

08 November 2006

Mr Rob Peacock
Principal
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Dear Mr Peacock

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 1 and 2 November 2006. 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 five lessons together with a Young Enterprise session and short visits to two further 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

- High quality provision being maintained in the business area.
- Students' achievements are very good and generally compare favourable with national averages. Action has been taken to address underperformance in AS accounting in 2005 which also had an effect on the high grade achievement in 2006.

- Students benefit from and appreciate high quality teaching. They experience a variety of approaches in lessons; a good mix of teacher input, student activity and directed study, all enriched by current business examples to illustrate the theory taught.
- Assignments and assessments are carefully marked and, with few exceptions, students get detailed and informative feedback. However, spelling errors often remain uncorrected.
- Students' progress is regularly and closely monitored. Students minimum expected grade, informed by their prior attainment, is judiciously used to encourage them to achieve their potential. Students are required to re-do work which falls below the standard expected. Their course files are regularly inspected by staff which is a particularly effective means of identifying those who need further support.
- ILT is used to enhance learning. The new whiteboards are often used to good effect but some staff have yet to utilise them to their full potential.
- Course information is detailed, high quality and easily accessible to students either through the college intranet or on a pen drive given to applied A level students.
- The distinction between applied A level and A level business studies is clear. The former has a practical dimension where students are required to relate the theory taught at each stage to practical applications. The A level business is taught much more as a classroom based academic subject.
- Staff have high expectations of students. They communicate them clearly throughout the course. Quality and high standards are woven into the business ethos of how the department operates. This is reflected in, for example, expectations of punctuality, attendance, quality of learning materials provided to students and, reciprocally, the quality of work students are expected to produce.
- There is excellent leadership of the business team. There is a good balance between empowering staff to take ownership of their work within a context of management arrangements to monitor performance and share good practice. There is some scope to take this further by staff becoming even better aware of the different strengths which each displays in classroom delivery.
- Staff are well qualified and most have recent business experience.
- The consolidation of business teaching rooms into one corridor where students know staff can routinely be found has been a successful initiative.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- some employer involvement is evident, although as the self assessment recognises there is scope for further engagement, especially for A level business students

- the range of courses in business is limited to level 3 although the college is considering including business as part of a revised GCSE offer
- students additional support needs in key skills are not systematically identified and met. Key skills accreditation is confined to ICT. No current business students are seeking accreditation in key skills at Level 3 even though opportunities are signalled in the course handbook.

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

Rhys Evans
Additional Inspector