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Mr B Fearon
Principal
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Dear Mr Fearon

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 18 and 19 May 2010 to look at your work in developing learners' numeracy skills.

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; six observations of numeracy teaching and learning sessions; and a review of the supporting documents you provided.

Overall, West Kent 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 is making reasonable progress in implementing its well-formulated emergency action plan which was introduced in July 2009, after identifying significant areas for development in its numeracy provision. However, the college's Skills for Life strategy does not have specific targets or objectives for numeracy and it is not clear where the responsibility for numeracy cross-college senior management.
- Appropriate action to increase the take-up of provision and outcomes for learners has included making numeracy part of all courses at level 1 and 2 for learners aged 16 to 19 from 2008; and improving the procedures for the initial assessment of learners' numeracy skills at interviews and at induction. The college is making good progress in raising awareness of the

importance of numeracy skills on vocational courses to parents, learners and teaching staff. However, attendance at numeracy sessions by learners aged 16 to 18 on vocational programmes is particularly low on construction, engineering and public services programmes. The college is not meeting a few of its targets for recruiting adult learners on to discrete numeracy programmes.

- Staff development and training to improve the qualifications and expertise of those teaching numeracy are satisfactory. Recent developments have involved promoting greater teamwork and sharing of resources and teaching strategies among numeracy tutors. The college is making satisfactory progress towards its participation in the national initiative known as the 'Skills Pledge' to ensure that all staff have a qualification in numeracy or mathematics to at least level 2.
- Teaching and learning observed during the visit were satisfactory. Teaching staff provided good individual support to help learners overcome their fear of mathematics and improve their confidence. Learning sessions included useful discussions to link aspects of numeracy to occupational and everyday contexts. However, the teachers observed placed too much emphasis on developing learners' ability to follow mathematical procedures to complete tasks at the expense of developing and assessing learners' understanding of mathematical concepts, such as negative numbers and place value.
- The less effective learning sessions involved an over-reliance on workbooks and worksheets, including electronic worksheets and activities, with insufficient project work. They also contained little structured discussion or group work.
- Qualification success rates in numeracy/mathematics up to level 2 were low in 2008/09 across the college, particularly in key skills application of number. Success rates were good in numeracy qualifications for learners on Train to Gain programmes.
- Learners interviewed felt they had gained confidence through completing tasks and gaining qualifications, and some also reported that they were able to apply skills in handling number in their everyday lives and at work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to work towards targets in the emergency action plan for numeracy (and literacy) and ensuring that senior management responsibility for numeracy is clearly identified following the restructuring of the college
- continuing to develop marketing strategies to promote the importance of numeracy, including the involvement of employers and local community partners to increase take-up and attendance across the provision
- developing a focused staff development programme to ensure that all those teaching numeracy have appropriate qualifications and expertise to develop and assess learners' understanding of mathematical concepts, in addition to developing their learners' technical competence in carrying out calculations and other numeracy tasks

- increasing the range of teaching strategies, including project and group work, and learning resources, including computing facilities, to move away from the over-reliance on workbooks and worksheets
- increasing the range of procedures used to measure, record and analyse learners' achievements in numeracy/mathematics, including progression to further learning and/or employment.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy.

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 UPIN for your organisation. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Karen Adriaanse
Her Majesty's Inspector