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Mr Ioan Morgan  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Morgan

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 Monday 18 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to Sheila Fleming, Hilary Shaw, Tony Parkin, Alan May and John Melville for 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

How well do learners achieve?

- Pass rates in 2005/06 in engineering courses at levels 1 and 2 across all sites were at least 90% with one exception, GCSE engineering at 63%. NVQ level 1 and the double award GCSE have 100% pass rates. Building crafts occupations foundation certificate has a pass rate of 90% in Rugby and 82% in Leamington
- The impact of CoVE provision on one school's engineering pass rates is strong, with an improvement of 4% on previous results in 2004/05 and

6% in 2005/06. Progression from the STAR 14 to 16 provision to college is good at 61%.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- The STAR 14 (14 to 16) programme offers a very wide range of programmes and levels. The college delivers the programmes in the main and collaborative delivery is less common. The curriculum on offer links with other areas of the school provision. Across the county a significant key development for specialised diploma provision has been the creation of the common day. College and school timetables are aligned to maximise curriculum offer and availability of transport.
- The engineering CoVE has led on the specialised diploma bid. Discussions have taken place with regard to resources, software, equipment and types of unit and how different elements of the STAR 14 programme might contribute to the specialist learning element. The engineering bid is for the level 2 diploma and the piloting of functional skills. The specialised diploma will be more collaborative with students spending two days in school and one day in college. The college has supported schools with taster days. There is a growing infrastructure across the county to support diploma development. Further, more detailed planning is to take place after February 2007 when the results of the submission are known.

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

- In moving forward, the diploma is seen as a catalyst for collaboration. However, barriers to the new diploma programmes are expanding as the local authority (LA), colleges and schools struggle with issues of supply and demand with limited capacity and physical resource. There are a number of key concerns from different perspectives. Funding, transport, where learners belong and potential damage to partnership working are common issues.
- At a management level the strategy groups have discussed the new diplomas and a number of concerns have been raised. Key concerns are the erosion of the quality and breadth of existing STAR 14 provision and the lack of suitable provision for more disaffected learners. The STAR 14 programme has been successful in providing access and progression for these students. The diploma is seen as of interest to schools at level 2. The new diploma is perceived as likely to create streaming of lower ability students onto STAR 14 courses. It is estimated that restrictions in funding will restrict breadth of offer by as much as 50%.
- Current issues for schools are the timeliness of allocation of funding to support the delivery of the STAR 14 provision and co-ordination and support for the new diplomas. School staff do not fully understand the new diplomas and some would like the opportunity to work more collaboratively with the college. The balance in what is covered at college and school often leaves schools with the need to provide 'catch up time'.

- It is acknowledged that these issues will be addressed with the new engineering specialised diploma. Transport costs will be a major issue particularly in rural areas where learners may have a 50-mile round trip to access the provision. The LA cannot guarantee continued funding.
- Results on construction programmes are very good but it has been difficult to establish a specialised diploma. Lack of school collaboration, limited access to appropriate businesses, health and safety issues but more importantly the perception of construction as a career route have been inhibiting factors. The construction area makes innovative use of a “multi-skills” qualification for the Star 14 group to introduce students to different vocational routes in the construction industry.
- Schools are concerned about access and the notion that the diploma is only for bright learners and that, with its introduction, ‘hands on’ courses will disappear. In some schools the numbers of students doing higher level courses is as low as 15%. Current vocational GCSE’s are perceived as very theory-based and too academic for many learners. School staff are concerned about levels of expertise to deliver the new diplomas.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- Initial advice and guidance are well established, using good networks. The college has Head of Year 9 events for the vocational work-based learning programmes. A prospectus is available for Year 9 options. There are a range of taster days, many are interactive. Students applying for the young apprenticeship programme have an assessment day for interview and vocational/skills aptitude test.
- The college is developing an on-line prospectus to incorporate the new diplomas and standardise the content.
- Links with employers are through existing professional forums where there have been meetings in preparation for the new diplomas. Direct links with employers to support curriculum and regional development are less well established.
- In engineering there are some innovative approaches to promote awareness of engineering as a career and engage new learners. National diploma students’ work alongside Year 9 students engaged in a set of exploratory tasks and challenges. Students are encouraged to engage with problem solving activities in order to build mazes and fair ground rides. On completion, Year 9 students receive a college certificate. The national diploma students use this as an assessment opportunity to achieve appropriate key skills. Learners benefit from the college’s excellent industry links which provide access to the latest equipment and technologies.
- Star 14 is not advertised in the 14 to 19 consortium brochures.

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

- Warwickshire College has very good partnership links with schools with well established 14 to 16 provision across the city. Schools feel that the

college understands the issues and problems they face. The CoVE in engineering has excellent links with industry. The college has taken a lead with specialised diplomas and is involved in three out of four of the county bids. The college will support the development of the specialised diplomas providing access to appropriate resources, the shared use of facilities and support for the development of sharing strategies. The college will also lead on functional skills which is a specialist area of expertise. Staff development and links to employers will be led by the college.

- The LA currently makes a contribution to transport costs and is actively engaged in promoting the new diplomas and facilitating the sharing of good practice and information across the county. They have ensured good infrastructures to support the design and implementation of the diplomas and a co-ordinated diploma offer across the county. A range of teams and meetings are in place at a strategic, implementation and pastoral level.
- The college has good links with the Universities of Warwick and Coventry and a range of employers, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and multi-nationals. There are good opportunities for progression into higher education (HE). The proposed staff development and training in the specialised diploma engineering bid includes work shadowing in linked organisations. Work based co-ordination is managed well with six operational meetings a year. The engineering CoVE has supported one school to apply for specialist status.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- the need for improvements in schools' understanding of the new diplomas
- further clarity in the curriculum offer at 14 to 16 and what this will look like with particular reference to progression.

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

Yours sincerely

Judy Birkenhead  
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