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Mrs J Westerman
Principal
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Dear Mrs Westerman

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

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 February 2009 to look at work in literacy and numeracy.

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 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 the college to support learning English as an additional language.

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 organisations but individual organisations 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 staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, watching sections of a DVD that were recorded in your college and a short visit to the library.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in literacy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and numeracy is outstanding.

- Excellent progress in learning and improved literacy and numeracy competencies has resulted in high success rates.
- Learners' develop extremely good personal qualities, such as self-confidence, self-esteem and assertiveness.

- There are frequent opportunities for learners to complete the online national tests in literacy and numeracy and receive accredited confirmation of their knowledge and skills.
- Learners make excellent progress from the three day explicit and embedded literacy and numeracy courses to the level 3 diploma.

Quality of teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy

The quality of observed teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Outstanding efforts are made to identify and respond to learners' literacy and numeracy needs.
- A very wide range of teaching strategies maximise learners' enjoyment of literacy and numeracy learning.
- Creative, imaginative and stimulating sessions successfully engage and motivate learners.
- The excellent emphasis on collaborative learning and peer tutoring successfully reduces barriers to learning and increases learners' personal effectiveness.
- Learners receive effective additional support in literacy, numeracy and information technology (IT) in a range of workshop sessions.
- Outstanding reinforcement of literacy and numeracy in all courses provide relevance and appeal to learners.

Quality of the provision

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

- Outstanding tutors are well qualified, very enthusiastic and highly committed to developing learners' literacy and numeracy potential.
- A wide range of learners is successfully recruited on to explicit and embedded skills for life courses and on to the diploma programme.
- There is an excellent range of literacy and numeracy teaching and learning resources.
- Learners with language needs receive excellent support both in and out of sessions.
- A very good portfolio of innovative and successful three-day courses, such as 'Speaking and Presenting Yourself with Confidence' and 'Read and Write for Healthy Living' arouse and maintain learners' interest in learning and develop their literacy and numeracy competencies.
- Learners' e-portfolios are used very well for target setting and progress reviews.
- The excellent development of diploma learners' literacy, numeracy and IT knowledge and skills is assured through academic skills sessions in the initial phase of the course and thereafter through embedded literacy, numeracy and IT provision in the curriculum pathways.

Leadership and management of literacy, numeracy and language

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

- The leadership and management of the skills for life provision are outstanding.
- Your positive approaches to skills for life highlights what learners can, rather than cannot, do.
- The excellent staff participation in prestigious national research initiatives and in leading regional teacher network events are facilitated and supported by college management.
- Weekly delivery team meetings and frequent staff liaison make a strong contribution to the cohesiveness of the literacy and numeracy provision.

English as an additional language

- There is no dedicated provision for EAL/ESOL learners.
- Very effective in-class language support is given to learners who require additional help. Out-of-class one-to-one and small group language support is also given to learners and is very effective in developing their language competencies.

Inclusion

- Outstanding efforts are made to ensure that learning programmes are accessible to hard to reach and disadvantaged learners. The college specialises in first-steps learning and is highly successful in re-engaging and retaining adult learners.
- Residential provision is particularly effective in helping learners to concentrate on their learning, with time for themselves away from domestic responsibilities and other distractions.
- The range of adaptable and enabling technology for learners with physical and sensory impairments is outstanding.
- Excellent additional support for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities is co-ordinated by a highly empathic and very committed member of staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to provide literacy and numeracy training leading to accreditation for non-specialist literacy and numeracy tutors
- introducing initial assessments of diploma learners before the course begins
- continuing with the planned arrangements for entry 3 numeracy tests.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Ken Fisher
Additional Inspector