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Dear Ms Morris

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006-07

Sector Subject Area 15: Business, Administration and Law

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 28 February and 1 March 2007. I am particularly grateful to your staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to learners who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey in business and administration. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but should we wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first.

The evidence used to inform judgements included: interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of learners' work and observation of nine lessons.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen in business and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed

- Students' achievements on vocational courses are good and generally compare favourably with national averages. Retention rates are high on most courses.
- Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives that are understood by students. Teachers mostly use a range of student activities which includes group work, practical activities and research. These are supported by well written handouts and enriched by current

business examples to illustrate the theory taught. However, in a minority of the lessons observed there was an over reliance on the teacher and insufficient use of effective questioning techniques to check out students' learning.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and create a productive working atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers have a very good rapport with learners and clearly understand the specific needs of individual students' but insufficient attention is given to planning for differentiated activities other than by the quality of students' work.
- Assignments and assessments are carefully marked and teachers' feedback informs students how well they have done in relation to the grading criteria and exactly what they need to do to improve. The correction of students' spelling and grammar mistakes is not done consistently throughout the department.
- Guidance and support is outstanding. Students who are likely to benefit from additional support are identified very early and the process of referral to academic support is continuous throughout their course. The positive impact of additional academic support sessions clearly improved the AS law pass rate in 2006. Homework clubs are held three nights a week to support students who are having difficulties.
- The college has invested heavily in the access to IT facilities to enable staff to use information learning technology in classroom-based learning activities. Teachers have been trained in the use of electronic whiteboards and effectively use PowerPoint to present key points. Staff have made good progress in developing support materials, including an electronic text book and links to useful websites, for students on the college's virtual learning environment. Self assessment recognises this is an area for further development.
- There is a broad range of courses with clear progression routes. College data indicates that a large proportion of students progress on to higher level business courses in college and from level 3 courses to higher education. The rate of progression from AS to A-level is lower than expected.
- Students' progress is regularly and closely monitored. Students minimum target grade, informed by their prior attainment along with homework grades and results from their topic tests are used well to identify students who need extra support. Students have a termly one to one review with their subject teachers and personal tutors. Action plans arising from these meetings clearly indicate what a student needs to do to further improve.
- There is a commitment by staff to continuous improvement. Teams discuss students who are causing concern and develop strategies to enable them to get back on track. Self assessment involves all staff and good use is made of data in identifying courses that are underperforming. However, insufficient use is made of the outcomes

from lesson observations to identify strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- on AS and A-level business and accounting courses, improve the pass rate and progress of learners in relation to their GCSE grades on entry
- provide greater guidance and support for students in keeping well organised files to effectively support their learning
- although initiatives have been taken to promote links with local employers, particularly for students on vocational courses, there is no coherent strategy in place across the subject area; self assessment recognises that business links could be developed further, particularly for GCSE and A-level students
- develop further a more interactive induction programme that assesses students' skills and integrate the development of these key skills into individual learning plans.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business courses in the college.

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

Yours sincerely

Bev Barlow
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools