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Mr A Williams
Principal
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Dear Mr Williams

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 21 and 22 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 senior staff, tutors and learners; four observations of teaching and learning sessions in numeracy; telephone calls to employers; and a review of the supporting documents you provided.

Overall, Brooklands 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

- Senior managers and teachers clearly understand the importance of developing numeracy skills in order for learners to widen their progression opportunities. The college's Skills for Life strategy provides a concisely written and comprehensive account of its plans to meet learners' development needs. Staff across the college are clear about their responsibilities in achieving the objectives in the strategy. In 2009/10, the results for key skills had improved and the newly introduced functional skills provision was successful.
- Effective staff training prepared staff well for the introduction of functional skills programmes. Specialist mathematics and numeracy teachers share

good practice in numeracy teaching and learning at team meetings. However, vocational staff teaching numeracy do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills further and share ideas and learning resources.

- Staff have a good awareness of the local need for numeracy provision through close collaboration with community groups. Managers work well to set up a good range of programmes for vulnerable groups, such as teenage mothers and young people not in employment, education or training. Effective partnership work with primary schools has led to the development of successful numeracy programmes for teaching assistants. Similarly, collaboration with the Army at the Deepcut Barracks enables soldiers to gain numeracy qualifications that are a prerequisite for promotion.
- College staff work very closely with local employers to ensure that programmes meet their numeracy needs. For example, engineering staff ensure that learners develop the high levels of numeracy necessary to fully prepare them for employment and higher education. However, the take-up of numeracy provision by some employers is low. For example, in the care professions, although employers understand the need for both literacy and numeracy skills, they often prioritise literacy programmes.
- Teaching and learning sessions of numeracy observed during the visit were largely good. Tutors planned lessons very well and they maintained the active interest of learners by using a good variety of learning activities. Learners valued how teachers explained mathematical methods carefully and provided alternative approaches where appropriate. Teachers make good use of learners' life experiences and contemporary information, such as the recent news about incorrect tax payments and the methods for these calculations. However, some teachers do not explore the fears and personal barriers that some learners have about numeracy in order to build the self-confidence that they need to tackle number tasks they have avoided in the past.
- Learning support staff liaise effectively with teachers and support the learners' development of numeracy skills well. All staff and learners interviewed much appreciated the good range of learning resources for numeracy that are available on the college's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
- The college does not manage effectively arrangements for identifying learners' levels of numeracy at the start of their programme. It uses an appropriate initial assessment but not all learners undertake this test and some teachers are unaware of the numeracy levels of their learners. Similarly, take-up for additional learning support in numeracy is low. Staff often provide individual support in numeracy on request or to assist learners to complete a specific task, but learners do not have sufficient records of this learning. College managers acknowledge the need to improve the coordination, recording and evaluation of additional learning support.
- Outcomes for learners taking numeracy programmes are satisfactory. Success rates for adult numeracy courses improved in 2009/10, but they

are still low for a few courses. Provisional results for 2009/10 indicate that success rates for application of number and functional mathematics will be high at over 80%. Success rates are high for the small number of Train to Gain learners taking numeracy qualifications. However, they are consistently low for GCSE in mathematics at grades A* to C, declining to 34% in 2009/10.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that learners working towards the adult certificate in numeracy and GCSE mathematics receive the support and training necessary to help them develop the independence in carrying out numeracy tasks that they need to meet the required standards
- increasing the take-up of numeracy courses by employers and adults, and ensuring that employers prioritise equally the benefits to trainees of learning numeracy and literacy skills
- ensuring that all relevant learners take part in an initial assessment of their numeracy to provide them and their teachers with information on their abilities in numeracy, as well as their development needs
- extending the number of learners who receive additional learning support for numeracy, and tightening management and quality improvement procedures for this support across the college
- increasing the opportunities for vocational teachers to share good practice in supporting learners with numeracy needs.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and the Skills Funding Agency and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your organisation. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tony Noonan
Her Majesty's Inspector