

**Basildon College**  
**Reinspection of Quality Assurance: February 2001**  
**Report from the Inspectorate**  
**The Further Education Funding Council**

## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

*The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.*

### **REINSPECTION**

*The FEFC has agreed that colleges with provision judged by the inspectorate to be less than satisfactory or poor (grade 4 or 5) should be reinspected. In these circumstances, a college may have its funding agreement with the FEFC qualified to prevent it increasing the number of new students in an unsatisfactory curriculum area until the FEFC is satisfied that weaknesses have been addressed.*

*Satisfactory provision may also be reinspected if actions have been taken to improve quality and the college's existing inspection grade is the only factor which prevents it from meeting the criteria for FEFC accreditation.*

*Reinspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Reinspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports and confirm that actions taken as a result of previous inspection have improved the quality of provision. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. The opinion of the FEFC's audit service contributes to inspectorate judgements about governance and management.*

### **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

*Assessments use grades on a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses. The descriptors for the grades are:*

- *grade 1 - outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses*
- *grade 2 - good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses*
- *grade 4 - less than satisfactory provision in which weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.*

*Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.*

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## **Basildon College Eastern Region**

### **Reinspection of quality assurance: February 2001**

#### **Background**

Basildon College was inspected in October 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 14/00. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4.

The key strengths of quality assurance were the procedures for collecting evidence for self-assessment and the detailed analysis and reporting of complaints. The major weaknesses identified at inspection were: inconsistent implementation of quality assurance procedures; lack of rigour in course reviews; insufficient analysis of data on student retention and achievement; imprecise targets for improvements in retention and achievement; and the unsystematic monitoring of action plans by curriculum teams.

The reinspection took place in February 2001. Inspectors held meetings with college managers and staff. They reviewed a wide range of documentation, including course reviews and self-assessment reports, minutes of meetings held by course teams and managers, the academic board and the corporation.

#### **Assessment**

The college has made steady progress towards addressing the weaknesses identified at the last inspection and the strengths have been maintained. The progress report on the comprehensive post-inspection action plan produced for the reinspection was self-critical. The quality assurance strategy has been revised and the main focus is on improving teaching and learning. Responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of, and reporting on quality assurance is clearly defined. Staff now have a better understanding of the quality assurance arrangements. Course teams meet regularly and record the outcomes from meetings as action minutes. However, as identified at the last inspection the action to be taken to bring about improvement is not always explicitly stated. Course reviews are completed three times a year and the end of year review contributes to the college's self-assessment report. Insufficient consideration is given to assessing the quality of teaching and learning at course level. The lack of rigour in course reviews remains a weakness. Many action plans are superficial. Course teams set targets for retention and achievement and these are rigorously monitored by heads of school. As identified at the last inspection there is still insufficient analysis of data on student retention and achievement, use of national benchmarking data for comparison and target-setting for improvement at course level. Action plans to address weaknesses at all levels across the college are carefully monitored and updated systematically. External verifiers reports are now centrally co-ordinated and the action taken to rectify issues is routinely checked. At the original inspection the distance learning provision was not included in the college's quality assurance arrangements but recently these programmes have been included in the quality procedures which apply to college-based courses.

Student survey questionnaires have been improved. Responses are thoroughly analysed and appropriate action taken to address student concerns. The college recently carried out its first survey of employers which identified the need to establish closer links with employers. The second postal survey of parents resulted in an increased response but it is still low with only 15% completed returns. Service standards with measurable targets have been recently developed for student services and for college marketing but are still underdeveloped for

other non-teaching areas. Arrangements to monitor the achievement of targets and the charter commitments are not yet fully in place. The academic board was reconstituted in October 2000 and includes student representation. There is good evidence from the minutes of meetings that the academic board is considering appropriate matters but to date insufficient consideration has been given to the academic performance of the college. A quality and standards committee of the academic board was established in February 2001 to address this weakness.

Staff appraisal for teaching staff ceased to operate after the last inspection. A new appraisal scheme has been introduced recently and lesson observation is a compulsory element. The outcomes have been used to share good practice and inform staff development activities. The college was recognised as an Investor in People in December 2000. The FEFC standards fund has been used to fund two project managers to provide structured training to improve the quality of teaching and to develop teaching and learning materials for inclusive learning, information learning technology and basic and key skills. In the four curriculum areas reinspected inspectors judged 46% of lessons to be good or outstanding and 8% to be poor. This is an improvement from the last inspection when 40% of lessons were graded good or outstanding and 18% poor or unsatisfactory. Since 1998-99 student retention rates on courses at level 1 have declined and on courses at level 2 and 3 they have remained about the same. Student achievement rates remain below the national average at level 3 and near to the national average at levels 1 and 2.

The college should continue to address: the lack of rigour in course reviews; the insufficient analysis of data on student retention and achievement; target-setting for improvement at course level; the standard of teaching and learning.

**Revised grade:** quality assurance 3.