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Mr D Wood
Principal
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Dear Mr Wood

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 13 and 14 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 senior staff, tutors and learners; six observations of teaching and learning sessions in numeracy; and a review of the supporting documentation provided.

Overall, Lancaster and Morecambe 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

- In planning the college's Skills for Life programmes, Lancaster and Morecambe College takes good account of local provision, including the programmes offered by the local adult college and school sixth forms. The Skills for Life team works effectively with the college's business unit to offer literacy and numeracy courses in response to employers' needs.
- The college has implemented effective strategies over the last three years to strengthen the cross-college links between Skills for Life and vocational provision. The introduction of link coordinators and Skills for Life 'champions', and the inclusion of Skills for Life team members in senior management and curriculum meetings have been key elements in achieving this. These developments have been effective in raising the

profile of numeracy as a subject, supporting the sharing of good practice, improving the monitoring of learners' progress, and providing a solid foundation for the introduction of the qualification framework for functional skills.

- Lancaster and Morecambe College has improved the use of initial and diagnostic assessment to identify learners' numeracy skills and development needs more systematically and to ensure that teachers have the information they need to provide appropriate additional learning support. Vocational teachers and specialist numeracy teachers show a good awareness of the range of numeracy levels and specific support needs in numeracy of all their learners.
- The college uses data effectively to monitor recruitment to numeracy programmes and the achievement of qualifications. However, the college does not use information about learners' progress in numeracy and mathematics sufficiently for quality improvement purposes. For example, managers do not analyse effectively the outcomes for learners receiving additional numeracy support.
- Teaching and learning observed during the visit were satisfactory overall. Teachers planned lessons and courses effectively, integrating numeracy skills well within vocational aspects and using an appropriate range of activities, including games and introductory 'warm-up' tasks for practice and revision. They used questioning techniques well in whole-group sessions and when working with individuals to tease out learners' understanding of mathematical processes. However, teachers placed insufficient emphasis on developing learners' understanding of the mathematical concepts underpinning the processes.
- Weaker aspects of the teaching and learning observed included the use of activities that failed to challenge learners at an appropriate level and hold their interest. Teachers sometimes made too few checks on learners' progress in class. Lessons made too little use of information and communication technology and group activities to develop learners' mathematical skills and understanding.
- Achievement is satisfactory overall. It is good in provision for the adult certificate in numeracy at level 2 and in work-based learning. Success rates have declined at entry level and level 1 but have improved for GCSE in mathematics. Conversely, success rates for key skills are above the national average and have improved at level 1. Learners interviewed said that they were gaining more confidence in mathematics and valued the individual support their teachers gave them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all learners, particularly those on programmes at entry level and level 1, are on programmes appropriate to their needs and that they receive the support they need to develop the skills and knowledge required for the qualifications

- improving the quality of teaching and learning so that lessons engage learners in activities that extend their development, and teachers monitor the progress of all learners more effectively
- extending the use of group work and information and communication technology to help learners explore and develop their grasp of mathematical skills and concepts
- making full use of subject-specific information in quality improvement procedures, including the analysis of data on additional learning support, to contribute to the further improvement of numeracy teaching and learning.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Lancaster and Morecambe 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 Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector