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Ms Stella Mbubaegbu  
Principal  
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Dear Ms Mbubaegbu

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 12 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to Deborah See for her 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?

- It is too early to judge impact of the business, accounting and financial services CoVE on achievement and standards at this stage. College data on the programmes run within the gas installation and maintenance CoVE show good participation and progress of students, though it was not possible from the visit to provide an overall judgment of achievement and standards. However, retention is good and attendance on programmes for students aged 14 to 16 is also good.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- Through the investment in resources and the updating of equipment, teachers have been made aware of the impact of the CoVEs. The curriculum developments arising from the CoVEs and work with the 14 to 16 cohort, have helped staff to develop their teaching and learning strategies and have improved their skills and practices. Equipment and buildings have been improved and there are good resources, which are well used. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has been facilitated and e-learning modules are being developed for use across the college.
- External expertise has been used to enhance the delivery of the courses and teachers have extended their knowledge and expertise of current industry practices through working with business and employers. College teachers have good knowledge of the specialised diplomas in their own areas. Work on improving assessment practices and learning as a direct result of the CoVEs is still at an early stage of development.

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

- There has been some constructive curriculum development as a result of the CoVEs. The CoVE in business, accounting and financial services is developing longer progression pathways by planning for a foundation degree and also by working with schools to deliver financial capability as an element within the Every Child Matters agenda. Financial sector employers have usefully been involved in this work.
- Though the focus of the gas installation and maintenance CoVE is narrow, much good development work has been done in construction such as setting up the off-site motor vehicle/motor cycle course, which is also addressing some needs of the high priority under-16 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETs) group. Good clear pathways have been established from level 1 to foundation degree.
- The college has helped the schools to develop their vocational curriculum offering in areas such as health and social care, hair and beauty, motor vehicle and construction. Through the college and the work of the 14 to 19 increased flexibility working group, there is good involvement of work-based trainers. The college has also established good links with local special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to help them offer suitable vocational and work-related learning opportunities.
- Professional bodies and employers are actively involved in the design of new courses within each of the CoVEs, an example being the Institute of Financial Services Certificate in Financial Planning. The college is preparing staff for the new specialised diplomas through briefings and staff development, though it was not possible to ascertain extent of staff knowledge.
- The college has led on the Gateway submission and the expertise within the college has contributed very effectively to the self assessment.

Synchronised timetable blocks have been established with some of the local schools, but as yet there is no common timetable.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- In relation to the specialised diplomas, work around guidance and support is at an early stage. The knowledge and commitment of some schools towards the specialised diplomas varies, making it difficult to make more progress in planning approaches to advice, guidance and support at this stage.

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

- Communications within the college about the CoVEs and with some of the schools is very good. Good, clear information is given by the college on the developments taking place and it has established good working relationships with the schools through longstanding pre 16 provision and leadership of the increased flexibility programme (IFP) partnership. Key links with appropriate personnel within the schools have been set up and they are invited to take part in curriculum development.
- College resources and equipment are used well by the schools whose students benefit from facilities they would not otherwise have access to. Expertise of college staff is also well used to advise on curriculum developments and the college provides good leadership and support. Effective staff development events have been put on by the college.
- The CoVEs are well managed and there is a clear vision of how to take developments forward.

Areas for development in conjunction with schools and the local education authority, which we discussed, included:

- planning and agreeing a common timetable sufficiently extensive to support the delivery model adopted for the diplomas
- more systematic and planned professional development, especially for school staff
- ensuring the expertise of the IFP working group is used to inform further 14 to 19 developments
- strategies to engage all schools effectively in engaging with the specialised diploma development
- developing reporting structures (for informing parents and students about specialised diplomas and for keeping them informed about progress)
- completing the skills audit and mapping.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the ways in which your CoVEs support 14-19 curriculum development in the area.

As I explained at our meeting, 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

Peter Green  
Her Majesty's Inspector