

The Interact Centre

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

March 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.

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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 11/2000

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

The Interact Centre, London

Inspected March 2000

The Interact Centre in the London Borough of Ealing provides further education and training for people with autism and Asperger's Syndrome, most of whom have emotional and communication problems. Some have mild learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection, there were fourteen students enrolled, of whom 10 were funded by the FEFC. Eight of those are aged 19 or over. The centre is unable to cater for students with severe learning difficulties, physical disability or major sensory impairment.

The centre aims to provide a curriculum to develop students' social, communication and relationship skills as well as developing their understanding of autism and Asperger's Syndrome and how this affects the way other people see them.

The centre is outstanding for its knowledge of how students learn and for its ability to help all students to learn through practical sessions. All students gain an impressive range of skills for everyday living which are clearly assessed and recorded. All

students improve their confidence and ability to communicate effectively. Many are able to learn and develop good levels of pre-vocational and everyday living skills which prepare them for employment, sheltered employment and living independently in the community.

Management of the centre is very effective. Since the previous inspection, students' learning and achievements have improved as a result of a change in the curriculum. The curriculum now places a greater emphasis on the essential skills students need to learn. All students have individual learning plans but these are not fully developed.

Accommodation is appropriate for the activities undertaken. In addition, the centre makes good use of the local community to enhance students' learning.

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

Context

The Establishment and its Mission

1 The Interact Centre was founded in 1994 by the current principal to increase the range of provision on offer in West London for intellectually able people with autism and Asperger's Syndrome. Many had previously been unable to gain or maintain places in local sector colleges. Local learning disability or mental health services were not appropriate for them. The centre provides for students between the ages of 16 and 25, all of whom have developmental delays and are currently making the transition from adolescence into adulthood. The centre cannot provide for students with mobility difficulties, sensory disabilities or severe learning difficulties.

2 The Interact centre is based in a large community centre which is used by a variety of local groups. Since the last inspection, the accommodation has improved and the centre now occupies the whole of the second floor of the community centre. Students have the use of a kitchen on the first floor for catering sessions and a large grassed area outside, which is used to teach horticultural skills and for social events in the summer. In addition, the centre uses a basement workshop for pottery lessons. There is no residential provision.

3 Most of the students have been formally diagnosed as having Asperger's Syndrome. People with this syndrome have normal or above average intelligence, but experience problems with social communication and understanding and in imagination. The

majority also have additional emotional problems. Students in their third year at Interact have made significant gains in confidence and social competence. Other students are at an early stage of learning appropriate behaviour and skills for adult life.

4 At the time of the inspection, 14 students attended the centre. Two are between the ages of 16 and 19, two are aged twenty and ten are 21 years or over. Ten students are funded by the FEFC.

5 The centre is well managed by the principal, who provides strong leadership. He consults regularly with the staff. All staff share the same vision as the principal. As a result, the provision for students is particularly well planned to meet the needs of all the students. Careful attention is given to the essential skills students need to live and work in the community.

The Inspection

6 The inspection was carried out by two inspectors over two days. Nine lessons and other activities where students were learning were observed. In addition, inspectors observed the arrival of students and lunch in the common room. Inspectors' judgements were informed by discussions with the principal, the students and all members of staff either together or individually. 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	4	5			

7 All the learning activities observed were judged to be outstanding or good. This is well above the national average of 65%, recorded in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-9: the Chief Inspector's Annual Report*. No sessions observed were unsatisfactory. Students' attendance in lessons was outstanding. All students were working in small groups of between four and seven. The centre recognised most of the strengths in teaching and learning in its self-assessment report. Inspectors noted additional strengths.

8 Teaching is consistently good and often outstanding. Staff know the students well. They have a realistic view of the skills students need to learn to help them to function in the community. Lessons are regularly discussed and adapted to students' needs. Third year students have made significant gains in confidence and social competence. Other students are at an early stage of learning appropriate behaviour and skills for adult life.

9 Staff are good role models for the students. Relationships between all staff and between staff and students are very good. Staff have created a relaxed but purposeful working atmosphere in which students can learn. There is a

clear plan for each day's activities. This is explained to the students at the beginning of the day during morning meeting. Students have the chance to bring forward any personal concerns or problems they anticipate during the day. A student in his first year who was apprehensive about his first tutorial was able to voice his concerns and seek reassurance from older students and staff. Staff are knowledgeable about what is likely to upset students. Staff always explain at the beginning of the day, events which could disrupt the daily routine, such as the arrival of inspectors. As a consequence, students are better able to cope with the day's developments. Students are welcoming and greeted inspectors warmly each day. They had a mature, objective approach to their work and were happy to discuss it with visitors. In an art and craft session, one student was keen to explain his sculpture of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of luck and money. He was able to identify difficulties in the craft process and explain how he had dealt with them.

10 Staff are fully aware of students' weaknesses, and seek to ensure that lessons focus on the strengths of students and what they can do. They build on these through practical activities such as pottery, art

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and craft and drama. Through the skilled use of indirect teaching, staff address students' weaknesses and learning is effective. For example, students who enjoy pottery were observed making coil pots. The teacher had identified specific objectives for each student which were in addition to the pottery skills they were learning. These objectives included staying on task, taking turns, describing the process of making the pot to another student and taking responsibility for organising materials and equipment. The students were making good progress in relation to their objectives whilst at the same time enjoying the activity.

11 In skilfully led drama sessions, students learn self-confidence and the different ways of managing potential confrontations. Students role-play everyday situations such as choosing a television programme to watch. They learn how to cope if someone else wishes to watch a different programme at the same time. They can articulate why confrontations arise and make sensible suggestions as to how these can be avoided. This learning is reinforced by students acting out a more appropriate way to deal with the situation.

