

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Gareth Rees
Principal
Askham Bryan College
Askham Bryan
York
YO23 3FR

Dear Mr Rees

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 04 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to Lindsey Johnson and Dave Cooper 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 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

- wider skills development

Learners aged 14 to 16 are developing wider skills which they are able to apply across their school subjects. Some pupils have achieved better results than those predicted for them as a result. Learners appreciate the style of the programmes and respond positively to being taken out of the school environment to learn. Teachers report modifications to sometimes challenging behaviour as a result.

- good collaborative work to engage students in vocational studies
- good promotion of vocational opportunities to schools through the CoVE

CoVE teachers liaise with school teachers to make links between their own provision and learners' other studies in schools. Teachers are able to develop their own knowledge in greater depth through professional development activities provided by CoVE teachers, and to contextualise this learning within their own subject areas.

The College has a good understanding of the format and intentions for the new diplomas and has been in discussion with specialist HE providers about the potential impact of these on prospective students' knowledge base. Development work has taken account of aspects of teaching and learning. CoVE teachers and school teachers have found that taking students out of the school environment is productive and has a beneficial impact on both behaviour and achievement. The college has developed some interesting and innovative resources to support the diploma curriculum. These include interactive CD-Roms and specific activities to engage school students, such as cheese making, sausage making, and food miles workshops.

CoVE provision links well to the curriculum followed by students in schools. Teachers collaborate to find ways of interweaving strands and aspects of the CoVE provision into school work.

The CoVE provision also links well to the proposed 14 to 19 diplomas in this curriculum area. The CoVE works with a range of schools, and has very strong links with schools with the same vocational specialism. It works in close collaboration with these schools, sharing resources, including staffing, developing teaching and learning materials, and facilitating links with industry.

The college cites funding constraints as the main barrier to the future effectiveness of its collaborative work.

Information about the CoVE provision is disseminated to school teachers, who cascade this to their students. Students express high levels of interest in the work of the CoVE, and understand how this can enhance their present studies and future careers. The college is working with the Connexions service to give advice and guidance to sixteen year-olds. This is still in development.

- good, effective links with a wide range of partners to develop and implement a relevant vocational curriculum and to meet the needs of learners and industry
- good collaboration to share good practice

The CoVE is communicating well with schools in the locality. It is currently trying to move away from offering tasters for York schools to offering full qualifications, to bring York in line with other schools in North Yorkshire. The

CoVE is working with technology teachers in schools to develop the curriculum. The college's centres throughout and beyond North Yorkshire are providing specific areas of provision to match the needs of the local area. The college works in partnership with three other colleges to ensure that provision is comprehensive and not duplicated unnecessarily. There are regular meetings with heads and principals to look at the Gateway process.

The college works with the North Yorkshire business and education partnership to run specific events to attract young people into vocational provision. One of NYBEP's priorities is to include local examples of high value added businesses. College staff have good, current occupational skills and experience and extensive links with industry. They use these links productively to contextualise learning for young people and to channel young people towards appropriate career routes, particularly in the context of aspects of the sector with shortages of skilled staff. The college works with other CoVEs to share good practice.

The college appointed a manager for 14 to 19 curriculum leadership in April 2006, but the person appointed resigned after a few months. The position is currently being re-advertised, and a new person will be appointed early next year. Responsibility for curriculum leadership is currently being taken by other members of the team

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- There are some concerns that the new specialised diplomas will reduce the time in the workplace that students currently have through national diplomas, and will lack sufficient academic rigour to create an effective access point to HE. The college has been in discussion with specialist HE providers on this point. Employers are not all fully aware of the implications of the specialised diplomas for their business, though there is a high level of collaborative working through a number of different networks and support mechanisms. The SSC carried out a consultation process, but this has not always resulted in employers' views being accurately reflected.

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. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jill Szutenberg
ALI