

Belford College

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

September 2000

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

***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.

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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*

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Summary

Independent Establishment 05/00

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

Belford College Oldham, Manchester

Inspected September 2000

Belford College offers residential specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or additional needs such as emotional or behavioural problems. The college is situated in Oldham, and can accommodate eight residential students. At the time of inspection, the college had eight students, seven of whom were funded by the FEFC. The college was set up in March 1997 and its first cohort of students is due to leave in July 2001.

The college aims to provide a residential environment and curriculum which enables students to learn skills which increase their independence, help them to become integrated within the community and develop their self-advocacy. The college stresses the importance of teaching to develop students' self-esteem through the development of confidence, reflection, and the taking of responsibility for their own actions.

The wide range of activities within the 24-hour curriculum is good. Staff are skilful in managing what is, on occasions, very difficult behaviour and help students to learn and take responsibility for their actions. Staff

provide comprehensive and effective support for students, who are enthusiastic about the care and attention they receive. Students participate in a wide range of activities including work experience inside and outside the college. The college has made considerable efforts to improve the college environment and has begun to develop simulated work environments. Staff provide effective support for students to learn through practical activities. Students are enthusiastic about their involvement in the life of the college. However, the curriculum, which comprises literacy, numeracy and information technology, is not fully meeting students' learning needs. Students are spending too much time completing worksheets which are often not appropriate for their age. Students' individual learning plans are not sufficiently detailed. Assessments are not sufficiently analytical and do not provide the evidence to allow appropriate targets to be set. Procedures for monitoring and recording students' progress are inadequate.

Staff are familiar with the contents of the self-assessment report, the production of which was led by the principal. The report is detailed and, though each section was graded, the college did not award itself an overall grade. Many sections of the report were descriptive rather than evaluative and identification of weaknesses lacked clarity and analysis. Evidence cited to support strengths in some parts of the report was not available; much of this evidence was still to be developed under the college's action plan. The report does not adequately analyse the

Summary

impact of strengths and weaknesses on students' learning and achievements.

Inspectors judged that the college had overestimated the quality of its provision. The provision funded by the FEFC was judged to be satisfactory with strengths but also some weaknesses and was awarded a grade 3.

Context

The Establishment and its Mission

1 Belford College is situated in Werneth, a suburb of Oldham. The college is located in a substantial detached Victorian property. It offers residential specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or additional needs such as help with emotional or behavioural problems. The college was set up in March 1997 and its first cohort of students is due to leave in July 2001.

2 The college mission statement is: "Pathway towards independence, integration and self-advocacy." The statement of aims embodies the ethos and principles by which the college operates. These include:

- 'to facilitate students becoming fully involved in all decision making processes affecting their lives, enabling them to maximise their independence according to individual aspirations and abilities.
- to provide appropriate progressive prevocational post-16 courses, including individual Care Plans which take account of personal interests, choices and future expectations.
- to integrate all students into Community resources whenever and wherever possible.
- to provide further education in a warm, caring and supportive atmosphere where all students feel valued as important individuals and self-advocacy is promoted wherever possible.'

3 The college admits students with a complex range of learning difficulties. Many have serious behavioural difficulties. Some students have additional medical conditions. The ability range of the students is wide. Some have specific learning difficulties. The college does not provide facilities for students with physical disabilities.

4 Belford is a small eight to nine bed residential college and staff have developed a 'non-aversive' approach to mediate behaviour. The college recruits students from all over the country, although current students are largely from local areas.

5 At the time of the inspection, eight students were attending the college, seven of whom were funded by the FEFC. Five of the FEFC-funded students were male. Currently, the college has nineteen staff, comprising 2 teachers, 14 support staff and 3 part-time instructors. There are two staff vacancies.

The Inspection

6 The inspection was carried out by two inspectors over three days. Twelve sessions of teaching and learning were observed. Inspectors' judgements were informed by discussions with the principal, the students and members of staff. Students' work and centre documentation, including students' files, were examined.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of lessons observed

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

7 Of the lessons observed, 50% were judged to be good or outstanding. This is below the sector average of 65% for all colleges inspected in 1998-99 as set out in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*. The figure of 25% for lessons judged to be less than satisfactory or poor is much higher than the national average of 6%.

8 The college's curriculum comprises literacy, numeracy, information technology, independent living skills and a Modular Integrated Skills Programme which offers areas not covered by other curriculum. For example, students have undertaken first-aid and personal health options; anger management and self-awareness modules are planned. Students also undertake work preparation training, in conjunction with work experience either within the college or outside. A range of evening and weekend activities are included in the 24-hour curriculum. Activities are based on the interests and abilities of individual students. They offer opportunities for students to extend their learning. The outcomes from these programmes are included in student records of achievement and external accreditation.

