Inspecting post-16

basic skills in literacy and numeracy

with guidance on self-evaluation

The post-16 subject guidance published in 2001 comprised: art and design; business education; classics; design and technology; drama and theatre studies; engineering and manufacturing; English; geography; government and politics; health and social care; history; information and communication technology; law; mathematics; media education; modern foreign languages; music; physical education; religious studies; science; sociology.

Further booklets published in 2002: agriculture; basic skills in literacy and numeracy; construction; dance; English as a second or other language; hairdressing and beauty therapy; hospitality and catering; leisure and tourism; psychology.

Contents

Introduction

This booklet aims to help inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in basic literacy and numeracy for students post-16. It is not to be confused with the separately published guidance booklets for English and mathematics. It complements the *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* (1999), the supplement *Inspecting School Sixth Forms* (2001) and the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* (2002).

This guidance concentrates on issues specific to literacy and numeracy. General guidance is in the *Handbooks*. Use both to get a complete picture of the inspection or evaluation process.

This booklet focuses on evaluating standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and other factors that affect what is achieved. It outlines how to use students' work and question them, the subject-specific points to look for in lessons, and how to draw evaluations together to form a coherent view of the subject.

Examples are provided of evidence and evaluations from college inspections, with commentaries to give further explanation. These examples are included without any reference to context, and will not necessarily illustrate all of the features that inspectors will need to consider. The booklets in the series show different ways of recording and reporting evidence and findings; they do not prescribe or endorse any particular method or approach.

Inspectors and senior staff in schools and colleges may need to evaluate several subjects and refer to more than one booklet. When evaluating the provision for literacy, you may find that it overlaps at points with evaluations of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and English as an additional language (EAL). There is a separate booklet in this series for ESOL/EAL. You can download any of the subject guidance booklets from OFSTED's web site (*www.ofsted.gov.uk*).

Our Inspection Helpline team, on 020 7421 6680 for schools and 020 7421 6703 for colleges, will respond to your questions. Alternatively, you can e-mail c*ollegeinspection@ofsted.gov.uk* or *schoolinspection@ofsted.gov.uk.*

OFSTED's remit for this sector is the inspection of education for students aged 16–19, other than work-based education. In colleges, the 16–19 age group will not be so clearly identifiable; classes are likely to include older students and, in some cases, they will have a majority of older students. In practice, inspectors and college staff will evaluate the standards and quality in these classes regardless of the age of the students.

The inspector or manager with responsibility for literacy and numeracy may have a range of courses and other provision to consider. Those most likely to be encountered fall into three main categories:

l discrete literacy and numeracy courses and/or workshops;
l additional support that could be in the form of:
  – 'drop-in' workshops;
  – 'in-class' support given in mainstream vocational or academic lessons either to individual students or to a small group by a learning support worker or a literacy/numeracy teacher;
  – a literacy/numeracy tutor team teaching alongside a vocational tutor;
l scheduled literacy/numeracy classes that are an integral part of a student's main vocational or academic programme.

The national standards for adult literacy and numeracy are defined at three levels: entry level, level 1 and level 2. Entry level has been divided into three sub-levels which correspond to the first three levels of the national curriculum: entry 1, entry 2 and entry 3 in order to describe in detail the small steps needed for adult students to make progress.

The way in which the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy align to the national qualifications framework (including key skills) can be seen in the chart given on page 4 of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Core Curriculum documents.[1]

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1 *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum Including Spoken Communication* and *Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum* produced by Cambridge Training and Develoment on behalf of the Basic Skills Agency © DfES 2001 ISBN 1-85-85990-127-1.

Common requirements

All inspectors share the responsibility for determining whether a school or college is effective for all its students, whatever their educational needs or personal circumstances. As an inspector, ensure that you have a good understanding of the key characteristics of the institution and its students. Evaluate the achievement of different groups of students and judge how effectively their needs and aspirations are met by initiatives or courses aimed specifically at these groups of students. Take account of recruitment patterns, retention rates and attendance patterns for programmes and courses for different groups of students. Consider the individual goals and targets set for students within different groups and the progress they make towards achieving them.

You should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of schools and colleges regarding equal opportunities, in particular those defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. These Acts and related codes of practice underpin national policies on inclusion, on raising achievement and on the important role schools and colleges have in fostering better personal, community and race relations, and in addressing and preventing racism.

As well as being thoroughly familiar with subject-specific requirements, be alert to the unique contribution that each subject makes to the wider educational development of students. Assess how well the curriculum and teaching in literacy and numeracy contribute to the students'personal, social, health and citizenship education, and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Judge how effectively the school's provision for literacy and numeracy helps prepare students aged 16–19 for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society.

1   Standards and achievement

1.1   Evaluating standards and achievement

From the previous inspection report, find out what you can about standards and achievement at that time. This will give you a point of comparison with the latest position, but do not forget that there is a trail of performance data, year by year. Analyse and interpret the performance data available for students who have recently completed the course(s). Be aware that data for some adult students may not be complete or accurate. Draw on the *College Performance Report*. Also analyse the most recent results provided by the college. When numbers are small, exercise caution in making comparisons with national data or, for example, evaluating trends. For further guidance on interpreting performance data refer to the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges*.

Where you can, form a view about the standards achieved by different groups of students. For example, there may be data which enable you to compare how male and female students or different ethnic groups are doing, or how well 16–19-year-old students achieve in relation to older students.

Make full use of other information which has a bearing on standards and achievement, including success in completing courses, targets and their achievement, and other measures of success.

You should interpret, in particular:

- progress made (using the results of initial diagnostic assessments and individual learning plans);
- trends in results;
- distribution of grades;
- the performance of full- and part-time students;
- the relative performance of male and female students;
- the performance of minorities and different ethnic groups;
- trends in the popularity of courses;
- drop-out or retention rates;
- students'destinations, where data are available.

On the basis of the performance data and other pre-inspection evidence, form hypotheses about the standards achieved, whether they are as high as they should be, and possible explanations. Follow up your hypotheses through observation and analysis of students' work and talking with them. Direct inspection evidence tells you about the standards at which the current students are working, and whether they are being sufficiently stretched to achieve as well as they should. If the current standards are at odds with what the performance data suggest, you must find out why and explain the differences carefully.

Evidence from external moderators' reports may give evidence on relative strengths and weaknesses and may contribute to the hypotheses you form, which you will then follow up in your observation and analysis of students' work.

For students on basic literacy and numeracy courses, levels of achievement may not be reflected entirely in qualifications. You will need to use initial assessments, individual learning goals and individual learning plans in order to evaluate students' achievement and attainment.

As you observe students in lessons, look at their work and talk with them, you should focus on, for literacy, their progress towards being able to speak, read and write in English at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general. In particular, you should focus on students' capacity to:

- listen and respond to spoken language including narratives, explanations, instructions and questions;
- speak to communicate information, feelings and opinions;
- engage in discussion, talking together as they develop their reading and writing skills;
- read and understand a range of texts;
- read and obtain information from a variety of sources;
- write to communicate information, ideas and opinions to intended audiences.

For numeracy, you should focus on their progress towards being able to understand, use, manipulate, interpret and communicate mathematical information at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general. In particular, you should focus on students' capacity to:

l read and understand information given by numbers, symbols, diagrams and charts;
l specify and describe practical problems or tasks using the correct mathematical terms;
l calculate and manipulate mathematical information to generate results that make sense and that have been checked;
l interpret results and communicate mathematical information.

For both literacy and numeracy, you should focus on:

l whether students are working towards suitably challenging targets;
l how their progress compares with any previous attainment;
l whether the standard of their work aligns with their learning goals at the given stage of the course;
l the extent to which their confidence is increasing and they are developing their personal skills;
l whether they are acquiring independent learning skills;
l whether they are attending regularly and are punctual.

In your observations, be alert to any marked differences in the standards of work of identifiable groups of students.

1.2   Analysis of students'work

Students'learning plans must be judged against the results of the initial assessments when deciding if individual targets are realistic and challenging. There should also be clear evidence of students'progress towards their objectives. You will need to look at a student's entire portfolio of work rather than at individual assignments when evaluating progress.

Use should be made of the adult core curricula for literacy and numeracy when making judgements on standards.

Example 1: evidence from the literacy portfolios of a group of students in a college of further education (FE); pre-foundation course in catering (end of first term of 3)

The course is for students who are disaffected and disengaged. Some have been excluded from their previous school and others have had their education severely disrupted by major family or personal problems. The students have no formal qualifications. Their literacy and numeracy skills have been thoroughly assessed using a range of different tests at the start of the course. The results of the tests have been analysed and used to develop individual learning plans.

Both students in this example were initially assessed at entry 1 (speaking and writing) and entry 2 (reading). Their agreed end-of-year target is to achieve entry 3 in order to progress to the foundation course.

Higher-attaining (female)
Portfolio includes extra work done at home and in additional workshop sessions. Most recent work includes legible and accurate hand-written text prepared for a variety of purposes, letters/assignments that have been word-processed, and work that has been drafted then proof-read and amended. Punctuation and spelling are at entry 3. There is also clear evidence of the development of reading skills (skim reading and text scanning) plus the effective and increasing use of a dictionary. Written feedback from discussion groups shows a change from 'shouting other students down'to encouraging other students to participate.

Lower-attaining (male)
Attendance has been poor and there is little evidence of consolidation or practising of skills. Limited progress has been made overall. Feedback from his teacher shows that he continues to interrupt other students during class discussion and is unwilling to listen to viewpoints that are different from his own. Written work is difficult to read and poorly presented. Handwriting, punctuation and spelling show few signs of long-term improvement, although standards do rise during the course of a workshop session. Spelling of vocationally relevant terms has improved but very few additional skills have been acquired and progress towards entry 2 is slow.

Commentary

Judgements about achievement are made against the individual learning plans. Judgements about attainment are made against the adult core curriculum. The first student has developed many new skills in speaking and listening, writing and reading. Her achievement is very good. She is also making very good progress against her end-of-year targets and is already working at the required level in some areas after one term. Therefore her attainment is also very good. The second student has developed very few additional skills and therefore his achievement is unsatisfactory. The standard of his work is below entry 2, yet he is aiming to be competent at entry 3 by the end of the year, and so his attainment is also unsatisfactory. This brings into question the accuracy of the review, which should have been carried out by the course leader, on the extent to which end-of-year targets were set realistically for all students.

Example 2: evidence from portfolios of students from an FE college; numeracy class for foundation level information and communication technology (ICT) students (February)

The students are not working towards accreditation in numeracy and they do not have individual learning plans. The class target is to be working effectively at level 1 by the end of the course.

Higher-attaining student A
Evidence of the development of a range of numeracy skills during the course to date (comparing and ordering decimals, fractions and percentages; estimating, measuring and comparing lengths and areas). The portfolio is organised, shows clear evidence of progression and increasing accuracy over the first half of the course. Most recent work is already at level 1.

