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22 October 2010

Ms D Dale  
Principal  
Wiltshire College  
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Dear Ms Dale

**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 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: interviews with staff, apprentices and learners on discrete numeracy programmes, and with employers and one union learning official; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of learners' work and observation of two learning sessions in numeracy.

Overall, Wiltshire 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**

- Partnership working with employers and unions is well established and effective. The college uses its partnerships well to promote discrete numeracy programmes for employees and design programmes to accommodate employers' and employees' circumstances. Programmes are successful at helping employees gain a qualification and improve their numeracy skills. Collaborative work with unions and employers is successful in overcoming barriers to participation.
- The college has suitable procedures for identifying learners' numeracy needs and uses these effectively to allocate learners to programmes of

study at appropriate levels. Some subject areas also provide additional, beneficial subject-specific analyses to help target learning at topics of particular importance in learners' vocational training. However, tutors do not transfer sufficient detail from the results of this initial assessment on to learners' individual learning plans to help plan individual programmes of learning or enable training coordinators to review learners' progress in developing skills and knowledge.

- The college has a well-understood strategy for the delivery of the curriculum in numeracy. Staff support their senior managers' commitment to ensuring that learners leave the college equipped with the skills they need for their careers and lives beyond college. The college gives high priority to learners' development in functional skills and has appointed specialists to teach these subjects. They work closely with vocational staff in specified link curriculum areas, thus improving their understanding of subject-specific numeracy needs and developing vocational tutors' numeracy teaching skills. Records reviewed during the visit suggested that some of these specialist staff did not have advanced qualifications or experience in numeracy. However, all have specialist qualifications or are working towards them.
- In work-based learning, teachers focus strongly on the contextualisation of numeracy as a strategy for developing learners' knowledge and understanding. Learners like this approach to learning numeracy and say that it helps them to understand its value. Teachers make use of a suitable range of resources for numeracy. The college makes these readily available to staff and learners through its web-based learning network. However, the individual learning plans and review records do not always give learners information on the resources recommended for their development.
- Learners particularly like the supportive way in which staff help them to develop the skills that they did not learn at school. Teachers use a suitable range of activities and teaching methods to help learners carry out calculations, but they do not always place enough emphasis on helping them to understand concepts underpinning these calculations, or to apply them in a wider range of contexts.
- Outcomes for learners taking numeracy programmes are satisfactory. Provisional data for 2009/10 show improvements in application of number success rates for apprentices, and in GCSE mathematics achievement rates at A\* to C, and these are now above national rates for 2008/09. At the time of the visit, the success rate in application of number at level 1 for learners on vocational courses other than apprenticeships was in line with the national rate with some achievements yet to appear in the data. Provisional success rates on discrete numeracy courses at level 2 are at the national rate. At entry level and level 1, provisional success rates have improved but remain below national rates for 2008/09. For learners on vocational courses, the application of number success rate at level 2 is low, and below the low national rate.
- The development of learners' knowledge and understanding in numeracy is satisfactory. Learners on discrete programmes report good examples of their ability to use their newly acquired understanding. However, too few

apprentices can describe improvements in their skill, understanding or confidence in numeracy. They do not always understand the principles that underpin the calculations they carry out. They accept that they have to complete their key skills qualifications as part of their training, but do not always understand the value of numeracy skills and how they help to develop their critical thinking or problem-solving skills.

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

- ensuring that learners on numeracy courses receive the teaching and support they need to develop their skills and apply their knowledge in a wide range of suitable contexts in addition to their vocational courses and examinations
- continuing to provide training leading to advanced numeracy qualifications for specialist functional skills tutors and to develop vocational staff to improve the teaching and learning of the underpinning principles in numeracy
- including more detailed information on learners' numeracy needs in their individual learning plans to help monitor their progress in gaining the skills and knowledge and promote greater understanding of their value and application.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Wiltshire 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

**Penelope Horner**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**