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Ms H Mardell and Ms K Stock
Smart Training
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Dear Ms Mardell and Ms Stock

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: good practice in literacy

Thank you again for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and learners, during my visit on 22 February 2010 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 included: interviews with staff and learners; scrutiny of relevant documentation and learners' work; observation of a planning and review meeting; observation of a 'round table' monitoring meeting; and observation of two lessons, including one observation in a learner's workplace.

Features of good practice

- The management of learners' literacy skills development and achievement is very effective. Senior managers demonstrate a sound understanding of key issues and have a comprehensive strategy in place for literacy learning across the organisation. A very well thought out, highly effective framework for training and assessment across this national organisation provides learners with very effective opportunities to develop their literacy skills and to achieve literacy and key skills qualifications at levels 1 and 2. Initial training for new staff includes good coverage of the importance of literacy learning.
- The planning of learning, reviews and assessment is systematic and thorough. It applies equally to learners' work in literacy, as in their main vocational programmes. Training managers and staff meet regularly to plan in detail the support, training and assessment which individual learners need. This exceptionally good planning greatly contributes to learners' successful achievement of vocational and literacy qualifications.

- Senior managers meticulously monitor individual learners' progress at regular and well-managed meetings with training managers and staff. Monitoring covers all aspects of the progress of the approximately 1,800 learners who are on programme at any one time. The introduction of a computerised management information system is providing very effective support for this.
- Initial assessment, diagnostic assessment and induction are detailed and comprehensive. Employers and learners are suitably involved. Assessment of work-related skills, numeracy and literacy is thorough. It provides managers and staff with a good understanding of learners' literacy levels and starting points.
- Learners' achievement of literacy and key skills qualifications is good. Smart Training places a strong emphasis on meeting learners' individual needs, to ensure that they achieve their planned qualifications in the intended timescales. At monthly study days, learners make good use of well-designed workbooks, which effectively integrate work on National Vocational Qualification units with literacy and numeracy learning. Learners with identified additional literacy support needs also receive effective individual support, frequently in the learners' workplace. Teaching staff use an appropriate range of literacy teaching and learning strategies and resources including information and learning technology.

Areas for development

- We discussed the need for additional specialist support for the staff who work with learners on literacy, to secure further improvements in teaching and learning and to ensure the successful implementation of the transition to functional skills from September 2010.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathleen Tyler
Additional Inspector