

Basildon College
Reinspection of Mathematics and Science: 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

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Background

Basildon College was inspected in October 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 14/00. Provision in mathematics and science was graded 4.

The key strengths were: good lesson planning in mathematics; an effective GCSE mathematics workshop; and widening participation in mathematics. The weaknesses were: a narrow range of teaching methods and learning activities; insufficient development of IT and other key skills; poor retention and pass rates on many courses; and ineffective management of science courses.

The provision was reinspected over four days in February 2001. Inspectors observed 10 lessons and one tutorial, and held meetings with managers, teachers and students. They examined students' work, reviewed data on students' achievements for 1998 to 2000 and scrutinised a range of college documents including the college's updated self-assessment report produced in January 2001.

Assessment

Although the college is addressing the weaknesses identified at the inspection, progress has been slow. Inspectors did not observe significant improvements. There have been many changes in staffing and the management of courses has been reorganised and improved. Strategies for the development of the curriculum have been produced using research into the needs of the local community. The range of provision in mathematics and science has been reduced. Full-time GCSE courses and GCE A levels in biology and chemistry are no longer offered. Student numbers have declined. However, the college has strengthened its provision in basic numeracy and science access courses.

Student retention rates have declined and are poor. For example, in 2000 the retention rate for GCSE mathematics was 55% compared with the national average of 73%. In all science GCE A levels only 22% of students completed their courses. All of these students were successful. However, other pass rates are poor. In GCSE mathematics the pass rate of 32% was well below the national average. In GCE A level mathematics none of the eight students who started the course was successful. Strategies to improve retention and achievement are now in place. The tutorial system has been improved and now enables students to review their progress and plan future actions. Students' attendance and performance are carefully monitored to ensure action is taken to help students who need it. Additional workshop sessions have been timetabled for groups in which several students need extra support. There are early indications that these measures are being effective. For example, retention rates for the first half of the current year show improvement for most courses. Attendance in lessons observed by inspectors was 86%, which is above the national average and well above the 61% attendance in classes observed in the 1999 inspection.

Of the lessons observed, 30% were assessed as being good or outstanding compared with a national average of 61% for the programme area. Almost all the teaching observed by inspectors was satisfactory. The best lessons are well planned and have clear objectives. However, inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the range of

learning activities remains limited and that teaching methods have not yet developed to meet the needs of all students. Many lessons provide few opportunities for students to participate in, or contribute to, their learning. The use of IT is still underdeveloped. Students do not see the use of IT as integral to their course of study. It is seldom referred to in classes, or required as part of coursework assignments. Although the college plans to incorporate the use of computers on all courses, the effect on the students' experience so far has been small. Policies to improve teaching and learning have been developed which address these weaknesses.

In order to effect further improvements, the college should: improve retention and achievement; develop its teaching and learning strategies so as to meet the needs of all students; increase the role of IT in the delivery of the curriculum; and continue to review its course offer in science and mathematics.

Revised grade: mathematics and science 4.