Higher-attaining student B
Portfolio shows some very good work that is at level 2 in places. Careless mistakes and frequent 'doodling' suggest that the student is not being sufficiently stretched. On the few occasions when a differentiated worksheet has been given, the student has been able to solve the most difficult problems accurately. Literacy level is low but work in the portfolio suggests that this student was capable of working successfully at numeracy level 2 when he started the course.

Lower-attaining student
Much of the work in the portfolio is incomplete – exercises started and never finished. Cartoon drawings in margins suggest a lack of concentration and application. There is clear evidence of the mistakes made early in the course being repeated again later in the term. Understanding and performance are well below level 1 at this stage.

Commentary

The judgement of attainment focuses on the standard of work produced by students, compared with the standard expected of students at that point in their course, irrespective of their starting point. In that respect, students A and B are high attainers, but their levels of achievement are very different. There is evidence that student A has made good progress and developed many new skills. Student B, however, has not made any significant progress and continues to work at least one level below that of which he is capable. Both the attainment and the achievement of student C are low.

1.3   Talking with students

Where possible, discuss the work that the students are doing in the lesson or work that you have seen in their portfolios. Check their understanding and whether they feel that the work is helping them to develop the necessary skills. Ask them about their targets and initial assessments and see if they are clear about the progress that they are making. Bear in mind that targets should be set individually rather than for the class as a whole. Questions will need to be straightforward and in language the students understand. It is unlikely that students will be familiar with terminology such as 'learning plans' and 'initial assessment'. Be prepared to ask for the same information in a number of different ways and take care not to bombard the students with too many demanding questions in quick succession. Intersperse the questioning with informal chat and some more general questions to help the students to relax.

Some useful questions for you to use might be as follows.

l   When did you start the course?
l   What are you hoping to achieve/learn from the course?
l   Are you enjoying it?
l   Are you finding the work easy or hard?
l   What skill are you practising/learning today?
l   Do you think that you are making progress? Have you learnt much so far?
l   How do you really know if you are making progress or not?
l   Have you got a record of the work that you have done already?
l   How do you know what you still need to learn?
l   Are you working towards a qualification? Will you need to take an examination/test? Do you know when?
l   Did you do any tests at the start of the course to find out what you could and could not do?
l   Did the teacher talk to you about what you hoped to learn when you started the course?

Some useful questions to ask literacy students might be as follows.

l   When you are talking to someone, how can you tell if the person is listening?
l   Do you think that everyone in the group contributed to that discussion? What stopped them?
l   Could you tell me briefly what this article/story/letter is about?
l   You are right, but could you explain to me why you have decided to use a capital letter/full stop/comma/question mark there?
l   What techniques do you use when you come across an unfamiliar word in your reading? (Ask when an example arises, if possible.)
l   If you do not know how to spell a word, what do you do?
l   Do you check your written work? How?

Some useful questions to ask numeracy students might be as follows.

l   What information do you need in order to answer the question? Where can you get it from?
l   What measuring equipment will you use? Why?
l   Where did you get that number/measurement/cost from?
l   You are right, but why have you decided to add/subtract/multiply/divide?
l   Before you work out the calculation on paper or use a calculator, can you work out a rough estimate in your head?
l   Which units are you going to work in? (You might need to give the alternatives – for example, pence/pounds, grams/kilograms or centimetres/square centimetres).
l   Does that answer seem reasonable to you? Why?
l   How accurate do you think that your answer needs to be in this case? (You might need to suggest some alternatives.)
l   How could you check your answer?

Example 3: evidence from discussion with 2 New Deal students in an FE college; two thirds of the way through a numeracy course

Both students found numeracy/mathematics difficult at school and were apprehensive about the course when they started. They have no formal qualifications in mathematics. They were initially assessed, as part of their induction, and both were found to be competent at entry 2. Their target is to work confidently at entry 3.

Higher-attaining student (male)
Enjoying the course and growing in confidence. Understanding the concepts for the first time. Enjoys looking for different methods/approaches and ways to check calculations. Can make connections between different topics. Doing extra work at home in order to make faster progress. Taking a keen interest in the methods taught at nephew's school (numeracy hour) and wants to discuss and understand them. Clear about target for the next two months – to cover the level 1 curriculum (some topics never done before). Proud of the work that he has done. Intends to study GCSE mathematics at the college next year and is already tackling some level 2 questions successfully.

Lower-attaining student (male)
Finding entry 3 difficult, yet anxious to move on. He feels that his work on each individual topic is satisfactory as he has managed to get the correct answers to the exercises. However, discussion with him shows that he has little real understanding of the concepts. He is finding this very frustrating and does not agree with the tutor, who has suggested that he should revise and consolidate earlier learning before moving on any further. Careful questioning reveals that he does not understand the topics covered and is trying to memorise methods/recipes with little success (for example, muddled attempts at long multiplication – adding zeros to the wrong line of the calculation). The results of his end-of-unit tests show that he is making very limited progress.

Commentary

Discussion with the first student clearly shows that he has a good understanding of the topics that he has covered and should easily achieve the targets that have been set. He has shown that he is able to work at higher levels successfully. He is well motivated and confident. His achievement is very high and he is well on target to attain the competencies required for entry 3. The second student is making very little progress towards his target of working confidently at entry 3 and he is two thirds of the way through the course. His achievement is low.

