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Ms L Spain
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Dear Ms Spain

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 16 and 17 November 2010 to look at 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 and learners; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of learners' work; and observation of six lessons.

Overall, Poole Adult Education 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

- The service offers a good range of numeracy provision across a number of community venues in Poole. The provision ranges from family learning, learning to learn at entry level, through level 1 and 2 programmes to mathematics for learning assistants and application of number for ancillary nurses. Recruitment is good and the numeracy programmes constitute around 30% of the skills for life programmes mounted by the borough.
- Outcomes for learners on numeracy programmes are good and have been above national averages for the past three years. In 2009/10, retention on all numeracy programmes was high. Achievements were also good and in 2009/10 pass rates on entry and foundation levels were over 90%. In

addition GCSE A* to C grade pass rates were above national averages. Outcomes on family learning provision and work-based learning were also good.

- Learners work conscientiously in numeracy lessons and make good progress. The standards of work they achieve are appropriate for the level of programme and the ability of the learners. Learners are confident and relaxed in lessons and are challenged and encouraged to make good progress.
- Teaching and learning are good. Numeracy activities are well planned so that learners' confidence and understanding are promoted well. Learners work at their own pace and the activities are appropriately differentiated to allow them to progress. Both volunteer helpers and learning assistants actively provide support for learners. They promote skill development and learners' confidence through sensitive help and support. However, not all teachers ask directed questions to gauge informally the progress made by learners and, in a small minority of lessons, some activities were not suited to the needs of all learners.
- Teachers track learners progress well and assessment is good. Learners appreciate the support and individual attention they get from teachers. They know what techniques they find difficult and respond positively to one-to-one support, alternative explanations, teachers' patience and the adult and respectful atmosphere in lessons.
- Initial assessment of learners' skill levels and additional learning needs is thorough and accurate in its diagnosis. Skills for life teachers are good at diagnosing learning difficulties and referrals are dealt with quickly.
- Numeracy programmes are managed well. Both teachers and managers have good access to accurate and up-to-date data. Managers have put in place well organised systems to ensure that lessons are timetabled efficiently, initial assessments are completed and communicated and learners' progress is tracked and monitored effectively. Lesson observations, in the main, result in the accurate identification of strengths and weaknesses. However, in a small number of cases, norms are identified as strengths.
- Continuing professional development for numeracy teachers is good. Lively training and updating for teachers, volunteers and learning assistants is taking place. Attendance is good and the participants all agree that the activities and resources used and discussed have had a beneficial effect on their practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making sure that all teachers understand the importance of asking directed questions to learners and that all lesson activities are sufficiently differentiated so that learners of all abilities are helped to progress
- ensuring that standard practices are not recorded as strengths in lesson observations.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop your provision in numeracy.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to the Skills Funding Agency and will be published on the Ofsted website under the UPIN for your organisation. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alex Falconer
Her Majesty's Inspector