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Mrs D Lavin
The Principal
The Isle of Wight College
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Dear Mrs Lavin

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 25 and 26 May 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, learners, employers and other partners; scrutiny of relevant documents; observation of three learning sessions; and visits to workshops in five vocational areas.

Overall, The Isle of Wight 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

- The college is fully aware of the local need in numeracy and mathematics, especially the barriers many learners have already faced before joining a college course. The college works very well with local partners, such as employers and the local authority, to set up and manage provision for adults in the community and at work to help meet the numeracy needs of people living and working on the island. However, take-up of numeracy programmes in Train to Gain is low.
- The development of the key skills provision, and specifically application of number, is a priority for improvement for the college. It has taken a wide range of appropriate action to improve the quality of teaching and learning and increase success rates. Senior managers closely monitor the progress

towards the targets in the detailed action plan to improve key skills. Take-up of each of the three key skills has increased significantly since the college introduced the requirement for students on all substantive courses to study at least one key skill each year. However, the college does not provide enough guidance for programme leaders to ensure that they prioritise the one key skill that is most appropriate for each separate cohort of learners.

- The college makes good use of initial screening in numeracy and the more in-depth initial assessment at induction to identify the numeracy levels of learners on vocational programmes. In particular, staff make good use of the detailed assessments to prioritise topics for teaching and learning in the vocational area and identify where additional support may be needed. Assessment of learners with specific special educational needs, including dyscalculia, is thorough. Specialist tutors tailor subsequent programmes of individual support very effectively to meet learners' specific needs. Initial assessment of provision for adults is satisfactory.
- Staff make good use of the wide range of development and training events including opportunities to share good practice and learning resources and developing their skills in teaching numeracy. Approximately 87% of full-time teaching staff have a qualification in numeracy at level 2 or above and all staff teaching numeracy have a qualification in teaching. However, the college does not provide adequate guidance on the requirements to have a qualification in teaching numeracy.
- The teaching and learning observed during the visit were good. Learning sessions focused well on teaching numeracy in practical contexts, especially in Train to Gain and on vocational programmes for learners aged 16 to 18. They were organised well to allow learners to work on their numeracy skills using a range of teaching and learning methods and in different settings, including small discrete groups, in the vocational workshops or in individual support sessions. Learners worked well on projects and provided good peer support. In the less effective sessions, teachers did not place sufficient emphasis on teaching and assessing learners' understanding of mathematical concepts. In the adult provision, teaching and learning activities were not set in sufficiently meaningful and relevant contexts.
- In 2008/09, achievement of the adult certificate in numeracy at entry level and level 2 was outstanding, and it was good overall at level 1. Success rates were high in the pilot qualification in functional mathematics but low in the key skill of application of number.
- Learners interviewed said they had gained significant confidence in using numeracy in the vocational workshops, at home and at work. Examples of skills that they had mastered, which had confused them in the past, included working out gauges for bricklaying, using both imperial and metric measurements and calculating personal budgets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing clear guidance to ensure that the college meets learners' numeracy development needs, including the qualification requirements for all staff teaching numeracy and the criteria for selecting which key or functional skill learners will complete as part of their course
- placing greater focus in learning sessions on checking learners' understanding of mathematical concepts and better use of contexts to develop adults' numeracy skills.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at the Isle of Wight 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 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