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Ms D Newcomb
Training Manager
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Dear Ms Newcomb

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 15 and 16 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, learners and employers; scrutiny of relevant documents; observation of three learning sessions; and visits to three workplaces.

Overall, Prostart 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

- Prostart has very effective procedures for integrating the development of learners' numeracy skills into the vocational training. All apprentices and learners on Entry to Employment (E2E) take part in numeracy training and assessment activities as part of their programme. Training advisers use initial assessments well to identify where learners require additional support. All projects to develop and assess apprentices' skills in application of number are highly relevant to their vocational specialisms and roles at work. However, managers do not measure systematically apprentices' achievement in numeracy on leaving the programme against the results of their initial assessments.

- Managers use detailed quality improvement plans well to set clear targets for each programme, including challenging targets for the achievement of numeracy qualifications. Staff providing additional support in numeracy have appropriate qualifications and expertise. Training for all staff includes good use of fortnightly meetings to share good practice and resources on all aspects of programmes, including numeracy. However, Prostart does not self-assess numeracy as a discrete subject and the objectives in the Skills for Life strategy do not make sufficient reference to meeting learners' development needs in numeracy.
- Teaching and learning in numeracy are good. Specialist tutors plan learning activities well to provide appropriate individual support to help learners meet the required standards. Staff also provide good support to learners who wish to extend their skills to take qualifications at levels higher than those stipulated in the apprenticeship framework. The teaching and learning sessions observed included clear explanations and guidance to help learners draw out connections between different numeracy topics. Learners used a good range of resources to help them develop the specific numeracy skills identified as areas for improvement in their learning plans. In group sessions, learners shared ideas very well to develop their understanding of specific mathematical concepts. However, not all sessions made sufficiently clear links between learning activities and relevant work-related contexts.
- Achievement rates for application of number qualifications for apprentices have been outstanding in 2009/10. Learners interviewed said they had gained confidence in using numeracy more effectively at work. They could also use calculations and percentages better in their personal lives, particularly to create budgets and understand utility bills that they had previously found daunting.
- Prostart uses equality and diversity data effectively to improve achievement across all programmes. Managers analyse detailed reports on learners' participation and achievement for key skills, including application of number, very effectively, and they provide staff with useful information on trends and gaps in achievement according to learners' gender, age, disability and ethnicity and relevant targets for improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing separate targets in the Skills for Life strategy to enable clearer reporting on numeracy and to include clearer reporting on the quality of the numeracy provision in the self-assessment report
- ensuring that the monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment includes specific feedback to staff on the quality of the development of learners' numeracy skills to identify good practice and areas for improvement more effectively
- making better use of the results of initial screening and in-depth diagnostics in numeracy to measure the progress apprentices have made by the time they leave the programme.

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

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

Iris Evans
Additional Inspector