

West of England College for Students with Little or No Sight

**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.

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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 21/00

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

West of England College for Students with Little or No Sight Exeter, Devon

Inspected June 2000

The West of England College for students with little or no sight in Exeter, Devon provides further education for young people with a visual impairment. Some students have additional disabilities including brain injuries, cerebral palsy and hydrocephalus, or emotional and behavioural difficulties. At the time of the inspection, thirty-one students were enrolled. Six students, all aged 19 or over are funded by the FEFC. The college is unable to cater for students with very severe and complex learning difficulties who have a visual impairment, those who have a major hearing as well as a visual impairment or students with significant nursing care needs.

The college provides an extended curriculum with extensive specialist support which promotes students' academic and vocational learning and develops their independent living skills, leisure and social skills.

Care staff make a major contribution to students' learning. The residential aspects of students' programmes are

enhanced by individual guidance and support. Students are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own lives. They make gains in confidence and skills, which enable them to progress to higher level courses and to lead more successful adult lives.

Formal lessons are not always as successful as the informal aspects of students' programmes. Some lessons do not meet the needs of the students, particularly those with more severe learning difficulties. There is often an inappropriate requirement for these students to take literacy and numeracy lessons. Insufficient attention is given to identifying students' most pressing learning needs and then using all aspects of the provision to meet those needs.

Students benefit from high-quality accommodation and resources. They also have access to the wide range of facilities at the West of England School for Children with Little or No Sight, with which the college shares a campus.

The work funded by the FEFC was judged to be good with strengths outweighing weaknesses and was awarded a grade 2.

Context

The College and its Mission

1 The West of England College for Students with Little or No Sight is the post-16 department of the West of England School for Children with Little or No Sight, situated on the outskirts of the city of Exeter. The college provides residential education and training for students aged 16 or over with visual impairments. It aims to ensure that students are given the same opportunity as sighted students to reach their maximum potential and level of independence. The residential setting enables the college to provide an extended curriculum with specialist support during the evenings and weekends, which promotes students' learning.

2 The modern purpose-built residential college shares an extensive site with the school. The college functions separately within the school, with the head of college reporting to the overall principal. Many of the support services and facilities are shared with the school. Students have access to a range of vocational and academic courses at a local sector college and the nearby specialist residential college.

3 All the students have varying degrees of visual impairment which cannot be satisfactorily corrected. Some have additional disabilities including brain injuries, cerebral palsy and hydrocephalus. Others have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The ability range of students is wide; with some students studying General

Certificate of Education or General Vocational Qualifications at advanced level and others having severe learning difficulties.

4 The college has places for forty-five students. Thirty-one students were enrolled at the time of the inspection. Twenty-six were between the ages of 16 and 19. Six students, all aged 19 or over, were funded by the FEFC. Students under nineteen are funded by their local education departments. One older student is funded by her social services department.

The inspection

5 Two inspectors carried out the inspection over three days. They observed 13 lessons, held meetings with managers, tutors and key workers and talked informally with students and staff. They observed activities in the evening, including meal preparation, social activities and individual leisure pursuits. Students' work and college documentation, including students' files, were examined.

6 The self-assessment report, the first undertaken by the college, was produced with contributions from all staff. It is detailed, with evidence provided for the judgements made. Although the report did not identify all the key strengths and many of the weaknesses identified by inspectors, they were in general agreement with the college's assessment of the overall quality of its FEFC-funded work. The report includes a detailed action plan which lists the names of those

Context

responsible for taking action, and target dates.

The Curriculum

Grade profile of lessons observed

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	1	4	6	2	0

7 More able students are successful in their National Vocational Qualification and General National Vocational Qualification courses at a local sector college, and in their work experience placements. They receive support which helps them cope with the problems which their visual impairment creates in working and learning in environments designed for sighted people.

8 The work of the residential care staff makes an outstanding contribution to students' progress and achievements. In the residential provision, students learn to be more competent and confident in the skills needed for more independent adult lives. Day and residential staff meet regularly. However, the college does not have an effective overall curriculum which accords equal status to the contribution of the care services to students' learning.

9 Formal lessons are most effective when the subject being taught is also used to enable students to gain the skills and confidence which will enable them to lead more successful adult lives. In an outstanding music lesson five pre-entry level students followed precise verbal instructions to produce sophisticated musical sounds by combining simple series of notes and

rhythms. The students were confident and the teacher had a sound rationale for the lesson, based on students' individual learning needs. In a well-planned and effectively taught swimming lesson students made good progress in a range of skills, including communication skills, which were over and above their achievements in the water.

10 In some weaker lessons, activities do not meet students' learning needs. Sometimes the content is inappropriate and students are faced with tasks which are beyond their comprehension. Sometimes tasks are made more complicated than they need be, or are unnecessary for the achievement of a particular lesson aim. The balance of aims in the programmes for less able students sometimes results in their spending too much time on activities which are irrelevant to their learning goals. Some over-intervention by staff hampers students' learning, or misleads them into thinking that students have accomplished more than is really the case.

11 As the result of support in the sector college, the input of the care staff and the contribution of teachers, students' achievements at all levels are generally good. Students learn the skills that will enable them to succeed on

The Curriculum

higher level courses and lead more independent adult lives.

Other Aspects of Provision

12 Students benefit from a wide range of high-quality support services which enhance their ability to learn and achieve. These include:

- mobility teaching
- occupational therapy
- music therapy
- physiotherapy
- orthotics
- speech and language therapy
- music therapy
- Braille services
- specialist information and communication technology
- a medical and health centre.

13 Since the last inspection, the accommodation, which was of an already high standard, has been improved further. The new dining room provides cafeteria and coffee bar facilities. It can also be used for student meetings and conferences. The residential accommodation has been altered to provide a self-contained flat where students can live on a semi-independent basis. Students also have the use of the facilities at the school. These include a fitness centre and large swimming pool, a field and assault course, running track and floodlit outdoor sports pitches. In addition, college students use the school's music and drama suites.

14 The resources for learning are consistently good.

15 Although there is no explicit quality assurance policy to co-ordinate and inform quality assurance procedures, aspects of quality assurance

practice are carried out and there are year-on-year improvements in quality.

16 The college does not have a system for finding out the destinations and careers of college leavers and therefore cannot use this information to inform the curriculum.

17 The head of college leads and co-ordinates the staff, who work more closely together as a team than they did at the time of the last inspection. Tutors meet weekly with residential staff to discuss the progress of individual students. The head of the college does not line manage the care staff.

18 The governing body for the school oversees the college's strategic direction and regularly monitors the college's performance.

Conclusions

19 **Key strengths of the FEFC-funded provision**

- good students' achievements
- students' success on their NVQ and GNVQ courses and in their work experience placements
- wide range of high-quality support services for students
- good quality resources
- outstanding contribution of residential care staff to students progress and achievements

20 **Weaknesses**

- failure of some lessons to fully meet students' learning needs
- inappropriate content and balance of aims in the programmes for less able students
- absence of an effective overall curriculum which gives equal status to the contribution of the care services to students' learning
- some over-intervention which hampers students' learning