12 Staff make effective use of projects to promote students' independence and to improve their social skills. During the summer term students plan a barbecue for themselves, staff, visitors and past students. Students are entirely responsible for the planning and

organisation, including ordering goods and writing invitations. This highly successful event allows students to meet people in a social setting and to develop further the way they interact with others. Students take part in the local Super-Sports event and the Ealing Jazz Festival where they sell their craft products.

13 Staff place a high emphasis on developing students' independence. As part of a carefully planned programme they allow students to make unaccompanied trips to local shops. In preparation for this, they help students to recognise when they need help and how to ask for it from members of the public. They also teach them how to use a mobile phone so that they can contact staff if they have any problems during the trip. Many students find such trips very difficult but staff devise frequent opportunities for students to visit local shops and to make bus journeys to more distant shops so that students gradually become more comfortable and confident about being in the community.

14 Staff are skilled at helping students confront and tackle their difficulties. The principal and a senior member of staff are always available to discuss any problems students might have. During the morning meeting and throughout the day, they are available to help if problems arise. Students know that they can address issues with senior staff at any time. This means that the meeting and subsequent lessons can continue without

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disrupting the learning of other students.

15 Staff have high expectations of students' behaviour and work. Students respond well. Students' placements at the Interact centre are successful when they have previously failed elsewhere.

16 Students are making good progress. All make gains in confidence and social skills. During their time at the centre, they are taught to recognise their difficulties. They come to accept that they need to work to change their behaviour. They respond well to the many opportunities they have to learn the appropriate skills to function independently in the community. Most students are able to travel on their own. They are able to shop without supervision. Some students are now living independently away from their families.

17 Students concentrate and apply themselves to tasks in lessons. They persevere and have learnt to ask for help when they need it. For some students, this is a major advance and has improved the way they live. They have become less apprehensive and have learnt to cope with strangers visiting the centre.

18 In craft lessons, students produce high-quality artefacts which sell commercially. They sell many of their products at the Ealing Jazz Festival. Some students have received commissions for their work. This boosts their self-esteem. Many of the

mosaic mirrors and the tapestry screens are made with meticulous attention to detail. Third year students are able to explain the processes involved and how they planned their design. Project work demands high levels of co-operation between students, in discussion, planning, prioritising and evaluating as well as skills in pottery, textiles, ceramics and the use of the computer. Students also learn to handle tools and equipment safely and correctly.

19 Staff develop generic primary learning goals, which encompass the essential skills students need to learn. As most of the students attend the centre because they have difficulty relating to other people and understanding themselves, their individual programmes concentrate on the development of these skills. For example, the generic primary learning goals include: developing insight into themselves and how they interact with others; developing insight into how others see them; and recognising different states of mind. Currently, students' individual programmes do not identify which of the generic primary learning goals are priorities for their learning at any particular time. Students' progress cannot then be monitored in relation to these priorities. These weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report.

20 The centre has a good record of students moving on to further education or into employment. These strengths in students' achievements are

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recognised in the self-assessment report.

Other Aspects of Provision

21 The process for selecting and enrolling students is good. Prior to making an application for a place at the centre, all students undergo an assessment. A decision is then made as to whether the student will benefit from a place at the Interact Centre. The assessment is comprehensive and detailed and involves the potential student attending for 'taster' days to experience the Interact Curriculum. Information is gathered from many different sources such as previous placements, parents, social workers, and educational psychologists. Using the information from a full interview, in addition to other relevant information from other sources, the centre creates a clear, detailed picture of a student's difficulties and what the student needs to learn. Parents and students are also involved in the process.

22 On entry to the centre, students receive a useful and informative handbook. This sets out the aims of the centre and what students will learn. They also receive helpful booklets produced by the National Autistic Society, which explain Asperger's Syndrome and its effect.

23 Effective support is provided through formal individual tutorials. Staff use this time well to discuss the student's programme and to review progress. Students also have the opportunity to discuss any personal concerns or problems. The level of support is carefully matched to the individual student.

24 Planning for students' transition into the community is thorough and carefully considered. There is good liaison with sector colleges and external agencies to ensure that the student moves on to an appropriate placement.

25 The centre monitors the quality of its work effectively. Staff meet together informally and formally to reflect on their work. They are particularly good at focusing on individual students and evaluating the success of their work in relation to their students. Changes are made quickly in response to weaknesses identified.

26 To complement its work, the centre applied for a quality audit by the National Autistic Society. An accreditation certificate was awarded for four years in 1996. A second audit took place before the beginning of the spring term and confirmed the accreditation for another four years.

27 Resources are good. All staff have a keen knowledge of autism and Asperger's Syndrome and are fully aware of what students need to learn. One of the staff is a qualified teacher with experience of further education. They are able to identify effectively the skills and support students need.

28 The range of equipment used is appropriate for the purpose for which it is used. New computers are being used to improve students' information technology skills. This will boost students' vocational opportunities.

Other Aspects of Provision

29 The centre has made the best use of its accommodation. The entrance corridor is attractive and welcoming. Displays of the Interact Curriculum and students' work transform an otherwise dull space. The outside area is spacious and well suited to the learning of horticultural skills. Students also have access to a small canteen area on the first floor where they eat their lunch. The students' common room is attractive and a suitable place for students to meet informally.

Conclusions

30 Key Strengths

- well managed provision with strong leadership
- outstanding students' achievements and clear progress in skills for everyday living and communication
- good and often outstanding teaching matched to the needs of individual students
- specific curriculum to address students' difficulties
- comprehensive initial assessment to identify the essential skills students need to learn
- effective monitoring and review of programmes of work
- outstanding support for students
- good resources

31 Weaknesses

- lack of priorities in students' individual learning programmes