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Mr P Roberts
Principal
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Dear Mr Roberts

Ofsted survey inspection programme – narrowing the gap in literacy and numeracy

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 24 September 2008 to look at the college's work on the above theme.

As outlined in the initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on how well you meet the needs of all learners in relation to their literacy and numeracy, with particular consideration to those at risk of not reaching their full potential. The visit also evaluated the level of expertise to support for learners of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages).

The valuable information gained during the visit will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing settings but these will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website.

In reaching these below mentioned judgements I have gathered evidence from the interviews with yourself and the staff of the college as well as some learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of learners work and observation of teaching and learning.

The overall effectiveness of provision for literacy and numeracy was judged to be outstanding.

Scope

Approximately 33% of the learners at the college are at level 1 or below in literacy and numeracy. This includes discrete literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes; key skills in application of number and communications; literacy and numeracy support; flexible learning and inclusion as well as some community based classes; learning in the workplace; and an entry to employment programme.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Learners have greatly increased their self-confidence. They learn valuable skills and their self-esteem improves. Learned skills support greater effectiveness at work. They develop appropriate learning and thinking skills and make much faster progress on their course work.
- Learners make good progress while on programmes and most join higher level classes or programmes. The numbers of learners on discrete literacy, numeracy and ESOL are increasing.
- Success rates for all learners are high and improving. These include ESOL and learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties (LDD), 14-16 year old learners, entry to employment and discrete literacy and numeracy learners.
- Success rates for a small but growing number of learners in the community and those based with employers are very good. Some learners are based within the difficult hospitality sector and others work in the public sector. They develop relevant skills and become more effective at their jobs.
- Qualifications in key skills, such as the application of number and communications, are on an upward trend.
- Retention, achievement and success rates for learners receiving literacy and numeracy support are also improving.

The quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Thorough initial assessments help to identify correct starting points for the learners. A range of assessment methods regularly update information. This helps the learner and the tutors to identify areas for development and focus their teaching accordingly.
- Personalised and contextualised learning is offered to the learners.
- Group sizes are small and the staff learner ratio is good. Support is very good and well-managed.
- Tutors diligently review learners' progress.
- Targets in individual learning plans are specific measurable and challenging.
- Staff are deployed well to maximise the effectiveness of the sessions for learners. Many classes have additional learning support tutors and they work well with the main tutors.
- Lesson planning is thorough and the schemes of work are rapidly adapted to meet the needs of the learners and interests.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in the classes.
- Learning materials and assignments are contextualised so that learners see literacy and numeracy as an essential part of their course.
- The learning environment is highly conducive to learning and relationships in the classrooms are good.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- Strong partnerships help to identify gaps in the provision and support.
- Managers have focused on initial assessment and improving achievement levels.
- Tutors routinely reflect on their practice and make changes to the lessons and style of teaching to better meet the learners' needs. They have high expectations of their learners and challenge them accordingly.
- Roles and responsibilities are clear and managers have established good working relationships and a strong team spirit. Performance management is fair but strong and includes learners' evaluation of teaching.
- Staff development is good including that provided by outside professionals. Tutors are well qualified and update their classroom skills on a regular basis through a broad range of staff development programme. Many vocational tutors have gained literacy and numeracy qualifications.
- Observation of teaching and learning is thorough and includes mentors and peer observations.
- The level of resources including ICT is good and tutors use these resources to good effect.
- Literacy and numeracy is well integrated into vocational courses.
- Staff make effective use of the broad range of available data.
- Curriculum and the growth in this area particularly ESOL is well managed.

How well does the provision promote inclusive practice?

- Learners from all sections of the community, including hard to reach groups, are taking part in learning.
- Marginalised groups such as those affected by mental health issues, homeless, ex-drug users and teenage mothers are actively identified and included in bespoke programmes. For example, the college ran four short courses during the summer months for learners who were at risk of dropping out of the education, employment and training field. The vast majority of them have come to the college.
- The college has provided appropriately devised workplace learning for learners' convenience.
- Achievement levels are high on almost all programmes.
- More courses are provided at level 1 to ensure that learners can attend and make progress from a low base.
- A broad range of enrichment and work experience opportunities are available for all learners, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- A high level of individual attention is given to the learners.
- Programmes meet the needs of the learners and the employers closely.
- Support for the learners with lower than expected levels of literacy is very effective.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- use of probing questions to illicit from the learners what they have learnt in the sessions
- encouraging learners more effectively to reflect on how they can apply this learning in their daily lives and continue to learn beyond the classroom.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop literacy and numeracy in your setting.

As was explained in the previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the inspector for your next inspection.

Yours sincerely

Harmesh Manghra
Her Majesty's Inspector