

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms J Raftery
Straight A Training
Fenwick Harrison Building
16-20 Camp Road
Farnborough
Hants
GU14 6EW

Dear Ms Raftery

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 9 and 12 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: observations of four individual support sessions in numeracy; interviews with learners, employers, senior staff and assessors; and a review of the supporting documents you provided.

Overall, Straight A Training 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

- Straight A Training has very effective partnerships with a wide range of prestigious employers, primarily within the catering and hospitality industry. Employers interviewed were positive about learners' progress and their employability and personal skills. They confirmed that learners applied their numeracy skills well within the workplace.
- Straight A Training has integrated the application of number into its training programmes very effectively. Assignments that assess learners' vocational skills are designed well and require learners to practise and reinforce relevant numeracy skills at the same time.

- Straight A Training has developed an effective process to identify learners' levels of numeracy since the previous inspection. Assessors are now aware of learners' gaps in numeracy and the level of numeracy they should be capable of achieving. Assessors use this information well to support their learners when they visit them at work on a weekly basis.
- Assessors monitor learners' progress in their vocational specialism very thoroughly. With a greater focus on key skills since the previous inspection, assessors have become increasingly adept at reviewing the development of learners' numeracy knowledge and skills. Individual support sessions in numeracy observed were satisfactory. Assessors focused appropriately on the topics that learners struggled with in their initial assessment and set relevant work-related tasks for completion before the next visit. However, in the weaker sessions, they tended to rely too much on using paper-based materials to develop learners' skills in carrying numeracy processes rather than discussing sufficiently with learners to help them develop their understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Straight A Training has acknowledged the need to maintain a focus on the continuing professional development of its staff to develop learners' numeracy skills. As with literacy, a numeracy 'champion' is in place and she has been effective in raising the profile of numeracy with learners, assessors and employers. However, no assessor has a qualification in teaching numeracy at level 5.
- Achievement of qualifications is good for apprentices and learners on Train to Gain programmes. On apprenticeships, pass rates for application of number are high.
- Learners interviewed confirmed that they were becoming increasingly confident in carrying out numeracy-related tasks at work, such as counting covers in the restaurant or discussing the relative bar profits on different nights of the week. Learners who speak English as an additional language and had good numeracy skills primarily gained confidence through learning the English words for mathematical terms. However, they did not receive sufficient opportunities to extend their numeracy skills further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the individual support sessions in numeracy, to include more dialogue with learners and to move away from an over-reliance on worksheets, so that learners develop an understanding of mathematical concepts, as well as the technical competence to carry out specific numeracy tasks
- challenging those learners who find numeracy relatively easy to work beyond immediate requirements of the qualification
- implementing the planned staff development programme to ensure that all those supporting numeracy have appropriate qualifications, expertise and confidence to assess and develop further their learners' understanding of mathematical concepts.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Straight A Training.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to 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

Harriet Harper
Her Majesty's Inspector