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29 October 2009

Mr I Pryce  
Principal  
Bedford College  
Cauldwell Street  
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MK42 9AH

Dear Mr Pryce

Ofsted survey inspection programme – good practice in literacy

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and learners, during my visit on 20 and 21 October 2009 to look at work in literacy. My work focused on the Bedford campus and did not include the Shuttleworth campus.

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 without their consent. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: five lesson observations; discussions with you, three members of your senior management team and the cross-college coordinator for literacy; discussions with three tutors; individual discussions with five learners and examination of some of your college documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- The college gives a very high profile to teaching and learning in literacy and the organisational structure promotes the importance of all learners' development of literacy skills very effectively. Managers and tutors have a good understanding of the barriers learners face in developing their literacy skills and of successful strategies to help learners overcome these barriers.
- The college has successfully created learning opportunities in literacy for young people and adults across the college, in the community and in the workplace and provides literacy support on an individual basis and in

groups. This is significant in helping learners overcome barriers in accessing literacy support.

- Where appropriate, the college successfully encourages learners to achieve not only the minimum level of key skills award in communication that their substantive vocational or academic programme requires, but also to study at a higher level if they have the potential. This encourages learners to extend and to develop their skills. Learners' achievement of national qualifications in literacy is high.
- All full-time vocational programmes for learners aged 16 to 19 include specialist teaching and learning in literacy, which covers entry level to level 2. Additionally, all level 1 vocational programmes have a specialist literacy tutor in classes, working alongside the vocational tutor, to provide expert in-class support. The college also provides specialist dyslexia support. The learners I spoke to find that this extensive support in literacy is helping them to improve their literacy skills significantly.
- In most vocational areas, tutors closely relate the literacy learning to the specific context of learners' vocational areas of study. They make effective use of specialist vocabulary and appropriately contextualised learning resources. Learners I spoke to said this makes their literacy learning interesting and highly relevant.
- In the best lessons I observed, tutors were very skilled at explaining specific literacy skills in ways which learners understood, with a very effective focus on the development of learners' underpinning skills in literacy, including punctuation, spelling and grammar. Learners I spoke to said that they were making greater progress in the development of their literacy skills since starting at college than they had in many previous years of study.

#### Areas for development

- We discussed the need to ensure that the contextualised delivery of literacy skills for learners aged 16 to 19 is appropriately extended to all vocational areas of study and that this work is of a consistently high standard.
- In addition, we discussed the need to further monitor the quality of teaching and learning in literacy, to ensure its consistency across all staff and for all learners.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop literacy learning in the college. As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Kathleen Tyler  
Her Majesty's Inspector