Example 4: evidence from discussion with students in an additional support literacy workshop for drop-in students in an FE college; the intermediate student is half way through her course and the A-level student is half way through her first year

Higher-attaining student (from an intermediate art and design course)
Attendance at the workshop is helping with coursework for main programme. She has had individual help with some topics that she has never understood before and is now very familiar with the rules whereas before she just guessed (for example, homophones such as 'their', 'there'and 'they're'; use of apostrophe). Went for a part-time job last month and was given a literacy and numeracy test which she was able to pass as a result of the work done in the workshop. Feedback from the teacher is very good and her marked work shows progressively fewer punctuation and spelling mistakes. She is very proud to point out that when her individual learning plan was reviewed some of the targets were raised.

Lower-attaining student (from an A-level science course)
Has always had problems with punctuation and spelling and is re-sitting GCSE English. A-level assignments are improving as a result of attending the workshop and the student feels that she is making good progress. Closer questioning, however, reveals that the literacy teacher proof-reads all the written assignments for her A-level subjects and corrects them. He gives a brief explanation of why each correction is being made as he amends the work. However, there is no follow-up remedial work and the student admits that she keeps making the same mistakes. She does not have a learning plan for literacy. Her English mock result was an E (the grade that she obtained last year).

Commentary

Neither student is working towards accreditation in the workshop. In the case of the first student, her attainment can be judged as high, because she has achieved the targets originally stated in her learning plan. These line up with the adult core curriculum, were based on a comprehensive diagnostic test and have since been extended. Her achievement is also high. The second student does not have a learning plan, but it must be assumed that her target is to reach level 2. Her attainment and achievement are both low.
Although both students feel that they are making good progress, the different approach taken by their teachers is having a significant effect on their achievement and attainment. The second student is learning very little from her attendance at the workshop.

1.4   Lesson observation

You will also obtain evidence on standards and achievement from lesson observations. In question and answer sessions, observe the depth of understanding shown by students, discuss their work with them and look through their portfolio of work to evaluate the progress that they are making.

Example 5: evidence from a literacy support class for foundation level motor vehicle students in an FE college (half way through their course)

The session starts with a 15-minute group discussion on ways to prevent car thefts (there have been several recent thefts from the college car park). Directed questions are used initially to recap the ground rules for group discussion that have been agreed previously and these are written on the board. The students show a lively interest in the debate and each student makes at least one valid contribution. They all try hard to adhere to the rules by not interrupting each other (apologising when this happens) and the more vociferous members of the group remember to encourage quieter students to participate. Some of the students clearly demonstrate level 1 speaking and listening skills and the rest perform at or around entry 3.

The rest of the session is spent working in two groups.

Entry 2 group
Reading an extract from a newspaper (adapted by the teacher) about car theft in the area and then completing an exercise based on the article. Students read through the article, helping each other and supported by the teacher. Discussion of the answers to the exercise shows that two of the three students are working at or just above entry 2. They read the exercise through when they have finished and are able to correct a mistake (tenses). The weaker student asks questions and makes progress but his work is just below the standard required.

Entry 3 group
The students in this group read the article from the newspaper. They learn some new words, which they look up in the dictionary without any prompting from the teacher. They discuss their answers to the comprehension before writing out their own individual answers. The two weaker students ask the others for clarification and the resulting explanations show that the majority of the group (four out of six) are working at or even above entry 3.

[Attainment well above average (2)]

Commentary

The majority of students are working at or above their target level and the rest are approaching their target. Given that there is a further term left, attainment is high. All students have made very good progress, albeit at different levels. Overall, their achievement seems very good, on this evidence.

Example 6: evidence from an additional support class (literacy) in an FE college; GNVQ intermediate health and social care students (end of first term)

The students have to read a newspaper article, detailing the arguments for and against making the 'morning after pill' more readily available to girls under 16, before completing a comprehension exercise.

Five students complete the comprehension after about 20 minutes, with no help from the teacher. They are asked to write a follow-up letter to the newspaper, giving their views on the subject. Their draft letters are well planned and have few spelling or punctuation errors.

Most of the students are able to complete the comprehension with some guidance from the teacher. They are reluctant to use dictionaries to check the meaning of unfamiliar words, although they are readily available. Their answers sometimes contain spelling or punctuation errors.

Four students fail to complete the exercise. They find the article difficult to understand and waste time chatting to each other. The answers they have completed are brief and contain a number of basic errors. Some students'attainment is higher than expected (5 out of 19) whilst other students'attainment is low (4 out of 19).

[Attainment average overall (4)]

Commentary

As the group is only about a third of the way through the course, the attainment is average overall. The class as a whole is progressing steadily towards the course goals and achievement looks satisfactory.

Example 7: evidence from a GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism additional support lesson in an FE college (midway through the course)

The students are working on an integrated assignment involving the use of statistics

The session is staffed by a numeracy specialist and a vocational tutor.

The students have not had an initial diagnostic assessment and do not have individual learning plans. The numeracy teacher does not have a separate lesson plan and so it must be assumed that the group has a target of level 2 (the same as their main programme).

The numeracy teacher starts the lesson by going over the compilation of grouped frequency tables and when to use the different types of statistical diagrams and graphs. At least half of the students are either talking throughout his explanation or searching through their folders and bags. Only one student attempts to respond to questions and her answers show a lack of understanding. In the second part of the lesson, the students work on the assignment.

The students fail to use a tally chart when compiling their frequency tables. The class intervals chosen for their grouped frequency tables overlap in many cases, and they do not check the total frequency as they have been asked to do. Many students are using inappropriate graphs and diagrams (for example, bar charts instead of histograms).

The students are placed on this course because of their below average attainment in numeracy. This lesson provides no evidence to suggest that the majority of them have developed any new numeracy skills and achievement remains unsatisfactory.

