

Royal West of England Residential School for the Deaf

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

May 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 024 76863000
Fax 024 76863100*

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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 19/00

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

Royal West of England Residential School for the Deaf, Exeter

Inspected May 2000

The Royal West of England School for the Deaf is a non-maintained residential school in the city of Exeter. The tertiary department of the school, which is housed in a separate building on the school campus, has 39 students. Six are funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and one by the Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW). The other students are funded by their local education authorities as a continuation of their schooling. In recent years the number of students in the department has decreased. All the students learn through total communication, which includes British Sign Language (BSL), speech, lip-speaking and reading, gesture and facial expression. Those who have been profoundly deaf since birth use BSL as their first language and have considerable difficulty with written English.

The tertiary department of the school provides an environment which supports young deaf people. Those who attend sector colleges

benefit from the wide range of courses available to them while they continue to receive support from the department. They receive a good service from communicators and learn effectively on their sector college courses. They achieve well. All students gain increased confidence from the provision at the school.

In order to improve the provision, the school needs to develop the extended curriculum so that all students benefit more from the residential aspects of the provision. Individual learning programmes are not yet adequate for the prioritising of students' learning needs and the measuring of their progress. The quality assurance system is underdeveloped and does not cover all aspects of the provision.

The self-assessment report was produced from contributions from all staff during a two-day training event. It is detailed, with evidence provided for the judgements made. However, the report did not identify all the key strengths and many of the weaknesses identified by inspectors.

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

Context

The establishment and its mission

1 The establishment is the tertiary department of the Royal West of England School for the Deaf, a non-maintained residential school, which was founded in 1826 to provide education for deaf children in the south-west of England.

2 The tertiary department has 39 students. Six are funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and one by the Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW). The other students are funded by their local education authorities as a continuation of their schooling. The tertiary department was therefore included in the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection of the school in March 1999. Seventeen of the students attend courses at local sector colleges, with support from the tertiary department.

3 In recent years, the number of students in the department has declined. At the time of the previous inspection in 1996 there were 54 students. More young deaf people take courses with support in sector colleges local to their homes. Current students have complex needs, which include emotional vulnerability, lack of confidence, learning difficulties, disrupted schooling, or additional disabilities.

4 The tertiary department of the school strives to be a centre of excellence for hearing impaired

students whose needs cannot be met within their local sector college. All the students learn through total communication, which includes British Sign Language, speech, lip-speaking and reading, gesture and facial expression. Those who have been profoundly deaf since birth use BSL as their first language and have considerable difficulty with written English.

5 The tertiary department is housed in a separate building on the school campus. Teaching rooms, a kitchen, dining room, common rooms and offices are on the ground floor. Upstairs the students have single bedrooms. Students with physical disabilities or students who are more independent use separate flats within the building. Since the last inspection the school has had to sell two off-site houses which provided a valuable opportunity for second year students to live more independently.

The Inspection

6 Two inspectors carried out the inspection over three days. They observed 10 lessons, including 4 where students were supported by staff from the tertiary department of the school. They also observed informal activities in the evening. Inspectors' judgements were also informed by discussions with the head of the tertiary department, members of staff, staff at the sector colleges, and students. Students' work and documentation including students' files were examined.

Context

7 The self-assessment report, the first undertaken by the school, was produced from contributions from all staff during a two-day training event. It is detailed, with evidence provided for the judgements made. However, the report did not identify all the key strengths and many of the weaknesses identified by inspectors. The report included a detailed action plan which included the names of those responsible for taking action, and target dates.

The Curriculum

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected. In those lessons inspected in sector colleges the grade was awarded for students' learning.

Grade profile of lessons observed

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

9 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the tertiary department provides an environment which supports young deaf people and encourages their development. Most students have been educated in schools for deaf children and find the transition to a hearing environment challenging. Experienced staff in the tertiary department ensure that students receive the help they need to gain confidence and the ability to cope in new situations.

10 Students learn effectively on their sector college courses. This was identified in the self-assessment report. Students funded by the FEFC are studying General National Vocational Qualifications in art and design, and business studies; National Vocational Qualifications in catering and horse management; and basic level qualifications in woodworking and information technology. They are well supported by communicators, who act as interpreters and also modify the language of learning materials to enable students who find the structure of English difficult to understand them better. Some teachers at the sector colleges have a basic knowledge of BSL. Managers at sector colleges are committed to working with the college and ensure that their staff are

well supported in this area of work. The effectiveness of the support for, and in, sector colleges was included in the self-assessment report.

11 Students approach their work with commitment and enthusiasm. They value being in a hearing environment, but feel that they need the support of the Royal West of England Residential School for the Deaf both as a provider of additional teaching and tutorial support, and as an opportunity to be part of a community of deaf students.

12 Less able students attend sector college classes for a small part of their week. Most of their work takes place at the school. Some teaching is carried out in whole group activities, even though the students are of very different levels of ability and understanding. The aims of activities are not always well defined. For example, a student may be taking part in an activity to increase his ability to work without constant support, although this is not set out anywhere in the aims of the lesson. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

13 Students achieve well on their sector college courses. One student has

The Curriculum

already been offered a place in higher education. A number of former students are studying for degrees. Students' practical work is of a good standard for their courses. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report. All students develop increased self-confidence and an improved level of independence during their courses at the school. The school is aware of this but did not include it as a key strength in the self-assessment report.

14 However, students' general progress towards more independent adult lives would be improved by the development of the extended curriculum so that all students benefit more from the residential aspects of the provision. This is particularly true of the more able students who need a more extensive programme for the skills they will need in their adult lives. During the previous inspection, inspectors noted that some students had completed the current programme of daily living skills. Staff were planning to revise and rewrite the programme, which had become out-of-date. This has not taken place. Individual learning programmes are not yet adequate for the prioritising of students' learning needs and the measuring of their progress. Students are therefore sometimes learning skills or concepts which are not a high priority for their development.

Other Aspects of Provision

15 Inspectors agree with the self-assessment report that general support for students is good. A range of policies is in place to protect students and their rights. Specialist services available to the students include physiotherapy, psychiatry, counselling, medical support, and ophthalmology. The school has an audiology department, a speech therapy department and the services of an educational psychologist. Students who attend sector colleges receive additional support with their work on a drop-in basis. Staff in the residential accommodation know the students well and provide considerable informal support.

16 The tertiary department is housed in good-quality, purpose-built accommodation on a campus which includes the primary and secondary departments of the school. Staff are experienced and well qualified. Materials and equipment to assist students with their learning are plentiful and mainly appropriate. These strengths were evidenced in the self-assessment report.

17 As noted in the previous inspection report, the underdeveloped quality assurance systems prevent the effective monitoring of all aspects of the provision. This was recognised in the self-assessment report but inspectors judged that this weakness had been given insufficient weight.

18 Governors effectively oversee the work of the tertiary department as part of their responsibility for the whole

school. They are trustees of the charity. Membership does not include students, staff or parents.

19 The tertiary department is managed by a head of department who is accountable to the principal of the whole establishment. Management lines are clear and communication is generally effective.

Conclusions

20 Key strengths

- a supportive environment for young deaf people
- good students' achievements on their sector college courses
- effective support provided for students on their sector college courses
- wide range of courses available at sector colleges
- gains in students' confidence

21 Weaknesses

- underdeveloped extended curriculum
- inadequate individual learning programmes
- poorly defined aims for the learning activities of less able students
- some unsatisfactory teaching
- underdeveloped quality assurance systems