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Mr M Farley
Principal
Tower Hamlets College
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Dear Mr Farley

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: numeracy – tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 6 and 7 July 2010 to look at your work in numeracy.

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; analysis of learners' work and observations of two learning sessions.

Overall, Tower Hamlets College is satisfactory at tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

Key findings

- The college has an extensive range of provision to support the development of numeracy skills of young learners and adults. Managers work well with local schools and external organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus, to develop the numeracy provision in the college. The college has detailed plans to introduce functional skills for all learners on vocational programmes in 2010–11.
- The college's self-assessment report identifies the significant variation in the quality of its numeracy provision. However, the report does not focus well enough on evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and the

success rates for numeracy, including the performance of different groups of learners.

- Staff are well qualified in teaching mathematics or numeracy and they share resources well within their team. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to receive training and share practice with colleagues across the college to increase their use of information and communication technology and help them use a wider range of teaching and learning strategies.
- The college has effective initial assessment procedures with a good range of assessment techniques to identify learners' development needs when they join the college. However, staff do not use the results of these initial assessments well enough when planning teaching and learning in numeracy.
- Teaching and learning are planned well. Overall, staff use an appropriate range of up-to-date and vocationally relevant learning resources.
- Learners interviewed were positive about the quality of support and guidance they have received from their teachers. Learners who said they had made good progress in improving their numeracy skills were pleased they had progressed to higher level courses.
- Success rates have improved over the last three years, especially for numeracy programmes embedded into vocational provision. However, success rates vary too much across the provision, including discrete courses and vocational subjects, and they are below national averages on a significant minority of courses. Similarly, attendance rates vary significantly, as does the proportion of learners leaving numeracy provision early.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- using self-assessment to evaluate the quality of numeracy provision in more depth, including the quality of teaching and learning, attendance and retention rates across the college and the performance of different groups of learners
- using the results of initial assessments more effectively to plan teaching and learning in numeracy
- ensuring that staff teaching numeracy and mathematics share good practice with colleagues across the college and receive increased training to support their use of information and communication technology and a wider range of practical activities in teaching and learning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Tower Hamlets College.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and the Skills Funding Agency and will be published on the Ofsted

website under the URN for your organisation. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Wilf Hudson
Her Majesty's Inspector