[Attainment below average (5)]

Commentary

The work is mainly at level 1, though the tasks, if completed would take students to level 2. Given that progress is very slow, it is highly unlikely that the group will be competent at level 2 by the end of the course. This represents unsatisfactory achievement.

2   Teaching and learning

2.1   Evaluating teaching and learning

Interpret the *Handbook* criteria with specific reference to basic skills and keep in mind the characteristics of effective teaching and learning in which:

- the teacher demonstrates knowledge and expertise in the teaching of basic skills;
- lessons are carefully planned and structured but allow flexibility either to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities or to respond to students'emerging needs;
- students have been given an initial diagnostic assessment in literacy and numeracy;
- students have individual learning goals and individual learning plans which have been negotiated with them and are based on the results of their initial assessment;
- learning plans are reviewed regularly (at least once a term);
- an appropriate range of teaching methods is used;
- good working relationships between the teacher and students foster learning;
- students are challenged and inspired by their teacher, yet at the same time they are handled with sensitivity and feel well supported;
- marking and feedback are effective and help the student to make progress;
- materials and methods are sensitive to equal opportunities and promote diversity;
- students are acquiring new knowledge and understanding and increasing their literacy and numeracy skills;
- students are clear about their learning goals and are confident in what they are being asked to do;
- students are clearly aware how well they are progressing and know what they need to do in order to improve;
- all students are making good use of their time and are working productively;
- students show an interest in their work, respond actively to any questions and are enjoying learning;
- students with physical disabilities or hearing or visual difficulties have their support needs met and are able to participate fully in their lessons.

Be alert to teaching which may have superficially positive features but which lacks the rigour, depth, insights and command of good subject teaching. The following are examples.

- When they realise that the students'current learning is built on weak foundations, some teachers do not ask them to take a step back, in order to consolidate earlier learning. They opt for immediate success, which will allow the student to continue making superficial progress. Eventually they will have to go over the earlier concepts, by which time more remedial work will have to be done. It is more effective for teachers to re-visit and consolidate earlier learning as soon as they detect a problem.
- Some tutors are too ready to answer questions on behalf of their students, especially if the answers are not immediately forthcoming. Both tutor and student are content this way because progress appears to have been made. The good teacher, however, will give students time to search for an answer, judging the right time to offer a prompt or to re-phrase the question to elicit a response.
- It is easy in a workshop to allow students to practise repeatedly the skills in which they feel confident. The student appears to be working well and the teacher is free to help other students. A good teacher, however, uses a range of persuasive techniques to encourage the student to venture beyond familiar work in order to develop new skills.

2.2   Lesson observation

Observing lessons is the major source of evidence for evaluating teaching and learning.

Example 8: basic skills for adult students in an FE college; nine students present, who have been attending for three months

Workshop covering numeracy and literacy across the range from entry 1 to entry 2

- *Prompt start to the session – short discussion of ways to check work. All students participate either by offering*

> ideas or by asking questions. Students check their work throughout the session. Literacy students read through their work carefully and use dictionaries to check their spelling. Numeracy students use calculators, reverse calculations and approximations to check their working out.
>
> | *Well planned and organised session in which:*
>   - *individual lesson plans are attached to the front of students'portfolios, and the tutor quickly outlines what they need to do as the students collect them;*
>   - *the scheduling of activities enables the teacher to spend time with individual students at appropriate points throughout the session.*
>
> | *Expert use of questions which probe and tease out misunderstandings and encourage students to work out solutions for themselves.*
>
> | *Tutor has a very good working relationship with students. Humour is used frequently and she handles the students sensitively but firmly. One student is keen to continue with an exercise on adding fractions but has forgotten about common multiples and how to find equivalent fractions. The teacher gently but determinedly takes him back several steps in order to reinforce previous learning.*
>
> | *A wide range of resources is being used (measuring equipment, magazines, catalogues, worksheets and interactive software). The teacher is also able to find and select additional resources quickly in response to students'need.*
>
> | *The workshop is managed with great skill. The teacher scans the room frequently – answering questions, checking progress, encouraging and praising. Each student receives regular individual attention.*
>
> | *Students are very punctual and quickly get down to work. Some arrive early and start their work before the session is due to begin.*
>
> | *Students show a keen interest in the tasks that have been planned for them and have brief discussions with the teacher about their purpose (sometimes initiated by the tutor and sometimes by the student). A number of students make further suggestions and the tutor discusses their ideas and negotiates a compromise where appropriate.*
>
> | *Students work productively throughout the session and move from one activity to another with confidence. All of the students make use of the IT facilities at some point during the evening. They help each other where appropriate.*
>
> | *Students are enthusiastic, know what targets they are aiming for and are clear about the progress they have made. They are proud of their work and eager to explain what they are doing and why.*
>
> | *Two students are slightly less motivated than the rest but they maintain a good pace largely through the energy and skill of the teacher.*
>
> | *Students demonstrate a sense of purpose and are keen to improve their skills. At the end of the session, some students ask for worksheets that they can take away and do at home. Nobody is in a great hurry to leave and some stay behind to discuss what they might do next week.*

[Teaching excellent (1); learning very good (2)]

Commentary

The teacher is outstandingly successful in the way she has planned the session so that she can spend time with each student and in her use of a range of resources and activities. She is responsive to the students and her workshop management skills are excellent. The students show a lively interest in their work and they made very good progress overall. The slightly less positive response of two students means that learning is judged very good rather than excellent.

Example 9: additional support session in a sixth-form college for intermediate GNVQ students (18 present); staffed by a literacy tutor and a vocational specialist (social care)

The students work initially on a group exercise and then individually

Strengths	Weaknesses
	Teacher outlines plan for the lesson and explains the need to practise writing in sentences.		*In the introductory question and answer session, the same six students answer all the questions.*

The worksheet is vocationally relevant (based on a newspaper article on MMR vaccine).

