

Oakwood Court

**Inspection of FEFC-funded provision in
non-sector establishments for students with
learning difficulties and/or disabilities**

June 2000

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to secure provision for individual students in England with learning difficulties and/or disabilities where sector provision is inadequate. When it exercises this duty, the Council makes a contract with the establishment making the provision. The contract includes the right of inspection.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 024 7686 3000
Fax 024 7686 3100
Website www.fefc.ac.uk*

©FEFC 2000 you may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in Council Circulars 97/12 and 97/22. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and other aspects of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use 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 the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses*

Contents

	Paragraph
Summary	
The establishment and its mission	1
The inspection	5
The curriculum	7
Other aspects of provision	16
Conclusions	19

Summary

Independent Establishment 20/00

Inspection of FEFC-Funded Provision in the non-sector establishment for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Oakwood Court Dawlish, Devon

Inspected June 2000

Oakwood Court, in the seaside town of Dawlish in Devon, was formerly situated in nearby Teignmouth and known as Fair Oaks College. The relocation to the current site took place in August 1998. The college provides full-time residential provision for students who have learning difficulties and additional behavioural difficulties. There are 23 full-time students in the college, of whom 20 are funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Although students come from a wide geographical area, most are from the South West.

Senior managers and staff have worked hard to establish the college on the new site. There is a commitment to quality assurance based on self-evaluation and continuous development. All members of staff, students, parents and carers are involved in this process. However, this evaluation is new and does not provide a sufficiently critical view of the work of the college. The self-assessment report over-estimates the strengths of the provision and does not identify all of the important weaknesses. It does not provide the necessary detail of the evidence upon which judgements are made.

The college provides a wide range of activities for students, including animal care, woodcraft, riding, horticulture and the development of independent living skills. Assessment procedures are inadequate. Students' individual learning plans are set out only in terms of units of accreditation and do not identify the key areas of learning required for students to progress. Teachers are therefore often unclear about what students need to learn. Lesson planning is weak. The quality of teaching was unsatisfactory in the majority of lessons observed.

Although a number of students present behavioural difficulties, there is insufficient staff training in positive and preventative methods of behavioural management. Procedures to ensure that key staff are informed about and trained to meet the full range of students' needs are unsatisfactory. There is an unhelpful distinction between the activities students undertake during the day and the evening, and insufficient joint planning of important learning goals by the staff who supervise these activities.

The work funded by the Council was judged to be less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths, and was awarded a grade 4.

Context

The Establishment and its mission

1 Oakwood Court is based in the seaside town of Dawlish in Devon. The college was formerly known as Fair Oaks College and was situated in nearby Teignmouth. The relocation to the current site occurred in August 1998. The college offers full-time residential provision for students who have learning difficulties. Many have additional behavioural difficulties. The number of students has almost doubled since 1997. The main college building is a former nursing home and has been adapted for use as a college. The accommodation in the main building includes three teaching rooms, one of which is equipped with computers, a training kitchen, external housing and care facilities for small animals and a greenhouse and horticultural facilities. Further teaching accommodation includes a woodcraft workshop on a small industrial estate in Teignmouth and a three acre field a few miles outside Dawlish, which is used for keeping poultry, bees, pigs and sheep. A local riding stable and a nearby smallholding are used on a sessional basis. Residential accommodation in the main building includes fifteen single bedrooms and a self-contained flat. There are also three houses in Dawlish, Acorns, Conifers and Elms, each of which accommodate three students.

2 The college operates as a limited company, Education and Care (Devon) Limited, which is a joint venture between the principal, as company chairman, and the head of care, as a director. The senior management team comprises the

principal, the head of care, the senior tutor (currently acting head of education), the co-ordinator of independent living skills/quality assurance co-ordinator and a manager of one the college's residential units. The college provides courses in a range of pre-vocational areas, including small animal care, horse care, poultry keeping, horticulture and workshop practice. In addition, there are opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and information technology skills, social skills and skills for independent living.

3 The college's aim is to provide a safe, nurturing and empowering environment in which young people with learning disabilities, and associated behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, can confidently complete the transition from adolescence into the adult world. It also aims to provide a learning environment which is organised to ensure that each student's learning and support requirements, including their short-term and long-term learning goals are met. Students can be aged between 16 to 25 years. All students have learning difficulties and many have associated behavioural difficulties. Some students have a specific medical condition that contributes to these difficulties, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorder, dyspraxia and mild cerebral palsy. Students at Oakwood Court are considered to be unable to attend a local FE sector college on a full-time basis. A small number of students attend South Devon college for part of their course.

Context

4 There are 23 full-time students in the college. Twenty of these students are funded by the FEFC, including five who are jointly funded by the students' local social services departments. Some students are placed at the college for 52 weeks a year, with the FEFC funding their term-time programmes. Students come to Oakwood Court from a wide geographical area. Most are from the South West area, although some come from the Midlands, the South East and London.

The Inspection

5 The inspection was carried out by three inspectors over three days. Observation of teaching and learning covered a wide range of activities available during the period of the inspection, including information technology, horticulture, animal care, independent living skills and work in the woodcraft workshop. Inspectors also observed the students' use of time between formal teaching sessions and time in the residential accommodation. In addition, inspectors' judgements

were informed by discussions with the principal, the acting head of education and other teaching staff, the head of care and other staff involved in the students' residential provision. Students' views were obtained. Inspectors examined a wide range of college documentation, including records of initial assessment, individual learning plans, incident records and other student files, and course material.

6 The college has undertaken the self-assessment process with enthusiasm and the process has involved all members of staff. The self-assessment report covers a wide range of areas of the college's work and follows the framework outlined in Council Circular 97/12 *Validating Self Assessment*. The report includes the areas for improvement and identifies the action to be taken. However, it does not provide sufficient detail or adequate sources of the evidence used to support its judgements. The report overestimates the strengths and does not identify all of the important weaknesses of the college.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of lessons observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	0	2	2	6	0

7 The most effective lessons are based on clear plans which indicate how individual students need to develop skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers enable students to gain the skills and confidence which will help them to lead more successful adult lives. In a successful craft lesson students were learning to use basic handtools and to be more resourceful and independent. In a well-managed follow-up lesson to a riding session, the teacher discussed with students the imaginative ways in which other skills, such as speaking audibly and following verbal instructions, had been included in the practical lesson. Teachers encourage students to see the progress they have made. Students generally benefit from supportive relationships with staff. Students report that they enjoy being at Oakwood Court. These aspects of learning and support were identified in the college's self-assessment report as a strength, and inspectors agreed.

8 However, many lessons were unsatisfactory. Teachers did not analyse sufficiently the needs and abilities of students and completed little planning for individual students' learning. The lack of effective planning in many lessons led to students learning little or nothing. Teachers fail to identify the basic skills

which students need to learn and fail to develop them effectively in lessons. Students are not involved in planning and evaluating their learning programmes. Some activities are repeated as part of the learning programme when students have already learned the necessary skills. For example, students take care of the rabbits and other small animals, involving cleaning and feeding on a daily basis as part of their taught programme. However, little consideration is given as to whether the student has already learned all the skills involved at this level of animal care and how further learning may progress in a planned way. This was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

9 Students' programmes are not planned to encourage them to become more independent. In most lessons, teachers give too much direction to students and often intervene before students have sufficient time to respond to questions asked or tasks set. Students are prevented from making mistakes, which might help them to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding, and enable them to see mistakes as an opportunity for learning. Students are not expected to remember their own timetables and get themselves to the right place at the

The Curriculum

right time. At morning and afternoon briefings senior staff tell students what they are to do in the following session. Staff then dispatch them in groups. This practice does not help students to develop independence and a more adult role. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

10 Individual learning plans are inadequate and do not form an effective basis for planning students' learning. Teachers do not give sufficient consideration to the likely next stage in the student's life and the consequent needs that arise from this. Learning plans consist of elements of accredited awards, rather than details of the key learning goals required if the student is to successfully move to the next stage of independence. The college has not identified this key weakness in the planning for its students.

11 Staff are poorly informed about students' individual needs and how these might be met. For example, a student who had recently joined the college had previously had a specialist assessment that strongly advised that all members of staff be made aware of the contents of the assessment report. Key members of staff for this student had not read this report. Staff are also not sufficiently trained to meet the particular needs of some students. For example, staff had insufficient understanding of the individual needs of two students who had dyspraxia and communication difficulties and, consequently, could not plan an appropriate programme of learning to meet these needs. This weakness was

not included in the self-assessment report.

12 Staff do not have an adequate range of strategies for dealing with difficult behaviour. Some staff require more support to develop their range of strategies. Physical restraint has been used to control students' behaviour on a large number of occasions. It has also been used also to safeguard students and staff when there has been imminent danger of harm. In the case of one student, restraint has been frequent and, on occasions, lengthy. Although training has taken place in the use of restraint, which has included the consideration of preventative strategies, there has been too little training in understanding the causes of the unacceptable behaviour and in considering alternative methods of management. As a consequence, incidents sometimes escalate to the point where staff respond with restraint. There is inadequate analysis, planning and intervention after such situations to try to prevent their recurrence. For example, there is no consideration of how staff will encourage good behaviour when a student has been involved in a number of such incidents. This weakness was not included in the self-assessment report.

13 Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory. Initial assessment of students' literacy, numeracy and information technology is insufficiently detailed and does not ensure that students' prior learning is taken into consideration when planning their work. The assessment does not consider the requirements of the

The Curriculum

students' chosen vocational courses or what skills they need if they are to become more independent. Students' progress is not measured and recorded as a basis for planning future work. Inspectors disagreed with the college's self-assessment that the initial assessment procedures are well established and lead to realistic individual learning plans.

14 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students have achieved elements of the National Proficiency Test Council's (NPTC) vocational foundation qualification, including elements of independent living, animal care, horticulture and poultry keeping. Some students have achieved the full level A award, designed for students with severe learning difficulties. A few students have achieved elements at level B, designed for those with moderate learning difficulties. Achievements have also been gained in basic numeracy, literacy and communications. A small number of students have achieved City and Guilds Wordpower at Foundation level and Level 1. However, because of the college's inadequate initial assessment

and programme planning, there is no evidence that these awards indicate that students have made real progress, or whether they merely accredit the existing skills, knowledge and understanding that students had on entry to the college.

15 Inspectors agreed with the college that the extended curriculum is underdeveloped. There is an unhelpful distinction between students' daytime and evening activities resulting in a lack of overall planning to develop important areas of learning. The NPTC assessment framework is used as a basis for identifying areas for independent living skills development. However, this is not translated into action plans which are used across both residential and day settings. Staff in the residential accommodation are not, therefore, clear about the skills, knowledge and understanding they are expected to promote during this part of students' college life. The college is aware of this and a recently produced short-term planning sheet has been designed to address this problem. Similarly, communication, literacy and numeracy skills are not developed in a planned way across the college.

Other Aspects of Provision

Other aspects of Provision

16 Staff offer a wide range of activities and learning opportunities on-site and at the additional off-site facilities. The teaching rooms are of an appropriate size for the groups of students. Resources are adequate for the courses provided. Opportunities are provided for students to study the care of a wide range of animals, from bees and poultry to sheep, pigs and horses. The woodcraft workshop is well equipped and provides a good opportunity for students to gain skills in basic 'do-it-yourself' techniques that will be useful to them as adults. Residential accommodation is of a good standard, with bedrooms that have been personalised and where the students are able to relax and feel comfortable. The residential units away from the main college building are of a good standard, with three students living as a group in each of these units.

17 Managers and staff have worked hard to establish the college on a new site in a relatively short period of time. The principal understands the need for continued development and has started to use the self-assessment process to identify the areas for further development, including the appointment of a senior member of staff to co-ordinate this area of work. The principal has recognised the need for increasing the college's ability to manage students who may exhibit difficult behaviour. A recent appointment has been made of a consultant educational psychologist. The principal understands the need to develop the relationship between the day college and the residential provision through improved planning and development of

students' independent living skills. There is no external advisory group to assist the principal and senior management team, although this has been identified in the self-assessment as an area for development. There is a student charter, a code of student behaviour and a range of policies in place on the use of physical restraint, equal opportunities, health and safety and key working. New staff are vetted using references from previous employers and police checks. Staff are employed for an initial probationary period of a year.

18 Staff use a range of methods to assure quality. These include, for example, formal lesson observation and questionnaires for students and parents and carers. Responses from students and carers indicate a high level of satisfaction with the provision. The self-assessment process identified the good relationships between staff and students as a strength, and inspectors agreed. Evidence gathered from lesson observations highlighted the variability of teachers' lesson planning. A more standardised approach has now been adopted. Lesson observations did not identify the weakness identified by inspectors of the lack of planning for individual students' learning objectives in many lessons.

Conclusions

19 Key Strengths

- the effective establishment of the college on a new site in a short period of time
- the wide range of learning activities
- appropriate learning resources

20 Weaknesses

- mainly poor teaching
- inadequate recording of students' progress and achievements
- ineffective individual learning plans
- poor assessment procedures
- narrow range of strategies for managing students' behaviour
- underdeveloped whole curriculum to include both day and evening activities
- insufficient understanding of some students' needs.