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Ms C Griffin
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Dear Ms C Griffin

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 29 and 30 September 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 managers, tutors and learners; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of learners' work and observation of three learning sessions at three of your learning centres.

Overall, Milton Keynes Council's Adult and Community Education Service 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

- Managers use detailed local data well to identify geographical areas with a need for training in numeracy, and to develop appropriate strategic plans for adult learning. Although the numeracy provision is small, managers successfully prioritise local areas with the highest level of need. They also work well with the local college, community groups, charities and other interested partners to minimise duplication of provision and develop cohesive progression routes for learners across the local area.
- The management of the numeracy provision is good and staff have introduced successful initiatives over the past three years to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for learners. Numeracy tutors receive a detailed induction when they join the service. They use the well-planned

and relevant staff development programme and team meetings effectively to increase their expertise in teaching numeracy and to share good practice. More vocational tutors have adapted their courses to include numeracy skills that are relevant to their vocational areas.

- The service has good initial advice and assessment procedures to ensure that learners are on the most suitable course. Learners and tutors use the resulting individual learning plans very effectively to guide learners' development.
- Classroom practices and resources are very good. Learners and tutors use a wide range of professionally presented resources that motivates learners and stimulates their interest in learning numeracy. In particular, learners receive a computer memory stick that has presentations on the most relevant numeracy skills and many useful links to appropriate resources on the general internet to help them reinforce their learning. Staff and learners use this very effectively to allow learners to work with a degree of independence for part of their class and at home.
- The service's observations of teaching and learning are comprehensive, with a good range of visits to evaluate and improve the provision. Teaching and learning in numeracy sessions observed were good. Tutors provided interesting and clear explanations of mathematical processes, such as long division, at the start of classes. In the latter part of classes, individuals worked well towards their individual learning targets using the internet, or by carrying out practical activities, such as estimating weights and then weighing ingredients to prepare food. Learners explained enthusiastically that they frequently followed up their lessons with work at home, using the resources provided. Tutors routinely set numeracy processes into an everyday context, such as planning schools visits or organising a small business.
- Outcomes for learners are good. Results for GCSE in mathematics at A* to C grades are above national averages for community learning. Success rates for the adult certificate in numeracy at levels 1 and 2 were good in 2009/10 for those learners who were on courses longer than 24 weeks. However, results for short courses at entry level and level 1, accounting for about a quarter of the learners, are low. The first year of a Train to Gain programme in skills for life for council employees had satisfactory success rates for numeracy of around 85%. In addition to gaining qualifications learners improved a good range of relevant skills to enhance their employability. However, the service does not monitor effectively the progress of discrete groups of learners attending specific community-based numeracy courses.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- implementing the well-formulated action plan aimed at improving the outcomes for short courses
- routinely reviewing the performance of discrete groups of learners on numeracy courses and taking action to deal with any underperformance

- reinforcing the advice and guidance to vocational tutors on how they can make learners' development of numeracy skills within their courses, where appropriate, even more effective.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Milton Keynes Council's Adult Continuing Education Service.

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

Andy Harris
Her Majesty's Inspector