All the students have individual learning plans, the work in their portfolio has been marked and their next worksheet has been included in their folder in preparation for the lesson.

Some students work very productively throughout the session. The majority successfully complete the tasks set.

Worksheet does not differentiate sufficiently - too difficult for some students and others finish it very quickly.

There are two mistakes on the worksheet, which are highlighted by an alert student. The literacy tutor does not acknowledge or utilise this contribution and the student subsequently becomes disruptive and argumentative.

Both tutors spend long periods of time with small groups of students whilst students in other areas of the room are waiting for help.

The room is too large for the group and they are allowed to sit in unsuitable places (round corners and behind pillars) where they have difficulty seeing the board and where the teacher cannot always see them.

Students are distracted by staff walking through the room to get to the staff workroom.

[Teaching and learning unsatisfactory (5)]

Commentary

The teacher has failed to cater for all the students' needs (lack of differentiation and poor classroom management), but the majority of students have managed to make some progress despite this.

Example 10: 'On-programme' literacy support being provided for three students in a hairdressing theory class in an FE college

Support tutor arrives late and lesson is disrupted as she locates her students.

The students have to complete a worksheet, using the information given in a handout which the class teacher discussed at the start of the lesson. The support tutor is clearly unprepared and has to spend time reading the handout and the worksheet before she is able to help the students.

Initial attempts are made to persuade the students to read the relevant parts of the handout and to encourage them to think about the answers for themselves. However, the students have already established their own way of working by the time that the support tutor is ready to help them. They are copying answers from others in the group and then asking the support worker to give them the correct spelling.

The major focus of the help given is to complete the worksheet correctly. Scant attention is paid to the development of literacy skills, although there are clear opportunities to use a dictionary and to develop reading and spelling strategies.

The support tutor concentrates on the two students who ask all the questions – to the detriment of the third, who is sitting alone and isolated from the others. The class teacher spends some time with this student, helping her to find the answers in the handout and encouraging her to draw on her experience in the salons. The support tutor does ask her several times if she is okay, but is easily put off.

There is no evidence of any liaison between the hairdressing teacher and the literacy tutor. The literacy tutor does not have a lesson plan and does not bring or use any resources.

The support tutor spends the last ten minutes of the session completing her own timesheet whilst the vocational tutor dictates the correct answers to the worksheet. The students make a number of spelling mistakes as they struggle to write down the answers. These are not checked or corrected.

[Teaching and learning poor (6)].

Commentary

The support tutor has not prepared for the session, has made little attempt to develop the reading or writing skills of the students and ceases to offer any support at all for the last ten minutes of the lesson. Although the students have completed the worksheet, they have made no progress in developing their literacy skills.

Example 11: literacy class for foundation level students on art and design course in an FE college
The lesson is on the use of capital letters

Strengths	Weaknesses
Lesson is well planned to have a number of different activities including class, group and individual work. The tasks are designed to appeal to the students'interests – highlighting use of capital letters in written extracts with an arts theme – production of poster on where to use capital letters. The teacher is very positive – encouraging and praising the students. Gives plenty of verbal feedback. Lesson brought to a crisp end with a recap of the work done and the main learning points. Five out of 11 students work well throughout the lesson and show enthusiasm.	One student arrives late and is reluctant to participate in the lesson. He sits quietly, but becomes agitated if pushed to work. The tutor tries to involve him and asks if there are any problems, but he remains uncommunicative. He is asked to stay behind at the end of the lesson. Another group of students (five) contribute very little to the session and only work reluctantly. The standard of their work is unsatisfactory. The teacher makes several attempts to engage them – tries to involve them in discussions, encourages and coaxes, but is unsuccessful.

[Teaching satisfactory (4); learning unsatisfactory (5)]

Commentary

The lesson is carefully planned and the resources are well produced and attractive. The teacher has a friendly, enthusiastic approach and works hard to involve the whole group. She has prepared a range of relevant and interesting activities. Her attempts to engage the more reluctant students are frustrated by a lack of commitment on their part. The student who arrived late is known to have serious family problems. Learning is unsatisfactory as more than half the group fail to make adequate progress. Unsatisfactory learning would usually indicate unsatisfactory teaching. However, the disaffection of some students seems to be due to factors outside the teacher's control. These factors need to be explored further.

2.3   Other evidence on teaching and learning

Lesson observation is usually the most important source of evidence on the quality of teaching and learning, but the analysis of work and discussions with students can also yield valuable information. This is particularly important when the work includes a coursework component undertaken over time. Under these circumstances, the observation of individual lessons may give a very partial picture of the students' learning experiences and of the support provided by teachers.

The work analysis will give you a good feel for the overall rate of progress, and therefore the pace of the teaching and learning. It will show the range and depth of the work which the students are required to do. For example:

- the work in the students'portfolios should show progress over time that is in keeping with the individual learning plan;

- there should be evidence of a range of different activities and resources that have been used to develop the appropriate numeracy or literacy skills;
- there should be evidence that the tasks set have been tailored to students'interests or main programmes of study;
- work should be marked, feedback should be given and there should be evidence that additional activities have been scheduled to overcome any weaknesses that have been identified;
- the work should show that students are being sufficiently challenged and are not being allowed just to work on activities that guarantee them success.

