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Ms Jeanne Harding
Principal
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Dear Ms Harding

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 14 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to Vic Reid for his hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up his 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?

- Recruitment to the CoVE improved significantly between 2003/04 and 2004/05, and 2005/06 saw an additional 1026 starts. The most marked improvements are at level 1 and level 4, with recruitment up by 387 and 575 respectively. There has also been an increase in the number of learners accessing short courses for employers and in those taking NVQ awards.

- The total volume of certificated outcomes across all levels has increased over the same period. In 2005/06 there was a significant increase across partner institutions, with 630 additional achievements at level 1, and 476 additional achievements at level 2, compared to the previous year.
- In 2006, 43 students aged 14 to 16 achieved the GCSE in engineering with 39% gaining an A*-C grade. About 20% progressed to full time college programmes. In the same period 10 students in this age group gained a full NVQ in performing engineering operations (PEO) and the remaining six achieved two of the four units. Eleven students progressed to Dudley College and, of these, six enrolled on engineering programmes.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- The college's partnership arrangements with schools are particularly strong and exhibit some good practices. Teachers work collaboratively to deliver a range of engineering programmes from levels 1 to 4. Planning for the future specialised diplomas is well underway with an established and successful 14 to 19 consortium. Expressions of interest to pilot the specialist diploma were co-ordinated within the authority. The college leads on the engineering bid within the Dudley North 14 to 19 consortium, building on well-established school links and staff expertise. Schools and college staff are experienced in area-wide management of learners in collaborative contexts and collaborative curriculum development and programme delivery.
- A curriculum advisory group includes representatives from colleges and schools. Regular meetings have been taking place for the last 18 months to share development work for the 14-19 diploma and to produce high quality learning materials. Outlines for the new diplomas have been produced and the team is waiting for further guidance on the units.
- Curriculum planning and timetabling is managed to support the best use of resources and teaching expertise between the colleges and schools.

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

- CoVE provision is planned to build upon and broaden the existing curriculum choice in schools. Learners experience the programmes as a joined-up learning experience. Teachers work across sites and take part in an introductory fun day for students with informal learning activities. Parents are involved in options choices.
- The CoVE consortium includes representatives from SEMTA and City and Guilds. Structured discussions have taken place with the college and SEMTA on the specialised engineering diploma. SEMTA have productive working relationships with the college on a range of key aspects of the skills agenda.
- Learner response to the young apprenticeship, NVQ in PEO, BTEC certificate and diploma has exceeded expectations. A number of BTEC programmes are being delivered jointly with students moving between

partners in order to access their curriculum choice. The local authority (LA) has supported the initiative with transport between sites.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- College and school teachers work across both sites. College teachers are actively involved in options and parents evenings. Flyers are distributed outlining engineering programme information and qualification progression opportunities. Engineering programmes feature in the schools' options prospectus. All learners receive a student handbook and have access to the CoVE website. Induction is carried out at both the school and the college.
- The Dudley local area prospectus is under development along with the Dudley Portal, an e-learning platform and virtual workspace to support the new diplomas.
- High Arcal School has specifically designed an application form for engineering options which involves research into engineering career opportunities and vocational learning.

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

- CoVE work is well advanced and is specifically supporting the development of the specialised diplomas with particularly strong leadership from the lead college, Dudley. The BlackCCAT CoVE involves the five engineering colleges across the Black Country. It has strong links with local schools and works effectively with the local authorities across Dudley's partnership groups.
- Links with Wolverhampton University, SEMTA, City and Guilds and the five colleges are productive. Future planning and development are well aligned with regional, national and international agendas. Management of the CoVE is thorough, with regular review, monitoring and self assessment processes. There is much sharing of resources, information and good practice.
- The CoVE supports the planning and development of the 14 to 19 specialist diploma in engineering, joint curriculum development of an engineering foundation degree and has delivered the first national pilot of the Automotive Academy re-employment/skills passport programme. The CoVE co-ordinator is trained as a productivity and competitiveness (PAC) analyst. Dudley College delivers EAL business improvement techniques at NVQ Level 2 to four local companies as part of the PAC Framework.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- further promotion of the work of the CoVE
- the college and its partners are fully aware of the barriers in developing the specialised diplomas, for example cost of transport, cost of staff development and training, pay differentials. Financial considerations may be in danger of damaging the very good partnership relations, but those

involved remain very positive that these are difficulties that will be overcome.

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

Judy Birkenhead
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