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Ms J Doyle  
Deputy Principal  
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Dear Ms Doyle

Ofsted 2009-10 good practice survey programme: the role of employers in work-related education and training

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation during my visit on 2 December 2009. I am particularly grateful to you and all your staff for the hard work involved in preparing for the visit and for giving up a great deal of time during the visit to meet me. Please pass on my thanks to all those concerned.

The visit provided valuable information that will contribute to our national survey of good practice in the role that employers play in work-related education and training. The published report will list the names of contributing organisations but individual contributors will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to help form the judgements included interviews with staff, employers and learners and scrutiny of the examples of good practice provided.

I agreed to provide a summary of the good practice seen and outline the main findings below.

The main strengths

- The development and delivery of bespoke courses relevant to industry have benefited staff and learners greatly. Staff knowledge has been extended by working very closely with employers to identify the exacting standards required by modern manufacturing and motor-vehicle servicing. Programmes have been developed promptly to meet industry needs. College-based learners work to industrial expectations of discipline, attendance and housekeeping standards. Practical skills development is monitored closely and in detail. Learners in manufacturing companies develop more confidence, improve problem-solving and team-building skills and are more receptive to change following their training.

- The Jobcentre Plus programme, run jointly with Nissan, is highly successful. The programme develops the hand skills and literacy and numeracy skills of registered unemployed learners appropriately to improve their chances of obtaining employment with Nissan. Around 100 learners start the five-week course every five weeks. Approximately 70% of the learners completing the course obtain employment with Nissan or other associated manufacturing companies.
- The modern learning environment in the skills academy for automotive, manufacturing, engineering and logistics is of a very high quality. Situated on an industrial estate, the academy was designed in conjunction with local employers to provide a learning environment similar to that seen in modern manufacturing, retail motor-vehicle and body repair companies. The learning resources are of a very high standard and include the latest information learning technology and modern motor-vehicle and manufacturing equipment, including much donated by major companies.
- The very close strategic involvement with local major manufacturers further develops staff knowledge. College staff are involved in new developments at an early stage to identify training needs. Visits to the new Nissan plant in Russia and the new electric battery plant in Japan enable college staff to be at the forefront of new technological developments and to develop associated training programmes. For example, the close involvement with Nissan and Smiths Electric Vehicles is supporting the development of training programmes relating to the service and maintenance of battery-powered vehicles. This is an important nationwide development, supported by recent Government funding for the Nissan battery manufacturing plant.
- The success rates on engineering and manufacturing technology courses are consistently very high. For example, in 2008/09 the overall success rate for apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships was 93.6% and the corresponding timely success rate was 85.9%. In 2007/08, the overall success rate for Train to Gain courses was 98% with a corresponding timely success rate of 96%. In 2007/08, the overall success rate for learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses was 81% and for learners aged 19 and over, was 85%.

The main areas for further development

- No areas for further development were identified.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop provision. If there are any points you wish to discuss, please contact me. We gather information on the impact of our visits. To this end, you may be contacted by telephone or sent a questionnaire to complete six to 12 months after the visit. I hope you will contribute to this evaluation.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and will be available to the team for your next inspection.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hooper  
Additional Inspector