Discussions with students will give you a sense of their motivation and the range of their experiences. You can ask questions to show whether they understand clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

3   Other factors affecting quality

You should report other factors only in so far as they affect the standards and achievement of the students and the quality of teaching and learning. Note and evaluate any significant features of the curriculum, leadership, management, staffing, accommodation or resources. The following questions might usefully be asked.

3.1   Staffing and resources

- Are teaching staff in possession of or working towards a specialist basic skills teaching qualification (for example, City and Guilds 9282/3/4/5)? Have they taken part in any other basic skills courses, for example, intensive courses provided by the Basic Skills Agency? What is the impact of such courses and teaching qualifications on their teaching?
- Are teaching materials varied in order to appeal to students with different preferred learning styles and to maintain interest? Do students work solely from worksheets?
- Are teaching materials tailored to adult students?
- Is there suitable fiction (reading books) for students on literacy courses?
- Is there a central bank of resources which students can access easily?
- Are ICT resources sufficiently available for students?

3.2   Accommodation

- Is the accommodation conveniently located in order to encourage reluctant students, and is it accessible to students with mobility, visual or hearing difficulties?
- Are students placed in an exposed position – for example, in the middle of a busy learning centre – where they might feel embarrassed by their level of work/resources?
- Is the standard of the accommodation as good as that in other areas of the college?
- Do literacy and numeracy staff and students have ready access to quiet areas for individual tuition and interviews?

3.3   Curriculum and management

- Is there an effective strategy for literacy and numeracy?
- Can students take part in literacy and numeracy classes in places and at times which suit them?
- Can students on mainstream courses refer themselves for support by using drop-in facilities, workshops or learning centres?
- Is initial and diagnostic assessment well used to place students on the right course?
- Do students have opportunities to develop and record improved self-confidence and self-esteem?
- Are there systems to ensure that the literacy and numeracy team works effectively with curriculum teams?
- Does the management of literacy and numeracy courses help students to progress from one level to another and into mainstream courses? How well is students'progress monitored?
- Is there close collaboration between literacy and numeracy, ESOL, and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?

4   Writing the report

The following are two examples of basic skills (literacy and numeracy) sections from inspection reports on FE colleges. (They do not necessarily reflect the judgements in any or all of the examples given elsewhere in this booklet.) The summative judgements in these reports use the five-point scale: *outstanding; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; very weak.*

Basic Skills (1)

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths

l   Progress and achievement are good.
l   There is a wide range of provision to meet students'needs.
l   The approach to initial assessment is thorough and systematic.
l   Effective use is made of individual learning plans.
l   The quality of teaching is good.
l   There is a comprehensive range of staff training.

Weaknesses

l   There is insufficient use of data to inform evaluation of students'progress.
l   Some of the accommodation is unsuitable.

Scope of provision

The college offers: literacy and numeracy courses for adults; in-class literacy and numeracy support for students on vocational programmes within college; additional support workshops in the college 'skills development centre' and basic skills training for New Deal clients.

In partnership with the local authority, the college provides a number of community-based literacy and numeracy courses for adults. These include short family learning programmes. There are 54 students enrolled on these courses. At its main centre, the college also offers discrete literacy and numeracy classes during the day and in the evening for a further 32 students. In addition, the college works with local employers and trade unions to offer literacy and numeracy classes in the workplace. There are 63 students currently enrolled on work-based provision.

Three hundred and thirty-seven students are receiving on-programme support for literacy and numeracy. This support is offered in several ways: by the use of learning support tutors in lessons, through separate support sessions and by the provision of literacy and numeracy classes as part of the main programme. There are currently 30 New Deal clients.

Achievement and standards

The students make good progress and their achievement is good in improving their literacy and numeracy. Retention rates are improving and are now above the national average. However, the numbers of students entered for externally accredited awards are low, making a comparison with national pass rates difficult. The majority of students receiving help with literacy and numeracy are not working towards a literacy or numeracy qualification. Their aim is to improve their literacy and/or numeracy to enable them to succeed on their main programme.

Students are encouraged to participate actively in negotiating their learning plans and they are clear about the purpose of their learning and what they must do in order to progress. The targets set are challenging and reviewed regularly. High levels of individual support result in most students, both male and female and those of different ages, making good progress and achieving well in improving their literacy and numeracy and in meeting the requirements of their mainstream programme. This is evident in the students'portfolios of work. Students who receive help with

literacy and numeracy often improve their personal skills, confidence and ability to work on their own, although this is not always recorded. The standard of attainment in basic courses in literacy and numeracy has improved since the last inspection when it was judged to be satisfactory. This reflects better co-ordination of courses and organisation of the curriculum, and improved teaching. Attendance is good for younger students but can be sporadic for adults.

Quality of education and training

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. There are well-structured schemes of work and lesson plans. A wide range of resources is used, including information and communication technology (ICT). Skilful classroom management ensures that all students receive regular attention and they are guided through a range of different activities during each session, which keeps them well motivated and actively engaged. Tutors leading sessions and those providing learning support use effective questioning techniques to encourage students to work out solutions for themselves and to tease out any misunderstandings.

There is a college policy which has been fully implemented with clear procedures for the initial assessment of literacy and numeracy. All 16–18-year-old students and those on foundation and intermediate courses, including part-time students, are assessed. Clear guidelines are given to staff, detailing the main assessment tools and the context and levels at which they are appropriate. Course tutors make the final choice of assessment tool. Specialist literacy and numeracy tutors analyse the results of the tests and provide feedback for the curriculum team. A literacy and numeracy tutor works closely with each curriculum team and together they decide the most effective method of supporting basic skills.

