

**Wirral Metropolitan College**  
**Reinspection of English and Languages: 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**

### **Reinspection of English and languages: November 2000**

#### **Background**

Wirral Metropolitan College was inspected in March 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 69/99. Provision in English and languages was graded 4.

The key strengths were: diverse provision to meet the needs of students; well-motivated students pleased with the progress they are making; and examples of good assessment processes. The weaknesses were: unimaginative teaching and inadequately structured lessons; unsatisfactory retention and achievement rates; ineffective collection and use of data; shortcomings in management; and inadequacy in resources.

The provision was reinspected over four days in November 2000. Inspectors observed 13 lessons and one tutorial. They held meetings with managers, teachers and students, examined students' work, reviewed data on students' achievements for 1998 to 2000 and scrutinised a wide range of college documents.

#### **Assessment**

The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly. Inspectors judged that 69% of lessons they observed were good or outstanding, compared with 33% in the last inspection and the national average for this programme area of 66%. None was unsatisfactory. Attendance improved to 75%, similar to the national average of 77%, while the average class size of 12 is much better than the national average. Lesson plans identify the timed sequence and variety of activities and the resources required to support learning. Aims and objectives are shared with students. In the best lessons, there is a useful summary of learning and progress. Students collaborate well in paired and group work and are confident in expressing their own views. Teachers are skilled in sustaining students' interest in long lessons by using a wide range of methods and tasks of varying length. Language teachers match the content and level of learning activities to the needs of their student groups. In some lessons, the lack of deadlines for completing tasks diminished pace and challenge. Poor punctuality sometimes goes unchecked.

Pass rates on many courses have improved significantly since the previous inspection. GCE A level English language rates have risen above the national average, while GCSE English and Spanish are now well above. A high proportion of students entering for GCSE in Spanish achieve passes at grade C or above, though the cohort is small. Retention is now above the national average in GCSE Spanish and GCE A level English literature but still below in GCSE English and GCE A level English language. Although the number of students seeking qualifications through the NOCN is small, their achievement and retention are good.

The quantity and quality of specialist resources have improved but their impact is sometimes undermined by poor acoustics and considerable noise intrusion. Students' accessibility to the computer network can be impeded by delays in securing passwords and electronic mail addresses. Classrooms for English courses are not grouped together. Staff work hard to overcome the inconvenience and inefficiency this causes.

Management responsibilities are clear. Registers are now accurate and up to date. Extensive and careful analysis of data informs better planning. Course leadership in English is strong, despite a heavy academic and administrative workload. A programme of lesson observations and regular meetings contribute well to the sharing of good practice. Coursework assessment is accurate. External moderators' reports commend the quality of the marking and grading. The provision of language courses remains varied and extensive, though there is as yet no provision at GCE AS. Initial assessment and review is effective in placing students on the right level of language course. Leadership and co-ordination of these courses is good. Part-time teachers of languages receive excellent and regular support within a well-organised programme of specialist meetings and events.

**Revised grade:** English and languages 3.