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Mr S Hughes  
Principal  
Croydon College  
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Dear Mr Hughes

**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 5, 6 and 7 October 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: observations of 10 learning sessions in numeracy; interviews with learners, teachers and managers; and a review of the supporting documents that you provided.

Overall, Croydon College is satisfactory 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**

- The college has worked effectively with local partners to develop its extensive range of provision in numeracy, primarily within mainstream vocational programmes, to support the development of the numeracy skills of young learners and adults.
- The college has clear and effective mechanisms for assessing and supporting learners' numeracy needs, involving initial and diagnostic assessment and referral, where appropriate, to discrete numeracy courses and/or individual support.
- The Skills for Life policy outlines convincingly the rationale for the recent move from a centralised management model to a more devolved structure, to embed numeracy more effectively into vocational areas. It

sets out very clearly strategic aims and objectives, roles and responsibilities and quality assurance arrangements for this area of work. The college has begun to implement functional skills on foundation learning programmes, following careful evaluation of its pilot programme in 2009/10. A newly formed Skills for Life steering group is poised to drive forward improvements in this area of work.

- As part of its rigorous self-assessment process, the college analyses systematically the performance of specific groups of learners. It has undertaken meticulous analysis of learners' outcomes on discrete numeracy provision and taken swift and appropriate action to improve the low success rates at levels 1 and 2 for adult learners in 2009/10. Learners on these programmes now attend separate sessions instead of the mixed ability workshops. Managers have also taken appropriate and effective action to address the fact that in the last year too few apprentices completed their framework, which includes a numeracy qualification, in the required timeframe, as a result of an unusual set of problems with partner organisations.
- The proportion of staff with specialist qualifications in teaching numeracy is high for those who teach on discrete programmes. Staff delivering numeracy support do not have specialist qualifications. The college has good expertise in supporting learners with specific learning difficulties. Many teachers have benefited from a good range of continuing professional development activities relating to developing numeracy in vocational programmes.
- Teaching and learning are good. Most of the sessions observed were good. Teachers focused skilfully on improving learners' confidence and learners valued this aspect of teaching and learning highly. Typically, lessons were characterised by a highly supportive atmosphere, motivated learners, a good range of practical activities and differentiated tasks. In the best of the observed lessons, learners made good progress in their understanding and use of mathematical concepts and skills and demonstrated that they could apply them well to solve problems. In the less effective lessons, however, teachers provided appropriate numeracy tasks but they did not assess or extend systematically learners' knowledge, skills and progress. Some students remained confused as to why their calculations were correct or incorrect, thereby limiting the extent to which they could apply their knowledge independently.
- Learners and teachers have access to good electronic and paper-based resources but the extent to which they use them effectively is variable. For example, some teachers use the interactive whiteboards particularly well to introduce concepts in an imaginative way or to reinforce existing knowledge and skills. Other teachers use them simply to display text and they often rely too heavily on worksheets.
- The development of learners' numeracy skills is satisfactory. While many overcome a fear of mathematics, not all learners make sufficient progress in improving their knowledge and skills. Qualification success rates for learners on numeracy courses have improved over the last three years. In 2009/10 a very high proportion of learners aged 16–18 were successful in achieving the certificate in adult numeracy. While the pass rate for GCSE

mathematics has remained stable over the last three years at around 88%, the proportion of high-grade has risen each year. Learners on vocational programmes who attended numeracy support sessions in 2009/10 achieved as well as, if not better than, than those who did not have this support.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- continuing the implementation of functional skills, including further training for vocational teachers in developing learners' numeracy skills and ensuring that this training draws on best practice within the college and focuses sharply on supporting learners to extend their understanding of mathematical concepts
- sharing teaching resources and ideas as to how best to use them, and using the lesson observation system to raise the profile and standards of numeracy by providing teachers with more detailed feedback on the technical aspects of their teaching in numeracy
- enabling learners to apply their knowledge and skills independently to everyday situations or vocationally specific activities
- improving success rates for adults undertaking the certificate in adult numeracy, particularly at levels 1 and 2 and improving the completion of apprenticeship frameworks, all of which include the achievement of a qualification in numeracy.

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

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

**Harriet Harper**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**