

# **Bridge College**

**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.*

*College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by institutions in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of and experience in the work they inspect.*

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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 17/00**

### **Inspection of FEFC-Funded Provision in non-sector establishments for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.**

#### **Bridge College Offerton, Stockport**

#### **Inspected June 2000**

Bridge College is part of the Boys and Girls Welfare Society and provides day placements for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. Many students have additional complex medical conditions. Since the previous inspection in 1995 there has been a significant increase in the number of students who have profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Currently there are 53 students at the college, all of whom are funded wholly or partly by the FEFC. Thirty-one of the students are aged 19 or above.

The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive, detailed and thorough. All staff have contributed to the production of the report. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. By the time of the inspection action had been taken to address many of the weaknesses.

The college aims, 'To create an Inclusive Learning environment where young people are empowered to make the transition to adulthood by maximising independence and

communication.' Staff have developed a curriculum which can be adapted to meet the needs of individual students. For most students, the curriculum comprises five main elements, 'academic, vocational, social, domestic and self'. For students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities the emphasis is on communication, planned dependence and sensory development. Each student has an individual programme which is devised within the framework of the curriculum.

Much of the work at the college is of outstanding quality. All staff take great care to maximise opportunities to promote students' learning throughout the day and to adopt a consistent approach to their work with the students. Staff know the students well and are successful in helping them to learn. Students' individual programmes are of good quality and prioritise the skills and competences that will be useful to them in their future lives. Staff place a clear emphasis on helping students to learn through practical activities. Good use is made of community facilities to promote learning and to help students develop confidence in using community facilities when they leave college. A minority of activities, particularly for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are not well matched to their needs. Students respond well to the high expectations of their teachers and support workers and are making sound progress. Information and communication technology, much of which has been

# Summary

developed in the college to support learning, record students' progress and facilitates communication of outstanding quality. Specialist support services and therapies are comprehensive and well integrated with classroom activities wherever possible to maximise students' ability to learn. There is a good range of specialist equipment. Accommodation is accessible and well-maintained and its quality reflects the value ascribed to students. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of the college's work are comprehensive and rigorous. Staff are proud of what they do and work well together as a team. Senior managers provide strong leadership, are supportive of staff and students and are directly involved in the work of the college. Staff have developed productive links with external agencies and parents.

The work funded by the FEFC was judged to be outstanding provision with many strengths and few weaknesses and was awarded a grade 1.

# Context

## **The establishment and its mission**

1 Bridge College, which is located in a former school in Offerton near Stockport, is part of the Boys and Girls Welfare Society which is a charitable organisation based in the North West. The college aims 'To create an Inclusive Learning environment where young people are empowered to make the transition to adulthood by maximising independence and communication.' At the time of the inspection, the college had 53 students, all of whom were funded wholly or partly by the FEFC. Thirty-one of the students are aged 19 or above.

2 The college is a specialist establishment which provides day placements for students with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. Some students have additional medical conditions and many have severe learning difficulties. Approximately 25% of the students have profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college does not provide for students whose main difficulty stems from behaviour which is particularly difficult to manage and may be injurious to themselves and others, students whose main disability is a sensory impairment and students who need a secure 24 hour environment with constant supervision.

3 Staff have developed a curriculum which can be adapted to meet the needs of individual students. For most students the curriculum comprises five main elements, 'academic, vocational, social, domestic and self'. For students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities the emphasis is on communication, planned

dependence and sensory development. Each student has an individual programme which is devised within the framework of the curriculum. Some students have the opportunity to study at local FE sector colleges. Staff are particularly skilled in helping students who have no speech to learn through the use of augmentative communication such as Makaton signs and symbols and VOCA (voice output communication aids). In recognition of these skills the college has been designated a Makaton centre of excellence and a Liberator centre of regional excellence.

## **The Inspection**

4 The inspection was carried out by two inspectors over three days. Sixteen sessions of teaching and learning were observed. Inspectors' judgements were informed by discussions with the principal, vice-principal, representatives of external organisations, parents, students, teachers and support staff and therapists. College documentation, including students' files, was examined.

# The Curriculum

## Grade profile of lessons observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	5	9	2	0	0

5 Of the lessons observed, 88% were judged to be good or outstanding. This is significantly above the 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*. No lessons were judged to be less than satisfactory or poor. Teachers and support workers know the students well and are skilled in helping them to learn. Great care is taken to ensure that staff make full use of the time students are in college to maximise their opportunities for learning. For example, as students arrive in the morning staff engage students in conversation and encourage them, where possible, to make their way independently to their tutor groups. Similarly, at break and lunchtimes staff converse with students and encourage them to make choices and to think for themselves.

