

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Colin Hindmarch
Principal
Harlow College
Velizy Avenue
Harlow
Essex
CB4 2QT

Dear Mr Hindmarch

Ofsted inspection of ITE provision leading to Awarding Body qualifications in the lifelong learning/further education sector#

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your provision between 17 and 20 January 2012, for the time they gave to our telephone discussions and for the information they provided before and during the inspection.

The visit offered valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and to a published national overview report. This report will identify the overall quality of provision leading to Awarding Body qualifications and identify the overall strengths and areas for development. However, in line with previous practice, inspectors will not make graded judgements of the quality of the provision in each centre; they will evaluate and feed back identified strengths and any points for further development. These are outlined below for your centre.

The published overview report will list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

Outcomes for trainees

The number of trainee teachers enrolled on college courses have declined significantly in recent years. As a result, initial teacher training courses will cease to be offered when the remaining eight trainees, all of whom are employed by the college, complete year two of the two-year Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) in summer 2012.

Overall success rates on the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) improved between 2008 and 2011 reaching 100% in the final two years of the offer; although fewer trainees were enrolled on the programme. In 2009, retention on the Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong learning Sector (CTLLS) was low, with just 52% of trainees completing the course successfully. In 2010, success rates improved to around 71% and in 2011, all eight trainees who started the course achieved the qualification. Success on the DTLLS course has improved, although timely completion rates are more variable. Difficulties in releasing staff to attend the training, during a turbulent period for the college, led to a revision of expected end dates to cover a three, rather than the typically expected two-year period of the programme. More recently, approved protocols with senior managers have secured better access to trainees' entitlement and high levels of attendance overall. Teacher trainers have supported the learning journey of a high proportion of new and unqualified college staff very well through a period of significant change. At the last full college inspection, in November 2010, overall teaching in the college was judged to be good.

Trainees are guided appropriately to relevant courses which are consistent with their teaching context. There are good examples of trainees who started as associate teachers progressing quickly into a full teaching role. Some have gained rapid promotion into more senior posts. Although trainees have a good understanding of the procedures to follow in gaining Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status, very few teachers in the college have completed the process. There are good systems in place to track recently qualified teachers through the period of professional formation to full QTLS status.

Most trainees make good progress overall, given their very different starting points. They speak highly of the professional confidence they gain as a result of the training. Working relationships between trainees and their students are generally positive and productive. Trainees pay careful attention to the whole-college focus on setting defined learning targets in planning their lessons. Nevertheless, targets are often too general, focused on tasks rather than learning and insufficiently personalised to meet individual learner needs. Consequently, they do not always challenge the most able students to achieve their full potential. Trainees are clear in their understanding of the need to check learning through questioning but are not yet consistently effective in applying these skills. The principles and practice of Socratic questioning are modelled well by teacher trainers in central training sessions.

Trainees have good specialist subject knowledge and relevant vocational experience. This is valued by learners and enriches their experience in lessons. However, trainees' ability to teach theoretical concepts is not always well-matched to their practical competence and confidence. All trainees have an assigned subject specialist mentor. Subject specialists are generally accessible, helpful and supportive but few trainees have the benefit of systematic, subject-specific feedback on their teaching practice. Reflection in trainees' personal development journals is often too general and overly focused on the actions of teachers rather than the learning that takes place as a result.

Trainees are aware of the importance of addressing equality, diversity and inclusion in their lessons. The practical application of these skills is an on-going focus for further development. In particular, the skills needed to ensure that all learners in mixed ability groups achieve their potential.

The course helps trainees to improve their understanding of the application of functional English and mathematics to their specialist subject. Remaining weaknesses in a few trainees' literacy and numeracy skills limit their ability to support learning in these aspects. Not all trainees have achieved the required level 2 equivalent in English and mathematics at this relatively late stage in their training; although plans are in place to address this.

Teacher trainers are responsive and offer high levels of personal and professional guidance. Trainees' progress is monitored regularly and feedback is helpful and supportive. However, trainees' own development targets are not always sharply focused on learning and what the trainee needs to do to continue to improve. This constrains their ability to model best practice in setting improvement targets with their own learners in lessons.

Trainees' views are sought regularly and used appropriately to bring about improvements in the training. There is scope to improve further the analysis of trainees' starting points to secure a better understanding of their progress, the value added by the training and to better inform whole-college improvement. The college's self-assessment of the quality of provision is generally accurate with a clear identification of the priorities for improvement, but needs a sharper focus on the analysis of the outcomes for trainees.

The key strengths are:

- trainees' good knowledge of their specialist area and the confidence they gain as a result of the training
- the experienced course leader who provides a good role model, promotes the sharing of good practice and offers a secure environment in which trainees are confident to test out new ideas
- the high quality personal and professional support for trainees and the flexible and responsive programme of training
- the close monitoring of trainees' achievements which helps them to succeed
- the encouraging and informative feedback trainees receive on written assignments and through observations of their generic teaching skills
- the rigorous assessment and internal verification processes
- the effective use of the learner voice in identifying opportunities for further improvements in the training.

The key areas for development are:

- ensuring that all trainees receive subject-specialist feedback on their teaching
- improving trainees' practice in setting sharper and more challenging developmental targets that are securely rooted in learning
- encouraging trainees to develop the use of their reflective journals to evaluate the impact of their training on their teaching; establishing closer links between evaluations of their own learning and evaluations of their teaching
- introducing a more structured assessment of trainees' potential at the start of the training, with clear targets, actions and learning outcomes so that: all trainees recognise their achievements; priorities for continuing professional development are identified and the value added by the training is captured.

As explained in the inspection guidance, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next inspection.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick

Her Majesty's Inspector