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Ms P Whittle
Principal
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Dear Ms Whittle

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

Thank you for the hospitality and warm welcome we received when visiting the Hammersmith campus of your college on 29 January 2009 to look at the college's work in language skills for English speakers of other languages (ESOL). We much appreciate the time and care taken by you and your colleagues to prepare for our visit.

As outlined in the initial letter, our visit had a particular focus on how effectively your college is narrowing the gap for young people and adults with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) needs by enabling them to learn and improve their communication skills to a functional level.

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.

The evidence used to contribute to the judgements made included interviews with senior directors and managers, tutors and learners, documentary evidence, including achievement data, and observation of six lessons. The three programme models that provided the context for the visit and to which judgments refer were:

- programmes which directly prepared ESOL learners for vocational study or work, and set ESOL learning within the relevant vocational contexts - ESOL Plus
- programmes which combined and integrated ESOL learning goals and vocational learning goals – embedded ESOL
- additional language support provided to individual learners needing help with ESOL needs who were following vocational programmes – ALS.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards, including personal development, for young people and adults' language skills below a functional level are outstanding.

- The achievement, retention and success rates for embedded ESOL and ESOL Plus courses in 2007/08 were outstanding. Success rates for ESOL Plus for Care at 92% and Plus ESOL NVQ level 2 catering at 90% were very high and significantly above national averages.
- The success rates for learners on vocational programmes receiving ALS were very high and at the same or very similar rates to those not needing English language or literacy support.
- Level 1 key skills outcomes for learners following embedded ESOL foundation programmes were excellent with success rates at above 80% in 2007/08.
- Retention rates at above 90% on embedded ESOL programmes were generally high or very high. The retention for embedded ESOL NVQ level 1 and 2 catering was outstanding at 100% in 2007/08.
- Progression rates from embedded ESOL and ESOL Plus courses into employment work or further study in 2007/08 were good or outstanding.
- Levels of attendance to date in 2008/09 were variable; attendance rates on embedded ESOL programmes were high at over 80% and satisfactory at 75% on ESOL Plus courses.
- Learners' levels of enjoyment and participation in classes were very high.
- Learners' levels of understanding of vocational topics in all sessions were high.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of observed teaching and learning is outstanding.

- All teaching and learning observed during the visit was good or outstanding; sessions were particularly well planned and prepared.
- Tutors had a very good understanding of learners' needs.
- Classroom management was particularly good because tutors gave their full attention to engaging all learners. Rapport between tutors and learners successfully motivated learners' progress.
- Learning sessions contained a very wide variety of particularly well-chosen activities, completed at a level and pace to suit the varied abilities of learners.
- Sessions provided excellent opportunities for learners to develop their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. All language learning work had a very strong vocational emphasis largely due to the

collaborative planning and teaching between language support and vocational tutors.

- All language learning work had a very strong vocational emphasis largely due to the collaborative planning and teaching between language support and vocational tutors.
- Routine target setting in learners' individual learning plans included well-considered subject and language goals for vocational pathways programmes.
- The planning of additional learning support (ALS) was excellent.
- The use of information learning technology in sessions was carefully planned and effectively integrated by both tutors and learners.
- Staff are particularly well qualified and experienced.
- In some sessions tutors and support assistants did not sufficiently encourage the full participation of individuals in whole group activities.

Quality of the provision

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

- Strong attention to initial assessment and diagnostic testing is used effectively in identifying learners' support needs and developing individual learning plans.
- The college offers very good vocational pathways to meet the progression needs of ESOL learners.
- The use of three programme models for learning is excellent.
- Additional learning support is highly effective in enabling ESOL learners to integrate fully. Arrangements for ALS are equally effective on all college sites. The volume of ALS provision the college provides, supporting over 1000 learners, is exceptional.
- The focus on providing learners with generic employability skills in embedded ESOL and ESOL plus provision is strong and effective.
- The range of vocational areas is good and reflects strongly, local employment needs.
- Regular information, advice and guidance for ESOL learners considering their next steps is effective.
- In some cases prospective learners have insufficient understanding of what ESOL Plus courses entail, especially from a vocational perspective; no vocational "tasters" or other introductions are currently available.
- The planned outcomes for a minority of learners' work are inappropriate, consisting of adult literacy rather than ESOL qualifications.

Leadership and management of the programme

The leadership and management of the provision seen for adults and young people with language skills below a functional level are outstanding.

- The whole college strategy for delivering literacy, numeracy and language skills is comprehensive and appropriate.
- Strong leadership provides a good and sustained response to the complex and growing need of learners for additional language support.
- Operational management is excellent and ensures the high quality provision of language learning and support.
- Across the college there is a strong, shared understanding of the importance and value of meeting language needs of learners wishing to gain vocational skills and move into employment.
- Management at all levels have a very clear understanding of the importance of collaboration and consistency in staffing arrangements.
- The action the college takes to secure funding to supplement learning and skills council (LSC) monies is consistent and effective.
- Management information data does not sufficiently distinguish the outcomes of ESOL ALS from those of literacy and numeracy additional support.

English as an additional language

Provision visited to enable learning English as an additional language is outstanding.

- The provision for EAL meets learners' support needs exceptionally well.
- Leadership responsibility at senior level for EAL is strong with curriculum managers exercising high and effective degree of autonomy.
- Managers are exceptionally well-qualified.
- The qualifications of staff, including those providing learning support are good and include relevant specialisms.
- Initial and diagnostic assessment in English of language need is detailed and effective.
- Decision making between ESOL and vocational staff is highly collaborative and very effective.

Inclusion

The college's approach to inclusion is outstanding.

- The college has a very effective strategy to meet the needs of the local community and those of learners, most of whom are from disadvantaged groups.
- The range of language support is extensive and very accessible.
- The promotion of cultural understanding and harmony in lessons is good.
- Success rates for EAL learners are high and in line with those learners not needing support.
- Programmes are very effective in helping learners fulfil their vocational aspirations, and to progress to a point where they are no longer categorised as "ESOL learners."

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving tutors' encouragement of learners during whole group sessions, to facilitate full participation in discussions and activities
- providing learners with greater understanding of what ESOL plus courses entail, especially from a vocational perspective
- the practice of inappropriately selecting adult literacy rather than ESOL qualifications as a planned outcome for a minority of learners
- ensuring data on the outcomes of learners receiving ESOL ALS are clearly distinguished from those receiving additional support for literacy and numeracy needs.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Boughton
Alastair Pearson
Her Majesty's Inspectors