

European Services for People with Autism

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

November 1999

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

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

European Services for People with Autism (ESPA) Limited

Inspected November 1999

***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 02/2000

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

European Services for People with Autism Limited, Ashbrooke, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear.

Inspected November 1999.

European Services for People with Autism Limited makes a range of educational provision for students with the full spectrum of autistic disorders. Separate provision is made in three locations for students with different levels of disability. The service has grown rapidly from 23 student places in October 1995 to 70 places in November 1999. Sixty-two students were funded by the FEFC at the time of the inspection.

Despite the difficulties which the students experience with communication, the college is characterised by the positive relationships between staff and students. Staff make good use of community facilities to promote learning and help students to learn through some effective practical activities. Many students have access to good provision in mainstream colleges. High-quality educational and residential accommodation enhances students' self-esteem. Many students learn to cope more effectively in the wider world. As the result of recent

developments, the college has many new systems which have yet to have a full effect on teaching, learning and students' achievements. Poor curriculum planning, poor lesson planning and evaluation and poor teaching hamper students' learning. Students' individual programme plans lack the precise detail which would enable them to be used effectively. Students were engaged in some inappropriate activities in some lessons. There is insufficient recording of students' progress and achievements.

The self-assessment process has been helpful to the college and has been used to identify areas for development and for consolidation. The self-assessment report was general and did not reflect the detailed assessment process undertaken by the college. Inspectors judged that the college had over-estimated the quality of its provision.

The provision funded by the FEFC was judged to be satisfactory, with strengths and some weaknesses, and was awarded a grade 3.

Context

The Establishment and its mission

1 European Services for People with Autism Limited (ESPA), located in Tyne and Wear and County Durham, makes specialist provision for students with the full spectrum of autistic disorders. The present company, which also runs separate long-term residential provision, was formed from a merger with Communities for Autistic People Limited (CAP). Previously ESPA ran the college provision. Staff who worked for CAP have had to adjust to the new educational focus of ESPA. The college is characterised by the positive relationships between staff and students.

2 Provision is made in three locations for students with different levels of disability. South Hill College, in Sunderland, caters for students who are seriously disabled by their autism and have severe or profound learning difficulties. Most students have behaviour which is difficult to manage, particularly in situations which they find stressful. Many students have little meaningful speech and few concepts of social expectations. The unpredictability of students' behaviour, their poor communication skills, their difficulty in developing social relationships and their need for constant support necessitate high levels of support.

3 Students with autism who are more capable but have significant difficulties with communication, social relationships and appropriate behaviour, are based at Ashleigh College in Newcastle. These students travel to Gateshead to studios on an industrial estate for most of their formal lessons.

4 Students who are more able are resident at Westfield Hall in Sunderland and attend classes at Tasker House. In addition, most students attend courses at one of the two local colleges of further education. A number of students have been diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome, which means that they are academically able but have difficulties with communication difficulties and exhibit rigid or ritualistic behaviour.

5 The provision has expanded rapidly since the time of the last inspection. In October 1995, the colleges had places for 17 residential students and six students who attended daily. Of these, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded seven students. At the time of this inspection the colleges had 70 places. Sixty-two students were funded by the FEFC. Twenty were aged 19 or over.

6 The college works only with students with some degree of autism. A few have additional physical or sensory disabilities. The college does not accept students who are unable to benefit from educational provision.

7 The management structure has been developed to meet the requirements of the expanded provision. These changes are still too recent for a judgement to be made about their effectiveness

The Inspection

8 A team of three inspectors carried out the inspection over five days. Inspectors observed students in all aspects of the establishment's provision,

Context

including that in two local sector colleges. They conducted interviews, talked with staff and students, scrutinised students' work, and examined students' files and a wide range of documentation provided by the college.

Curriculum

Grade profile of lessons observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	1	6	12	4	3

9 A specially designed core curriculum is offered at both South Hill and Ashleigh colleges. This comprises creative and expressive arts, and the development of students' independence and vocational skills, leisure skills, and the key skills, as defined by the college, of communication, numeracy, information technology, working together and personal skills. Staff are beginning to develop individual programmes for students based on the core curriculum. Currently, the aims of the learning plans are not sufficiently detailed for them to be used effectively to plan students' programmes.

10 The above table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected. Of the lessons inspected, 27% were rated good or outstanding. This is well below 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: the chief inspector's annual report*. The figure of 27% for lessons rated less than satisfactory or poor is much higher than the national average of 6%.

11 Students at South Hill college learn best in practical lessons, where they are least handicapped by their communication difficulties and their lack of understanding of symbols such as numbers and written words. The most successful lessons are organised to enable them to understand some aspect of

the world more clearly and cope with it more successfully. In a swimming lesson students were first taken to a park to enable them to adjust to being out of the college, and then to a swimming pool which they had not previously visited. The aim of the lesson for these students, who resist all aspects of change, was to help them to learn to cope with a different venue. As well as successfully coping with the new venue, one of the students spoke more freely and related better whilst he was in the water. Less successful lessons involved classroom based activities, including reading, writing and counting. Students were taught as a group, despite their different levels of ability. In some lessons, students who could already achieve the aim of the lesson were taught with others who would never be able to do so. Some staff find it difficult to devise learning programmes for students with profound learning difficulties.

12 Students at Ashleigh learn a good range of domestic and self-care skills in their residential accommodation. Many students become increasingly independent and learn a range of self-care skills which enable them to take more responsibility for aspects of their own lives. Most learn to manage their behaviour within more acceptable boundaries and to relate more effectively to other people. Classroom-based learning takes place in adapted units on an industrial estate in Gateshead.

