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Mrs C Hurst
Principal
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Dear Mrs Hurst

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

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 25 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 good.

Scope

This survey is based on examining evidence of a broad range of programmes such as discrete literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes; key skills in application of number and communications; literacy and numeracy support; and work of the foundation studies unit that provides full time programmes of basic education and vocational tasters for 16-18 year old learners. In addition, the

college's provision in family learning, in partnership with the local authority, and learning in the workplace were also included in the survey.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Learners make substantial progress in their classes. Their self-confidence improves significantly as they achieve their personal learning objectives quickly and learn valuable skills. They use these skills to become more effective at work, develop appropriate learning and thinking skills and make much faster progress on their course work.
- Parents on family learning programmes learn new skills to support their children in their education and they also improve their own skills. Retention rates on these programmes are in excess of 90%.
- 16-18 year old learners who were disengaged and low achieving in schools make outstanding progress. The college has been highly successful at fully engaging this group in increasing numbers.
- Success rates for all learners are good and improving. Employers speak very highly of the standard of the learners' work and increased self-confidence.
- Achievement of key skills qualifications in the application of number at level 1 and communications at levels 1 and 2 are satisfactory and the numbers taking such qualifications is increasing. A full set of achievement data for the current year is not available.
- Retention, achievement and success rates for learners receiving literacy and numeracy support are on an upward trend. This is particularly successful in health public service and care, arts and media, engineering and Information and Communication Technology but less effective in construction and business administration and law.
- Retention rates are on an upward trend and are high in the college for 16-18 and 19+ learners at 91% and 92%. In the community based provision, retention rates are 5% and 9% below the on-site provision for the same learner groups respectively. Average attendance rates however are higher by 9% in the community based provision.

The quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall but it is outstanding in teaching of literacy.

- 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 through thorough checks during progress reviews.

- Targets in individual learning plans are specific measurable and challenging. Learners set their own targets and pursue them rigorously.
- Staff are deployed well to maximise the effectiveness of sessions to the learners. Many classes have additional learning support tutors or inclusive learning officers who work well with the main tutors.
- Tutors plan their lessons thoroughly. The schemes of work allow tutors sufficient autonomy to incorporate topics and projects that interest their learners. For example, tutors use topics such as fishing and football to teach literacy and numeracy.
- ICT is used well in 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.
- The pace of learning is challenging. In some sessions the learners teach their peers.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

The quality of leadership and management in the subject sector area is outstanding.

- The college is working in strong partnership with the local authority. Their skills for life strategy is closely aligned to local authority strategy to Make Wigan Work.
- Governors take a keen interest in skills for life matters and have decided to allocate support for all staff to achieve a level 2 in literacy and numeracy.
- Managers have put high emphasis on initial assessment and improving achievement levels.
- Roles and responsibilities are clear and managers have established good working relationships and a strong team spirit. Staff development is good including that provided by outside professionals.
- Tutors are highly qualified. They develop their teaching and classroom management skills through a regular and extensive programme of staff development. Staff turnover is very low and staff enjoy their work and convey their passion for teaching through stimulating lessons. 90% of staff in the area have level 4 or 5 qualifications.
- Observation of teaching and learning is thorough and includes mentors and peer observations. The college has worked very hard to raise the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection and monitoring visit.
- The level of resources including ICT is good and tutors use these resources to good effect.
- Literacy and numeracy is well integrated in the vocational courses.
- Staff make effective use of 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?

Social and educational inclusion at Wigan and Leigh College is outstanding. It is making a strong contribution to community cohesion.

- Web-based learning through “Move on” courses has opened up choices for adults regarding the method and time of learning. The numbers taking part in learning and succeeding is going up rapidly.
- The courses are highly relevant to the needs of employers and the community.
- The take up of level 2 qualifications in literacy and numeracy is very high among the teaching assistants. This is an essential requirement for their job role.
- The college is working from 50 local venues in addition to six venues of its own, so learning venues are close to the learners’ home or place of work.
- Personal and community development learning is fully integrated in the college delivery and learners progress seamlessly into learning.
- Learners from all sections of the community including hard to reach groups are taking part in learning and enjoying and achieving their objectives.
- Marginalised groups such as those affected by mental health issues, homelessness, drug use and teenage pregnancy are actively identified and included in bespoke programmes.
- Achievement levels are high on almost all programmes.
- A high level of individual attention is given to learners.
- The support for the learners with lower than expected levels of literacy is very effective.
- Learning is fully inclusive. Learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties are effectively taught and supported in mainstream classes. The quality of interaction between the groups is contributing highly to the community cohesion in the college.
- Curriculum is harmonised in numeracy. Learners first work towards a level 2 in numeracy and then gain a GCSE.
- Assessment is very flexible and is available on and off-site. Learners are able to undertake paper based or electronic assessment.
- Tutors take great care to structure their lessons to include topics of interest to the learners such as gardening, fishing and football.
- The college is very responsive to the short and long-term needs of industry. It set up bespoke programme of short courses to help employees facing redundancy to secure jobs.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- encouraging learners to evaluate what they have learnt rather than completing a log of what was covered in the classes
- continuing to support schools in dealing with very low levels of numeracy achievement for 14-16 year old learners.

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