6 As the self-assessment report states, procedures for assessing students' strengths and weaknesses on entry to the college are comprehensive and thorough. Staff make good use of the information provided by the students' previous schools and often visit the schools to observe the students in a setting in which they are comfortable. The information they gather helps staff to identify an appropriate long-term goal for each student and this then leads to the development of an individual programme

which comprises medium and short-term goals. Most of these goals are realistic and relevant to students' needs and interests. A minority of programmes include some elements which are not as well matched to students' needs and levels of ability as they might be. A particular strength of the individual learning programme is a section which describes the teaching and learning methods which are most likely to be effective for the student and the strategies which staff should use to address students' behavioural difficulties.

7 Every member of staff has a copy of each student's individual learning programme and this helps them to adopt a consistent approach to their work with the students to maximise the student's potential for learning. Students' personal tutors can also set core targets for the students relating to communication, personal development, numeracy and positive behaviour. These core targets are communicated to all staff who then plan their lessons to incorporate activities which will enable the students to achieve their core targets. Lesson plans are detailed and carefully constructed to show how the different needs of individual students will be met through the various activities.

8 Staff are aware that many of the students learn best through practical activities and plan their lessons around



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such activities wherever possible. For example, in one lesson a small group of students went to a supermarket to purchase the ingredients they would need to cook a simple meal. The outing had been planned to teach the students basic literacy and numeracy skills which were relevant to their needs and well matched to their levels of ability. The outing also provided opportunities for students to develop their personal, social and communication skills by interacting with members of the public.

9 The severity of many students' disabilities means that they are likely to need support and care from other people for all their lives. Staff are skilled in helping these students to develop the skills they need to direct others as to their wishes and needs so that they can have some control over their lives even though they are dependent on others. Many students are used to having things done for them and staff take great care to encourage them to think about what they need and to ask for it in a way which will encourage others to want to help them. For example, in one lesson students had to identify what help each one of them wanted from the teacher or support worker to enable them to complete a specific task in the kitchen. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report.

10 Staff are creative and think carefully about ways in which they can help students to learn skills which will be useful to them in their future lives. For example, The 'Take Away Club' which operates weekly, enables students to order a take away meal of their choice at lunchtime. This requires the students to decide amongst themselves the type of

meal they wish to order and to place the order with or without support from staff depending on their level of ability. The club is popular with students and enables them to learn valuable skills such as communication, working and negotiating with others, and directing staff to provide the support they require.

11 Staff make good use of community facilities to promote and extend students' learning. For example, students were observed attending a creative crafts class in a local adult education centre. In addition to the benefits they gained from the lesson by learning new hobbies and interests, the students developed their personal, social and communication skills by meeting a wider range of people in the centre and using the coffee bar at break times. As the students live locally, the opportunity to use community facilities enables them to familiarise themselves with the range of facilities available and to develop confidence in using them so that they can continue to use the facilities once they have left college. Students also benefit from opportunities to participate in residential trips.

12 Where appropriate, students benefit from opportunities to enrol for courses in local FE sector colleges. These opportunities extend the range of programmes the students can study, develop their personal, social and communication skills and prepare them to progress to more advanced level courses when they leave the college. Some students also benefit from opportunities to participate in work experience placements in the college and in external organisations.

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13 Each student has a personal diary which is used to record either in writing or through symbols all the work they have done in college. This record provides an effective stimulus for communication in college and at home. Parents are encouraged to use the diary to record family events and activities in which students have participated during the evenings, weekends and holidays. Students find the diaries helpful as they serve as prompts when they are talking to their parents or staff in college. Inspectors agree that the diary system is a strength of the provision.

14 Much of the work with students who have profound and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities is carried out by multi-disciplinary teams of staff which include teachers, support workers and a range of therapists. Staff have a realistic approach to their work and set appropriate priorities such as developing effective means of communication and promoting the development of dexterity and mobility skills. Care is taken to ensure that, where possible, students are taught ways of attracting attention and communicating their needs to others. Staff also work hard to help students develop concepts such as cause and effect and object permanence.

15 As the self-assessment report states, the college's Objects of Reference' scheme is a strength of the provision. Objects of reference are used effectively to help students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make sense of daily routines and to understand what will be happening during different lessons. Staff have developed a set of

objects of reference which are used for all students. An object such as a cup is used to signify that it is break time and an object such as an egg is used to signify that the student is going into the cookery room. Each student has a bag containing a set of the objects of reference and frames have been made to attach the objects of reference to doors to indicate what the room is used for. Students are encouraged to match an object of reference to the one which is attached to the door to help them understand what type of activities they will be doing.

16 Procedures for assessing, monitoring and recording students' progress are outstanding. All staff, including support workers and refectory staff, are aware of students' individual objectives and make notes of any progress they observe. Teachers set objectives for individual students in their lesson plans and monitor their progress in relation to these during the lesson. At the end of the lesson they carefully review students' performance and record the progress they have made. Support staff contribute well to this process. The college has recently introduced reports which record students' progress by means of brief pen portraits which provide a succinct description of the progress students have made at major milestones during their time at the college. All students have records of achievement and portfolios of work to show what they have learned at the college. A particular strength is the practice of giving each student who leaves the college a video record of achievement which provides a visual summary of the work they have

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completed in the college. Most of these strengths are included in the self-assessment report.

