

**Spelthorne College**  
**Reinspection of history, geography and social sciences: November 1998**  
**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. 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.*

*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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**Spelthorne College  
South East Region**

**Reinspection of history, geography and social sciences: November 1998**

**Background**

Spelthorne College was inspected between September and December 1996 and the findings were published in March 1997 in inspection report 37/97. Provision in history, geography and social sciences was graded 4.

The areas covered by the inspection were history, geography, sociology, psychology, and access courses in social sciences leading to higher education programmes. The main strengths were: well-qualified and experienced teachers who managed classes well; some effective questioning by teachers to check that students were learning; students who worked well in small groups and were well prepared for role-playing exercises; and good attendance at lessons. The major weaknesses were: lessons in which teachers talked at too great a length and allowed students little opportunity to express their own ideas; the inconsistent use of schemes of work; the lack of differentiated learning materials for mixed ability groups; work which was insufficiently challenging for students; lessons in which there was no variety of activity or which were conducted too slowly to keep students motivated; the failure to use the extra 'fifth' hour intended for additional study effectively; the paucity of comments on students' work to help them improve their performance; poor levels of achievement; ineffective management of the curriculum area.

Reinspection took place in November 1998. The inspector observed 11 lessons, examined a range of documentation, scrutinised students' work and data on achievement and retention rates, held meetings with managers and staff, and spoke with students.

**Assessment**

Achievement and retention rates for sociology, geography and history have recently improved. The new management structure for the curriculum area is proving effective. Teachers adhere to common guidelines in designing and working to their schemes of work and course handbooks. Students are provided with a good range of learning materials. The extra 'fifth' hour is now organised to suit students' needs; clear tasks are set and there is guidance for students to help them study on their own and to plan their coursework. Specific individual help is provided when necessary. In most lessons, teachers encourage contributions from students, challenge them appropriately and help them to learn by making connections between new topics and students' own experiences. Students are set regular work and teachers provide helpful comments in marking it. A number of weaknesses remain: some students do not get enough support in developing their skills, particularly the skills involved in organising their own work and in writing essays; in some lessons, students who are not coping well are not being given enough attention; there are too few checks that all students understand the topic under discussion; some opportunities are being missed for students to discuss themes and concepts in open class debate. Although achievement and retention rates have improved, those in psychology remain poor. The registration and attendance system is cumbersome and the information it provides is unreliable because of the inconsistency with which it is used. The college recognises that its revised procedures for collecting, analysing and making use of students' views needs

further development.

**Revised grade:** history, geography and social sciences 3.

**A summary of achievement and retention rates in history, geography and social sciences, 1996 to 1998**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Psychology	2	Expected completions	13	5	11
		Retention (%)	77	100	73
		Achievement (%)	20	80	50
Sociology	2	Expected completions	8	7	5
		Retention (%)	88	100	80
		Achievement (%)	57	100	80
Psychology	3	Expected completions	22	12	14
		Retention (%)	68	58	57
		Achievement (%)	27	71	38
Sociology	3	Expected completions	21	12	11
		Retention (%)	43	83	82
		Achievement (%)	78	80	89
Geography	3	Expected completions	13	14	10
		Retention (%)	69	79	90
		Achievement (%)	89	55	89
History	3	Expected completions	18	11	5
		Retention (%)	61	55	80
		Achievement (%)	78	80	100

*Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)*