Teachers are friendly and encouraging and their relationships with students are good. All students have learning plans giving clear targets cross-referenced to the national standards and reviewed regularly. Students are closely involved in the development and monitoring of their individual plans and are clear about the progress they have made.

Literacy and numeracy are taught by a team of experienced staff who have a good knowledge of their subject. They all have a basic skills qualification or are currently working towards one. Some members of the team are facilitators and trainers for national and regional organisations. The college has a good staff development programme for all those involved in basic skills, and attendance at external events is encouraged.

There are sufficient computers, including laptops, which are put to good use. There is also a wide range of other equipment and resources. However, some of the teaching rooms are unsuitable because they are too small and there are not enough quiet areas in the 'skills development centre'for students working on their own or with a tutor.

Leadership and management

The basic skills provision is well managed and teamwork is strong. The team feels well supported and valued by senior managers. The basic skills manager gives clear direction and the team meets regularly to share ideas, make plans and review progress. The self-assessment report is detailed and the resulting action plan is regularly monitored, but insufficient use is made of data when evaluating the effectiveness of the provision. No attempt has been made to measure the take-up rate of additional learning support or to measure its effect on retention and achievement.

Basic skills (2)

Overall, the quality of provision is satisfactory.

Strengths

ı   There are high retention and pass rates for basic literacy and numeracy courses.
ı   Learning resources are of high quality.
ı   There is a wide range of provision.
ı   Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory and it has several good features.

Weaknesses

ı   Insufficient liaison is maintained between additional support teachers and course teams.
ı   Attendance at additional support sessions is poor.
ı   There is insufficient emphasis on specific targets in students' learning plans.
ı   The monitoring of students' progress is inadequate.

Scope of provision

The college offers day and evening provision for adults in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy both at its main campus and also at a number of community venues across the district. The basic skills team also provides additional learning support for 230 to 250 students aged 16 to 18 across the college. Short family learning programmes, where parents learn alongside their children, are offered in partnership with the local education authority. The parents are given the opportunity to gain 'word' and 'numberpower' awards. The college is also working in partnership with local hospitals to provide literacy and numeracy courses for adults with mental health difficulties and to offer workplace literacy and numeracy training for hospital employees. This range of provision provides an effective response to the learning needs of the community, and it meets the needs of a wide range of students.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory overall and good on literacy and numeracy courses, where completion and retention rates are generally high, as they were found to be in the last inspection. There is a high level of achievement for those students taking entry level English tests (100%) and the continuation rate for adults on literacy programmes is 95%. Pass rates on the 'numberpower' course are in line with the national average. Adult students also progress from literacy and numeracy courses to vocational programmes.

The college has attempted to measure the impact of literacy and numeracy support on pass and retention rates. Last year, the retention rate for those receiving additional support was 6% higher than the college average and the pass rate was 5% higher. This contributed significantly towards the college policy for improving social inclusion by raising standards among students who have traditionally lacked the basic skills to cope with mainstream courses. However, it is significant that only 50% of those students identified as needing support in numeracy and literacy received it.

Another relative weakness is that the individual learning plans of literacy and numeracy students do not always contain enough detail to enable staff and students to set realistic, short-term targets and analyse the progress made in order to promote higher standards. In some instances, they include vague targets such as 'improve writing' and the recording of progress is mainly listing the activities that have been covered rather than indicating the progress made in developing the skills identified in the initial assessment. Attendance at additional support sessions is often poor.

Quality of education and training

Overall, teaching is satisfactory, with several good features. The teaching team use a wide range of teaching methods and they make lessons vocationally or personally relevant to the students. The most effective teachers develop many of the learning resources themselves to match individual students' requirements. In group sessions, teachers encourage students to participate in discussions and share experiences and ideas. In one lesson, a small group of

men discussed their reactions to the terrorist events in New York on 11 September. The sharing of their feelings and responses led to powerful pieces of writing which formed the basis for further literacy activities. Supportive relationships with enthusiastic staff enable students to gain confidence and develop personal and social skills; teachers are sensitive to the range of students' levels and needs.

All full-time students have their literacy and numeracy skills assessed within the first four weeks of the course. Students who are identified as needing additional learning support are contacted by the basic skills team and offered either 'in-class support'or the opportunity to attend an appropriate additional support workshop. Each student who receives literacy and numeracy support has a student support agreement. The student is expected to complete a self-evaluation at the end of every session. However, some students and teachers regard its completion as a chore and give it scant attention. The resulting comments give little indication of progress in basic skills.

It is a significant weakness that the in-class support that students receive is not always effectively integrated with other aspects of their main programme of study. In advance of a lesson, basic skills support staff are often unaware of the specific element of the course that the student is covering or of the learning materials which the class teacher is using. Most teachers employed by the college are well qualified and have completed or are taking specialist training in the teaching of basic skills. The basic skills workshop is attractively furnished and well designed, with areas for group teaching and quiet areas for students working on their own or with a tutor. It is equipped with computers and a range of suitable software plus a good stock of practical and paper-based resources. These include an extensive bank of attractive, well-produced worksheets designed by the college. Laptop computers are frequently used in community venues to ensure that all literacy and numeracy students have regular access to information technology resources.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of courses are satisfactory. The basic skills team meets monthly to share good practice, review students'progress and monitor enrolment, retention and achievement targets. Planning and review days are also scheduled in the summer term.

The team has identified the need to improve liaison with the curriculum areas and has established a schedule of termly meetings with basic skills link tutors from the vocational areas. The new arrangements have yet to become well established and the link tutors do not always have sufficient time to co-ordinate basic skills work in their curriculum areas. There is no system to ensure that additional support tutors work in liaison with class teachers.

Notes

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