9 Programmes are internally and externally accredited. A number of external validation schemes are used, for

example, the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), Associated Examination Board (AEB) Achievement tests in literacy and numeracy, Open College units (OCR) and National vocational units (NVQ's). Students have achieved a variety of these awards including a Life Award, NVQ in Exercise and Fitness level 2, Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) as well as literacy and numeracy AEB awards. All students' achievements are valued and recognised through photographic profiles, records of achievement and the annual presentation day. The college recognises the need to produce more accurate reports of students' progress so that the full range of their achievements can be appropriately documented.

10 Many students improve their basic skills best in relevant contexts and through practical activities. The college does not use fully some very effective work experience activities in its teaching of basic skills. Links between the basic skills curriculum and other activities are poor. For example, in a numeracy session a counting activity was based on rote learning and little attempt was made by the tutor to introduce a practical application for the counting task. An effective food technology session could have been made more effective if students had practised reading and

The Curriculum

writing recipes in the basic skills session which followed.

11 The college's self-assessment report did not identify fully the weaknesses in the teaching methods and materials used in basic skills sessions. The college has designed a two stage course for both literacy and numeracy. The course comprises a series of worksheets which the students work through at their own pace. Inspectors agreed with the college that some of the materials are not appropriate for the age of the students. Although this weakness was to be addressed under the college's action plan, little has been done to provide materials suitable for young adults.

12 Inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that basic skills teaching methods are appropriate and that staff prepare work that is progressive and demanding. Each student has a weekly timetable identifying daily activities. Individual files for literacy, numeracy and information technology are kept as a record of work. These consist of the worksheets the students complete as part of their basic skills courses. Students are working at one of the two levels the college has developed, but there is little differentiation within the materials to meet the students' individual learning needs.

13 There is no evidence of any systematic or regular use of students' interests to develop literacy skills. There are no examples of personal or creative writing in students' files. Students do not practise drafting and editing their work nor develop sustained writing

skills. Most written work is based on question and answer tasks in worksheets. This over-reliance on worksheets means that staff do not address the specific learning needs of the students, or give attention to the different learning styles of individual students.

14 Each student has an individual education/care plan and, at each review, all aspects of the curriculum are reported upon and reviewed and targets are set for students. Inspectors did not agree that this was a strength. There was no evidence that the targets set were demanding enough to enable each individual student to make progress. There were no tutorial records available from the previous year for inspectors to use to assess the review process.

15 Students' individual learning plans are inadequate. There is insufficient detail in the baseline assessments to inform initial planning. Staff do not always have sufficient information from other agencies about students' needs and difficulties prior to their coming to the college. Six-monthly reviews are in place, but these are not sufficiently analytical to help staff plan appropriate work. Often the objectives set for students are too general and do not address their specific needs. In one case, an external assessment gave clear instruction and advice about a student's specific learning needs. There is no evidence to suggest, however, that the college had taken account of this advice in planning the individual learning programme. Indeed, teaching methods were used which reinforced the student's weaknesses, when the external assessment had suggested methods which would build upon the student's strengths.

The Curriculum

16 Daily records are completed by staff. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that additional training is necessary for staff to write more specific and accurate records.

17 Work experience is an important aspect of the pre-vocational curriculum offered at the college. Students are well supported in internal and external work placements and these include building maintenance, retail, a leisure centre placement and work with animals. Internal work experience includes upholstery, woodwork and printing. Tutors are knowledgeable and create effective learning activities. Considerable active learning takes place and students are enthusiastic and work hard in these sessions. The college makes considerable efforts to arrange external courses to meet individual needs: an NVQ level 2 in exercise and fitness has been gained by one of the students through links with a college in Manchester.

18 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the 24-hour curriculum is a strength. It offers opportunities for students to experience a range of activities in a relaxed context. These activities gave the students much enjoyment whilst enabling them to achieve both personal and intellectual development. The evening and weekend programme is based on the interests of individual students and a wide range of activities is available. These include visits to the local gym and swimming pool, art and drama. A number of different options are available each evening and students choose their options a week in advance; all students are encouraged to attend. In a skilfully led

quiz activity, a small group of students were actively engaged in tasks which developed their general knowledge, encouraged them to help each other and, at the same time, allowed them to enjoy themselves to the full. In another option, a dance and singing session provided an opportunity for self-expression within a controlled environment. Students also benefit from opportunities to participate in outings; last year a trip to Euro Disney was much appreciated and planning is currently taking place for another trip abroad.

