

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr C Jones  
Principal  
Calderdale College  
Francis Street  
Halifax  
West Yorkshire  
HX1 3UZ

Dear Mr Jones

**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 and 8 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, learners and employers; scrutiny of supporting documents you provided; and observation of nine learning sessions involving numeracy.

Overall, Calderdale 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**

- The college carries out a comprehensive assessment of individual learners' numeracy support needs. All learners on substantive college courses and work-based provision take part in an initial screening of their numeracy skills and, where appropriate, a thorough diagnostic assessment follows. Specially adapted assessments identify the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language.
- The college has created a climate in which learning support is highly valued by learners and carries no stigma. All learners, on college vocational courses and work-based provision, diagnosed as needing numeracy support last year, took up the offer.

- Strategic and operational planning to meet the numeracy needs of the community is strong. The college has productive partnerships with external organisations and makes good use of available data when planning and locating provision. Staff use local intelligence, numeracy data and school performance tables well to identify areas of specific need, including areas with high proportions of young people who are not in education, employment or training. The college has increased its provision at foundation level and level 1 to reach more learners with low skills in numeracy and/or literacy.
- The college has strengthened the curriculum management of its Skills for Life provision over the last two years and it is satisfactory. New appointments have focused on improving areas of weakness and managers have also tightened the cross-college coordination of key and functional skills.
- Systems for sharing good practice and keeping numeracy specialists abreast of the latest developments are becoming increasingly effective. Tutors meet frequently and share resources well. The college now has effective arrangements for developing the numeracy skills of staff. All academic staff (including learning support tutors) are required to have or be working towards a qualification in numeracy or mathematics at level 2. Those working towards their qualification report benefits to themselves personally and to their learners.
- All teaching and learning sessions observed during the visit were at least satisfactory with pockets of good and outstanding practice. The teachers were aware of the barriers facing learners with low numeracy skills and were adept at helping learners rise to the challenge to overcome them. Most teachers knew their learners well and they used a good range of resources to build confidence, make learning relevant and develop learners' understanding. Younger learners did not always work well individually on specific tasks, however, and became bored, thus slowing their pace of learning. Similarly, in the less effective sessions, learners wasted time waiting for the teacher to give individual help with common problems that the teachers could have explained to the whole group more effectively and efficiently.
- On higher level vocational courses teachers tended to focus on the skills and activities required for the examination. They did not focus enough on helping learners to develop an understanding of the mathematical concepts they were using.
- In the more effective sessions, teachers were skilled at questioning individual learners to check their understanding and identify misunderstandings. They used questions well to extend learners' thinking and to tease out misconceptions. However, teachers were less skilled at directing questions to the whole class. They tended to allow the same few learners to shout out answers to all the questions and did not make clear which of the responses was correct.
- Success rates for qualifications in numeracy and mathematics are improving overall, but remain low in some subject areas, with wide

variation between courses at different levels. There are no achievement gaps between specific groups of learners.

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

- ensuring that learners on the higher level vocational programmes foster greater understanding of the underlying mathematical concepts they are using when working out calculations
- improve questioning techniques used in whole-class activities by directing questions, clarifying answers and making more use of incorrect answers
- being prepared to adapt activities in response to learners' reactions by picking up on learners' unease with the teaching approach being used or their disinterest in the task
- continuing to improve success rates and reduce the amount of variation in outcomes between subject areas and course levels.

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

**Jan Bennett**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**