17 Most students make good progress at the college and are proud of the work they do. They are able to do more for themselves, or to direct others to do it for them, than they were when they entered the college. Many gain significant confidence and are able to progress to more advanced level courses in other colleges. Parents are very positive about the progress students make, particularly in relation to their behaviour and social skills.

## Other Aspects of Provision

18 Inspectors agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that support for students is of outstanding quality. Staff work well together as a multi-disciplinary team to maximise students' potential for learning. Within the college students have access to a wide range of specialist support services such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and nursing care. Wherever possible, support is integrated with classroom activities rather than withdrawing students for individual sessions. At the start of each morning and afternoon physiotherapists visit every classroom to make sure students are seated comfortably so that they can learn effectively. High-quality support is also provided for students who have behavioural difficulties. Their needs are carefully assessed, strategies are devised to help staff to support them, and care is taken to ensure that all staff adopt a consistent approach to this work. Staff carefully construct individual support plans for students, monitor the impact of the support and modify it as students' needs change. When necessary, students have access to specialist support from external agencies.

19 As stated in the self-assessment report, staff are well qualified and experienced. They work well together as a team to support students and maximise the benefits they can gain from their time at the college. Support staff are deployed effectively in classrooms and at break and lunchtimes. The college has a good range of equipment, some of which has been developed at the college. For example, staff have developed switches to enable students to operate equipment

such as computers and 'voice output communication aids'. The development of the college's computer database for tracking and recording students' achievements is a particular strength. The system promotes a consistent approach to this work and ensures that all staff have easy access to information about students. The system also enables staff to record details of the equipment each student has been assessed as needing for different purposes including eating and drinking. An additional major strength of this work is the ability to customise computer programmes to meet the requirements of individual students and to ensure that the adaptations are instantly available whenever and wherever they are needed.

20 Accommodation within the college is of high quality and reflects the value ascribed to students. The building is fully accessible to students in wheelchairs, clean, well-maintained and attractively decorated. Staff make good use of displays, many of which include students' work, to create a stimulating learning environment for students. Specialist rooms such as the multi-sensory room are of particular benefit to students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Although the college does not currently have a hydrotherapy pool, arrangements are made for students to use one which is within reasonable travelling distance of the college.

21 Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that procedures for assuring the quality of the provision are exemplary. Staff have a clear commitment to the process of continuous

## Other Aspects of Provision

quality improvement. Senior managers have established a carefully planned quality assurance cycle and monitor the quality of the provision through a range of methods such as team meetings, students' reviews and an annual curriculum review. Staff have contact with a range of other colleges and organisations and this enables them to establish realistic benchmarks against which they can make judgements about the quality of the college's provision. Procedures for observing lessons are well-established and include arrangements for observing lessons in the sector colleges attended by students at Bridge College. A particular strength is the setting of standards for different elements of the college's provision such as teaching and learning, human resources and health and safety, together with sources of evidence and procedures for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating these standards. The college actively seeks the views of students, external organisations and parents or carers about the quality of the provision and makes good use of external consultants in its quality assurance arrangements.

22 The staff appraisal system is well-established and staff speak positively about its benefits. The aim of the system is to develop staff performance and thereby improve the quality of teaching and learning. Senior managers carefully analyse the core appraisal targets of staff to identify training needs and develop appropriate training packages. A considerable amount of training is provided for staff within the college. For example, staff benefit from frequent opportunities to develop their skills in the use of Makaton symbols to improve their

ability to communicate effectively with students. The college has won two awards for the use of Makaton to support communication with students. Staff also have the opportunity to attend external training events and support staff benefit from the regular supervision sessions they have with their line managers. Most of these strengths are recorded in the self-assessment report.

23 The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive, detailed and thorough. All staff have had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the report. The self-assessment committee, which includes representatives from the different disciplines in the college, led the work and a number of training days were used to consult staff and secure their involvement in the process. Senior managers carefully constructed a detailed action plan to address the weakness identified through the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. By the time of the inspection, action had been taken to address many of the weaknesses.

24 Inspectors agree with the judgement that the college is well-managed. Senior managers provide strong leadership, are supportive of staff and are directly involved in the work of the college. Communication between staff is good. Staff from the different disciplines work well together as a team. The strategic plan gives a clear view of the direction in which senior managers wish the college to develop. Staff have developed productive links with a range of external agencies and parents.

## Other Aspects of Provision

Representatives of external agencies speak highly of the college and the quality of its work. Many parents value the way in which staff listen to their concerns and praise their willingness to work with them.

# Conclusions

## 25 Key strengths

- arrangements for maximising students' opportunities for learning
- arrangements for ensuring consistent approaches to teaching and supporting students
- good students' achievements
- comprehensive and well-integrated support for students
- outstanding developments in communication and information technology
- exemplary quality assurance procedures
- effective teamwork
- strong and effective leadership
- productive links with external organisations and parents

## 26 Weaknesses

- lack of match of a minority of activities to students' needs