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Ms M Sutton  
Principal and Chief Executive  
Bradford College  
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Dear Ms M Sutton

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 between 7 and 9 June 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 senior staff, tutors and learners; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of learners' work; and observation of five learning sessions.

Overall, Bradford College is good 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

- College leaders provide a strong strategic direction in response to the city's low levels of adult numeracy and low pass rates in GCSE mathematics among school leavers. Managers have developed very good links with partners in the community to offer a wide range of discrete numeracy provision within the college and at community venues in areas of deprivation across the city. Similarly, the college works very effectively with large and small employers to improve the numeracy skills of their employees. Managers adapt numeracy programmes in the workplace effectively to meet the very different needs of learners.
- Initiatives to develop the numeracy skills of vulnerable groups are outstanding. Examples discussed during the visit include a free course for new entrants to the country that offers numeracy alongside language and

literacy programmes. Projects targeted at unemployed groups, such as cookery classes for unemployed parents at a primary school, include a strong focus on developing learners' numeracy skills in meaningful contexts. The college also carries out successful and innovative work to support ex-offenders. These include courses at a learning centre in the city courts, close to the probation service, and a project that offers numeracy as part of a course for women ex-offenders and female victims of crime.

- The college has used staff development resources very well to build the expertise of its teaching staff. Teachers of numeracy and mathematics, including those developing learners' application of number skills as part of vocational courses, work extremely well together and share good practice and resources very effectively. Most staff teaching discrete numeracy courses have appropriate specialist qualifications in teaching numeracy. Key skills tutors work very closely with vocational tutors to plan the teaching and learning of the specific numeracy skills learners will need at the different stages of their vocational course. Teachers make particularly good use of the wealth of resources available at the mathematics centre and frequently call in to borrow equipment and/or to get specialist advice on how to teach a particular topic.
- Initial assessment and guidance for learners joining discrete numeracy provision is thorough. Staff make good use the results of the assessments and information collected at the initial interviews to allocate learners to suitable classes. Teachers use diagnostic assessments very effectively to build on this information to help them identify learners' areas of strength and weakness and agree priorities for their individual learning plans.
- The teaching observed during the visit was good, with examples of outstanding practice. Teachers were very skilled at pinpointing learners' barriers to learning and teasing out misunderstandings of mathematical concepts. They used probing questions to check learners' understanding and to help them recognise flaws in their mathematical reasoning. Learners interviewed cited teachers' endless patience and clear explanations as fundamental to their progress. Learners receive good opportunities to practise their numeracy skills in work situations and the assignments for application of number are particularly relevant to their vocational areas.
- In the best learning sessions observed, teachers used a wide range of resources and learning strategies to engage and motivate learners. Group discussions were lively and learners were not afraid to join in and 'have a go'. Learners interviewed said they felt comfortable when challenging each other's thinking and explaining their methods. Teachers and learners made good use of a wide range of resources, such as information and communication technology (ICT), measuring equipment, puzzles and games. Learners also make very good use of the mathematics workshop to receive support on a regular basis or to drop in for help with specific problems. However, not all learners receive sufficient opportunities to work in collaboration with other learners.
- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on national numeracy tests have been high over the last three years, although achievement at entry level 3 fell slightly in 2008/09. Success rates on application of number

courses have improved in the last two years and are above the national average but not significantly so. Progression from courses at entry level up to courses at level 2 is good.

- Learners interviewed said they have made good progress and have greater confidence. They understood mathematical concepts they had not been able to grasp before and found it very rewarding when they could apply newly acquired numeracy skills in their vocational area or at home.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop the quality of teaching and learning to help ensure that learners successfully complete their qualifications, particularly in the certificate in adult numeracy at entry level 3 and in application of number
- continuing to support the sharing of outstanding practice and learning resources in teaching numeracy across the college, in particular to develop opportunities for learners to develop their numeracy skills in collaboration with other learners.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Bradford 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

Jan Bennett  
Her Majesty's Inspector