

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms S Robinson
Principal and Chief Executive
Darlington College
Central Park
Haughton Road
Darlington
DL1 1DR

Dear Ms Robinson

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in literacy

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 October 2009 to look at work in literacy.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with senior staff, tutors and learners, two observations of literacy teaching, and supporting documentation provided by the college.

Features of good practice observed

- The college has good strategic links with the Ministry of Defence and schools to support the development of literacy programmes for a wide range of learners facing barriers to achievement. This includes very successful programmes for disaffected 14-16 year old learners and for new army recruits.
- Very good contextualisation of literacy teaching helps to motivate learners and make literacy learning meaningful.
- The college makes very effective use of initial and ongoing diagnostic assessment to set specific literacy targets for course and lessons.
- The balance in curriculum planning and delivery between the development of technical language skills, such as the correct use of punctuation and recognition of homophones, and the appropriate use of language to communicate for different purposes is good.

- The varied and engaging teaching strategies, such as the use of games and mnemonics make learning fun and focus on small steps towards success.
- The support for learners with dyslexia to develop strategies for independent learning is very effective.
- Teachers place a strong emphasis on improving learners' capacity to learn independently by encouraging informed choice over the strategies and activities they use.

Areas for development

- We discussed the need to continue to develop with the army ways of embedding literacy and additional support within the 26 week army training, building on the initial assessment carried out at recruitment.

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 sent to your local learning and skills council and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Jan Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector