

Grantham College
Reinspection of Science and Mathematics: December 1999
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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Grantham College East Midlands Region

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Background

Grantham College was inspected during the last week of September 1998. The findings were published in inspection report 01/99. Provision in science and mathematics was graded 4.

The main strengths were: clear lesson aims and objectives; the regular setting of homework; many students use of IT to enhance their studies; and a good range of specialist resources for sports science. The main weaknesses were: poor pass rates; poor retention rates; many students' failure to complete or hand in homework; and insufficient help for under-performing students.

Science and mathematics was reinspected over four days in December 1999. Inspectors visited 15 classes, held meetings with staff and students, examined students' work and scrutinised college documentation.

The college completed a new self-assessment report in November 1999. The report was self-critical and included an action plan to address the issues raised in the earlier inspection.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. More rigorous entry criteria have been applied to ensure that students enrol on courses which best suit their needs and aptitudes. Careful monitoring and testing of students early in their courses enables transfers to other courses to be made where necessary. Course and lesson planning has improved in some courses. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or better has increased substantially from 22% in the original inspection to more than 46% of lessons. This figure is well below the 62% for all inspections in this programme area in 1998-99. The strengths of the better lessons include: detailed lesson planning; use of a variety of strategies which actively involve all students; attention to the needs of students of differing abilities and regular checking to make sure that learning has taken place. Policies and procedures for improving students' punctuality and attendance have been implemented. Overall the attendance of students has improved. Homework is set regularly and completed by most students. Action is taken early if students fail to submit work. Homework is marked thoroughly and returned to students quickly. Revision classes have been introduced to assist students in preparing for examinations. There has been a marked improvement in both retention and achievement in GCSE mathematics. There are also good success rates on numeracy courses. There has been a steady improvement in examination results for GCE A level biology. High levels of both retention and achievement have been maintained in the science pathway of the access to higher education course.

Some weaknesses remain. There are poor pass rates in GCE A level chemistry and physics and low, but improving, retention rates overall on GCE A level courses. There are too many unsatisfactory classes as 20% of lessons were judged to have more weaknesses than strengths. In the poorer classes schemes of work and lesson plans were not detailed enough. There was insufficient checking that students were learning; teaching strategies being used

did not take account of the full range of abilities of the students in the group; time was not managed efficiently; there was insufficient equipment for use by individual students. There has been a decrease in the range of provision at GCSE and at GCE A level.

Revised grade: science and mathematics 3.