19 Students are involved in the life of the college. Inspectors judged that this was a significant strength. There is a student council and, at a recent joint training day for staff and students, the charter was put together. Students are involved in the daily running of the college as part of their independent living skills training. This training includes light domestic duties, meal preparation, and the cleaning and upkeep of their own bedrooms. Students also participate in planning and running college social activities.

Other Aspects of Provision

20 Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that student support is a significant strength. The college has developed comprehensive and effective support for students. This contributes to the excellent retention of students. Teaching and support staff work closely together and offer 24-hour support. They are very available to students. Although there is a formality between staff and students expressed through boundaries set by staff, the address of staff by surname and a staff dress code, there is much open affection between the students and staff. Constructive and positive relationships exist between staff and students, many of whom have not enjoyed stable relationships in their early years. Students appear happy, relaxed and confident and speak highly of the support they receive.

21 Many of the students have serious behavioural difficulties. Staff adopt positive approaches to mediate behaviour; the non-aversive approach to regulating behaviour stresses the importance of positive affirmation to build students' self-esteem. Rules, regulations, high expectations and standards are an important part of the approach; through the values communicated, students develop a sense of responsibility for their own actions. The high staff/student ratio offers students much individual attention; and care is taken to ensure that all staff adopt a consistent approach to their work.

22 Additional support services are available when required and these include a psychiatrist, psychologist, speech and language therapist, and art therapist. There is a qualified counsellor on the staff. Support staff work hard to

ensure the punctuality and good attendance of students, though, in case anyone does miss breakfast, snacks are provided mid-morning. Records of care and support are detailed. The tutorial system is designed to ensure that students have both personal and academic support as well as an opportunity to record their achievements. Tutorial records are recent and less well developed than the care records.

23 As stated in the college's self-assessment report, guidance on opportunities for students after they leave the college is available. Staff are currently working to prepare the college's first cohort to leave. Careers advisers from the home area of the student are involved in preparation plans for 'discharge'.

24 Much of the accommodation is of a good quality and reflects the care and support students receive at the college. The residential accommodation is of a high standard; it is well-maintained and independent living skills training takes place in natural settings, including the laundry and the communal kitchen. Work experience facilities on-site help to prepare students for external work placements. These include woodwork and upholstery rooms, a printshop, and art and beauty therapy rooms. There is an information technology room with three computers. Common areas also exist where students can meet informally and take part in social and leisure activities. Students have access to local recreational and sports facilities. The college staff believe that their students are entitled to a good environment. Their efforts are appreciated by the students.

Other Aspects of Provision

25 Quality assurance procedures are at an early stage of development. Inspectors were not able to agree with the college's judgement that this aspect of provision is outstanding. While procedures are clearly working in relation to students' care plans and audit procedures are in place for service reviews, quality assurance systems for teaching and learning have only recently been set up. Few lesson observations have taken place and staff have insufficient experience of practice in other colleges to establish appropriate criteria against which to judge the quality of teaching and learning. Though evaluations of practice exist, these do not have sufficient detail to inform programme development. Assessment is not sufficiently analytical to inform target setting. An appraisal system has been introduced and on-going informal supervision of staff takes place. The college is in the process of setting up a monthly formal supervision system for staff.

26 Employment procedures are extremely thorough and the college has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. Staff development includes active listening skills training, non-aversive behavioural management and report writing. A number of staff are starting part-time teacher training courses.

27 Management responsibilities are clearly defined. Informal communication is effective, though the college recognises the need to formalise policies and procedures for management. Many of these had been written by the time of the inspection but it is too early to assess their impact. Governors take an active

role in college life; they participate in staff appointments and attend college functions throughout the year. The self-assessment report acknowledges the need to develop the constitution of the governing body as well as involve governors in the appraisal of senior staff. However, it did not identify the need for review of and summative reports on, board activities.

28 Staff have developed a range of productive links with external agencies and parents. Parents are kept informed of students' progress as well as of behavioural changes and improvements in students' independent living skills. Parents attend a number of functions throughout the year. There is a parents' day which offers parents an opportunity to raise their own issues, as well as the presentation day, a carol concert and garden party in May.

Conclusions

29 **Key strengths**

- the wide range of activities within the 24 hour curriculum
- skilful management of students' behaviour
- comprehensive and effective support for students
- good involvement of students in the life of the college

30 **Weaknesses**

- failure to use an effective baseline assessment to inform individual learning plans
- poor links between basic skills curriculum and other activities
- some inappropriate teaching methods and materials in basic skills
- insufficient quality assurance procedures to improve teaching and learning