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Mr S Gill
The Principal
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Dear Mr Gill

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

Thank you for your hospitality and warm welcome, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06 November 2008 to look at the college's work in literacy and numeracy. I appreciate the time and care taken to prepare for my visit, especially by Kanwal Pattar.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of literacy and numeracy, my visit had a particular focus on how effectively your college is narrowing the gap for young people and adults by enabling them to learn and improve their literacy and numeracy skills to a functional level. The visit also evaluated the level of expertise within your college to support learning English speakers of other languages.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with senior directors and managers, tutors and students, telephone conversations with partner employers and scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of student's work and achievements and observation of two lessons.

The overall effectiveness in narrowing the gap for young people and adults by enabling them to learn and improve their skills for life was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in literacy, numeracy and ESOL is very good. Standards are high. The achievement of young people and adults with skills below a functional level is particularly good.

- Programmes are effective in improving the students' life chances by providing them with the skills required by employers.
- Students have achieved high success rates; over 80% for the last three years.
- The college is particularly effective in supporting students and retaining them on courses. Retention is very high and around 95% for the last three years.
- Students show high levels of enjoyment and commitment to learning and much improved self-esteem and confidence.
- Students improve their skills and they make good progression to higher level programmes, mainstream programmes and to job outcomes.
- Many students improve their effectiveness at work because of their improved skills for life.
- Students become more socially integrated as their personal and communication skills improve.
- Students gain improved parenting skills as they gain greater effectiveness in being able to help with their children's schooling.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of observed teaching and learning for young people and adults with skills for life below a functional level was good. Lessons were well prepared and managed and good attention was paid by tutors to meeting the needs of individual learners.

- Lesson plans were prepared with clearly identified learning objectives.
- Sessions contained a variety of activities and tasks, some individual, some group, to engage and sustain the interest of learners.
- Tutors and staff have a high understanding of learners' needs and tutors prepare detailed student profiles which are used effectively to plan learning.
- Effective building of concepts on everyday activities enables students to see the relevance of learning.
- Learning is made realistic by tutors to bring it within reach of the students.
- Learning is designed to enable progress in incremental steps suited to ability and thereby guarantee achievement.

Quality of the provision

The quality of skills for life provision for young people and adults with skills below a functional level is outstanding.

- Effective arrangements for initial assessment and diagnosis of each individual's needs, aspirations and preferences contribute to very high retention and very few wrong placements.
- Staff are effective in gaining students' confidence and they provide much one to one support.
- Students thrive on the much positive feedback, praise and encouragement they receive from staff.
- Students feel valued and cared for and they want to learn.
- There is an effective range of learning delivery options for skills for life support; contextualised, embedded, additional learning support, pre-mainstream course discrete courses and employer-based learning.
- The college staff are very welcoming.
- Staff maintain a strong focus on raising low self-esteem by recognising and valuing achievement.
- Staff provide high levels of support which helps to sustain students' motivation.

Leadership and management of literacy and numeracy

The leadership and management for skills for life provision for young people and adults with skills below a functional level are outstanding.

- The college is highly responsive to the learning and employment needs of the local community.
- College managers and staff are strongly committed to working with local community groups to provide programmes which meet a wide range of needs, broaden participation and develop social integration.
- Good partnerships with local employers are widening participation amongst non-traditional learners.
- The college has developed good strategies to build on community and employer links.
- The college's engagement with learners, effectively targets those from disadvantaged and minority groups.
- Equality and diversity is strongly promoted.
- Effective promotion of social cohesion is achieved through a raised understanding of different cultures.
- Good opportunities for professional development and in-service training for staff has a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching and learning.
- The well-qualified workforce is supported effectively by skills for life training for all staff including reception and support staff.
- The clear skills for life strategies build upon learner-focused objectives.
- The college has a high capacity to maintain continuing improvement.

English as an additional language

The level of expertise within the college to support young people and adults with learning English as an additional language is outstanding. Programmes for English speakers of other languages make up 56% of the college's provision. Improving the communication skills of all students is at the core of the college's work.

- The cultural, social and ethnic profile of the college's staff reflects the diverse nature of the local community.
- Staff supporting English for speakers of other languages are well experienced and suitably qualified.
- A flexible range of interventions are in place to support the teaching of English as an additional language.

Inclusion

- The analysis of local needs is extensive and accurate.
- Provision is tailored to meet the needs of the community.
- Flexible delivery of learning enables good attendance. For example, the delivery of workplace learning at times to meet with learners' working hours.
- Students are warmly valued as individuals.
- Programmes are effective in improving the students' life chances by providing them with the skills required to become fully integrated within the local community.
- Students' social understanding is well developed thereby strengthening their appreciation and valuing of diversity.
- College ethos strongly supports equality, social integration and cohesion.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- engage with a greater number of employers
- refine measures to evaluate the impact of improving students' skills for life, for example job outcomes, effectiveness at work etc.
- continue to promote the use of information and learning technology (ILT) within teaching
- achieve greater consistency in the procedures used to develop students' individual learning plans (ILPs)
- raise recruitment for some programmes.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop skills for life provision at the college.

As I explained in the pre-visit letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next college inspection.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Boughton
Her Majesty's Inspector