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Mr G Hall
Principal
New College Nottingham
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Dear Mr Hall

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: numeracy – tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 November 2010 to look at your work in numeracy.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior staff, tutors and learners; observation of six teaching and learning sessions in numeracy; and a review of supporting the documentation provided.

Overall, New College Nottingham is good at tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

Key findings

- Located in an area of particularly high deprivation, the college recognises the importance of numeracy as a national priority and it has steadily increased the number of numeracy learners since 2006/07. It has worked very effectively with partners, including employers and the city council, to identify local needs, and the part the college can play in meeting them. It offers a good range of numeracy provision for both adult learners and those aged 16–18. The college has implemented an effective management structure to support its whole-organisation approach to the development and delivery of Skills for Life. The college has engaged in a good range of projects that has helped to build its capacity in teaching and learning in numeracy. Staff are well qualified, and share good practice effectively.

- The college has taken a significant step towards developing the new functional skills framework through participation in a pilot programme across vocational areas. Staff have welcomed this involvement and are now better equipped for some of the challenges the new qualification has presented, including the requirement to increase learners' problem-solving skills.
- The college has good arrangements for providing additional learning support. Well-trained staff identify learners' individual needs effectively and offer useful support to learners who have dyscalculia. Those receiving additional support in numeracy achieve at least as well as other learners.
- Teaching and learning observed during the visit were good. Teachers planned lessons well to take account of the wide range of learners' needs. Teachers used projects and activities very effectively to link numeracy skills to everyday life and work. Their creative use of visual resources, particularly the interactive whiteboard, helped learners grasp mathematical concepts, such as ratio and fractions. Teachers used questioning well to check learners' progress and maintain their interest, and in the best practice, to reinforce and build their conceptual understanding. Learners generally worked steadily and made good progress in lessons. This was most successful where teachers provided a good variety of learning activities, including opportunities such as peer learning groups, for students to interact with each other. In a few instances, teachers relied too much on whole-group presentation and questioning, and failed to ensure that all learners were sufficiently challenged and making enough progress.
- Learners interviewed reported that they had grown in confidence through their courses, recognised more clearly the relevance of mathematics in work and everyday life, and were able to apply the new skills they had learnt.
- For the majority of numeracy learners, many of whom come from very disadvantaged backgrounds, achievement is at least satisfactory. Success rates are high for learners aged 16–18 taking the certificate in adult numeracy at entry level, application of number at level 1, or GCSE in mathematics. They are also high for learners on Train to Gain at all levels. Although there has been an improving trend in some areas of provision, success rates for adult numeracy at level 1 has declined.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop strategies to improve outcomes for functional mathematics at level 2 by ensuring that learners understand the specific requirements of the qualification, that they are in a group appropriate to their level of skills, and are helped to develop problem-solving skills early in the course
- continuing to tackle the decline in the adult numeracy success rates at level 1, particularly through strategies the college has recently adopted to improve initial assessment and retention

- extending good practice in the use and management of structured group activities to add variety, and encourage peer- and self-directed learning.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at New College Nottingham.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Jan Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector