

Wirral Metropolitan College
Reinspection of Childcare, Health and Care: November 2000
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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Wirral Metropolitan College North West Region

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Background

Wirral Metropolitan College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 69/99. Provision in childcare, health and care was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: use of work experience on childcare courses; and careful marking of students' written work. The weaknesses were: the narrow range of teaching and learning methods; poor pass rates on GNVQ, NVQ and counselling courses; poor attendance and retention rates on many courses; little use of IT in coursework and classwork; and the inadequate number and range of books for students.

The provision was reinspected over four days in November 2000. Inspectors observed 15 lessons, held meetings with programme team leaders, teachers and students, and scrutinised a wide range of college documents and students' marked work.

Assessment

The college has made considerable progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. The proportion of lessons assessed as good by inspectors has improved to 64% from 16% in the previous inspection. This is similar to this programme area national average of 65% for colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Attendance improved to 76%, similar to the appropriate national average, while the average class size at 13.1 was better than the national average. However, inspectors saw some unsatisfactory teaching, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. In the better lessons, teachers used a range of activities which engaged the students' interest and enabled them to demonstrate what they had learned throughout their course. In a few lessons the tasks set were insufficiently challenging and there was little participation by students. Teachers in most of the lessons inspected were careful to link theory with workplace practice. Older students in some lessons used their life and work experience to illustrate teaching points for younger students. Students on full-time courses participate in well-managed work experience. All students on full-time courses have a timetabled session each week in each of the key skills of communication, application of number and IT. A range of extra-curricular enrichment activities such as yoga and swimming has proved very popular with students.

Although retention has improved since the last inspection, it remains unsatisfactory for more than half of the courses. In 1999-2000 pass rates for introductory and intermediate counselling courses and some NVQ programmes were good. Levels of achievement on full-time childcare courses and the advanced GNVQ in health and social care were below the national average. The standard of students' work is generally good. The practical craftwork produced by the childcare students is of a very high standard. Portfolios of students' work showed that their use of IT is much improved. In both lessons and course work, students demonstrated an appreciation of the importance of the values of the care profession. Teachers mark assignments carefully, giving students constructive guidance on how to improve their work. There is an effective tutorial system that incorporates detailed action-planning by students.

Since the last inspection the health and care courses have been relocated to the Borough Road site. Two programme team leaders manage childcare and health courses. They are increasingly working together to ensure the sharing of good practice and the most efficient use of staff expertise. Curriculum teams meet regularly. The meetings cover aspects such as quality assurance and curriculum development. Annual course reviews have been introduced. They are updated termly. They pay appropriate attention to targets, students' achievements and retention. Self-assessment is generally self-critical and realistic. Course planning has improved since the last inspection. Most schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed and identify the aims and objectives of the lesson, the activities to be undertaken and assessment opportunities.

Poor specialist resources were a significant weakness in the last inspection. The relocation to the 'care centre', a suite of well-equipped rooms with a specialist counselling room, has helped to improve staff morale and co-operative working. A good range of books is held in the section. The environment in corridors and classrooms is enhanced by attractive displays of students' work and relevant posters and articles. Teachers are well qualified and many have recent or current experience of relevant health and childcare work. Resources in the library are now satisfactory and include a good range of books, periodicals and video and sound recordings.

Revised grade: childcare, health and care 3.