schools.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- Good links have been established with schools. College co-ordinators attend Year 9 option evenings at local schools to raise awareness of careers and training in the hospitality industry. There are good links with parents. An information booklet has been produced for parents of school students and they are invited into college presentations. Some useful and well-presented guidance booklets are available to inform local employers. There is no other published material available to inform learners.

- The college plans to produce an overall area-wide student information prospectus when further preliminary work on diploma developments has been completed.

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

- Communications between the CoVE and local schools are regular, effective and productive.
- The North Somerset partnership, made up of one federation of Weston schools and one federation of North Somerset schools, is well-established. The partnership is well managed by the strategic partnership board. Various levels of partnership working have been formalised into the arrangements (strategic, operational, subject specific, development and steering groups). The college is represented at each level and takes the lead on many.
- The college had already developed its restaurant and kitchen facilities to a high standard before the acquisition of CoVE status. It is planned to use subsequent CoVE funding to develop vocationally-related IT systems and e-learning. The college is responsive in providing staff for partnership development work.
- The curriculum manager for hospitality and tourism has overall responsibility for curriculum leadership and management in this area of learning. He will be responsible for overseeing the subject specific diploma curriculum when further information is available.
- The CoVE manager is a member of the Weston Hospitality Association and attends their monthly meetings. This contact provides a source of information and comment both ways. A preliminary questionnaire has been issued to employers. There has been general agreement with local employers to support the requirements for training placements for diploma learners and the college is planning to share its database of employers with local schools.
- There has been staff development on the legal requirements of working with the younger age group. A mentoring scheme has been set up to provide subject specific support. The college uses experienced staff on its current IFP. Less experienced staff who wish to work with this age group are given the opportunity to do so with the support of a mentor.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- the early stage of development of the hospitality diploma makes specific development of the curriculum impossible
- matching delivery with expectations to provide a curriculum that will meet achievement requirements and be very vocationally-based
- a clear strategy for the funding of additional learning support when several different providers are involved in delivering the qualification.

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

Linda Truscott
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