

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr S Paice
Head of Prisoner Development
HMP Featherstone
New Road
Featherstone
Wolverhampton
WV10 7PU

Dear Mr Paice

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 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 prisoners, staff of the prison and staff of the colleges providing learning and skills at the prison; scrutiny of relevant documents; observation of two learning sessions in numeracy; and visits to the employment and vocational training sites within the prison.

Overall, HMP Featherstone 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 prison has a sound structure for evaluating its learning and skills provision as part of its quality improvement agenda. Revision to the contractual arrangements for learning and skills in the prison has resulted in significant changes to the personnel managing and teaching in the education department on behalf of The Manchester College (TMC) since September 2010. The prison's senior management for prisoner development has worked well with TMC and the two other colleges providing vocational training to agree and implement an appropriate

quality improvement action plan. However, it is too soon to evaluate many of the resulting recent changes.

- The prison and TMC have good processes for identifying and recording prisoners' levels of numeracy (and literacy), and have successfully minimised the need for prisoners to repeat an assessment that they may have recently carried out at another prison. Prison staff work well with TMC and the teams for information, advice and guidance, allocations to activities and offender management to check whether a prisoner identified as needing support in numeracy has attended education classes. However, the prison does not align adequately the different systems these departments use to record prisoners' development targets for numeracy, take-up of provision and eventual learning outcome to measure how well it is meeting prisoners' needs in numeracy.
- The prison promotes numeracy provision well at induction and it has recently enhanced the role of a prisoner representative to include encouraging fellow prisoners to take courses in numeracy. Prisoners interviewed said that they preferred to discuss how numeracy classes may help them in the future with another prisoner.
- The prison is working well with relevant partners to develop provision that contextualises teaching and learning in numeracy into vocational settings. Action plans highlight appropriate objectives to develop the expertise of staff through sharing ideas and good practice, and ensure that schemes of work include a greater range of practical and vocational learning materials and activities. However, much of this work is at an early stage of development.
- The teaching and learning in numeracy observed was satisfactory overall. Staff used diagnostic assessments to identify learners' development needs in numeracy in more depth and allocate them to the most appropriate class. The more successful aspects of teaching and learning included good use of relevant and interesting activities that involved real everyday items, such as leaflets on interest rates for loans, and good individual support for learners as they worked to complete exercises or tasks. Conversely, tutors did not use the introduction of learning activities well enough to help learners to develop skills in tackling a problem or task independently. Learners had insufficient opportunities to tackle activities in small groups. TMC's system for observing learning sessions to evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, but tutors do not receive sufficient feedback on how to improve the technical aspects of teaching numeracy and helping learners to understand numerical concepts.
- Many learners who participate in numeracy provision attain the learning goals planned for them well, including the achievement of qualifications. Learners interviewed cited examples of how they had learnt specific numeracy skills, such as carrying out long division and multiplication, using percentages and calculating decimals, that they had grappled with in the past. However, poor attendance and punctuality frequently disrupts the learning for individuals.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop teaching and learning in numeracy in vocational contexts by extending provision to prisoners attending the vocational and contract workshops
- continuing to implement the actions identified in the quality improvement plan for learning and skills
- focusing more on developing learners' skills in tackling numeracy tasks independently
- mapping the results of initial assessment to eventual participation in numeracy provision and completion of learning goals to measure prisoners' progress in meeting their numeracy development needs while at the prison.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at HMP Featherstone.

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 the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Karen Adriaanse
Her Majesty's Inspector