Curriculum

Students successfully learn to use local supermarkets and shops and maintain appropriate relationships with other users. In less successful lessons students are required to learn about a skill rather than learning to do it.

13 The timetable and curriculum at Tasker House is similar to that of a school. In addition, there are other lessons aimed at helping students to understand some of their socially inappropriate behaviour so that they may consciously try to modify it. This approach would benefit from formal evaluation of its effectiveness in helping young people with Asperger's syndrome to decrease some of their difficulties.

14 Many students learn to cope more effectively in the wider world, but, currently, the recording of students' progress and achievements is insufficiently detailed. As many students are able to make only small gains in learning, precise goals need to be set. Achievements need to be recorded meticulously. Teachers are working towards this by developing individual learning plans. This work, as the college acknowledges in its self-assessment report, is still at an early stage of development. Few formal records are kept of the achievements of students who have recently completed their courses at ESPA. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Other Aspects of Provision

15 The college recognises that much of the expansion in provision has been opportunistic rather than as part of a planned process. As a consequence, many of the systems created to meet the requirements of the expansion are new and untested. This was acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

16 Forty-two students attend local colleges. Attendance ranges from one session to four full days a week, depending on individual needs and abilities. Most of the students with Aspergers' syndrome attend college provision as part of their programme. Nine students are integrated with higher level courses such as General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and Higher National Certificate. Most students mix with other students and participate actively in sessions without a learning support assistant.

17 In the sector colleges students from across the ability range have access to separate provision, which is made specifically for students from ESPA and taught by sector college staff. In a creative writing lesson a student who rarely spoke in other lessons contributed effectively, demonstrating the ability to think imaginatively. Another student suggested 'HP sauce pouring' as an image that captured aspects of slowness. In a work preparation programme students were encouraged to take responsibility for tasks that involved using the community. In a GCE A level mathematics lesson, the students benefited from the teacher's patient, systematic and visual approach to teaching.

18 Less able students join classes provided by the sector colleges exclusively for ESPA students. Some attend programmes for students with learning difficulties. Students who attend provision for students with learning difficulties benefit from the opportunity to make wider social contacts and to learn from programmes that emphasise practical tasks. The strengths of this provision were under-estimated in the self-assessment report.

19 Arrangements to support ESPA students in sector colleges are particularly effective when sector college staff offering learning support are involved in the planning. On the advanced programmes, where students are fully integrated, the learning support assistants encourage independence in learning in the classroom and respect the wishes of students. Support for students is provided initially in the classroom and subsequently reduced as the students became more confident. Learning support assistants are effective in helping with social interaction in separate specialist provision. Assistants are less effective when they over-support students in completing tasks and do not allow them to take time to solve problems on their own. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

20 In September 1999, the number of students attending sector colleges doubled, as did the range of courses available to them. The new provision is poorly planned. Sector college staff were asked to teach academic subjects to individuals or separate groups without any preliminary induction, training or guidance about teaching students with

Other Aspects of Provision

Aspergers' syndrome and the difficulties they face in learning. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. In one class, there were insufficient staff available to enable students with complex additional learning needs to make progress, though when this was realised the class size was reduced. Major changes were made in the first few months of the provision in staffing and student groups and this lack of planning had an adverse effect on students' learning. The college is aware of the difficulties and by the time of the inspection had increased the time allowed for liaison between staff and students. There is now a full-time post to support the new developments.

21 Five students successfully moved on to sector college programmes having passed their examinations. One progressed to higher education. Others are continuing in sector provision, some with help from ESPA. Five students passed the locally-designed independent skills for adult life certificate and achieved some units of pre-vocational qualifications. The students on vocational programmes in the current year are progressing well. Data on the success and progress of students in sector colleges is not systematically collated and analysed in order to aid planning. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

22 Effective training for sector college staff who teach students who have Aspergers' syndrome or autism is at an early stage of development and is not yet systematic. A coherent approach to training for learning support assistants

working with the students has not yet been established. Some staff move from care roles into educational roles without appropriate training. ESPA staff contribute to courses for staff working with their students which are run by one of the sector colleges. This course was not, however, in place before the expansion of provision and so staff were not always well prepared. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

23 Accommodation on all sector college sites is appropriate for students from ESPA. Staff from sector colleges provide opportunities for students from ESPA to meet other students outside lessons. Students are able to use sports and leisure facilities, learning workshops and the library. Students also use the sector college student services. On all the ESPA college sites accommodation is good. Buildings are carefully maintained to provide educational and residential accommodation which enhances students' self-esteem.

24 The self-assessment report prepared for inspection was the first undertaken by the college. The process of self-assessment proved to be helpful to the college and was used to identify areas for development and for consolidation. However, the self-assessment report was general and did not reflect the detailed process which had been undertaken. Inspectors judged the college had over-estimated the quality of some aspects of its provision, including teaching and learning.

Conclusions

25 Key Strengths

- positive relationships between staff and students
- access to good provision in mainstream colleges
- good use of community facilities to promote learning
- effective practical activities
- high-quality learning environments
- students' achievements in coping more effectively in the wider world

26 Weaknesses

- some poor planning of the curriculum
- lack of precision in devising students' individual programme plans
- inappropriate activities in some lessons
- some poor teaching
- some poor lesson planning and evaluation
- insufficient recording of students' progress and achievements