

Basildon College
Reinspection of Support for Students: February 2001
Report from the Inspectorate
The Further Education Funding Council

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

REINSPECTION

The FEFC has agreed that colleges with provision judged by the inspectorate to be less than satisfactory or poor (grade 4 or 5) should be reinspected. In these circumstances, a college may have its funding agreement with the FEFC qualified to prevent it increasing the number of new students in an unsatisfactory curriculum area until the FEFC is satisfied that weaknesses have been addressed.

Satisfactory provision may also be reinspected if actions have been taken to improve quality and the college's existing inspection grade is the only factor which prevents it from meeting the criteria for FEFC accreditation.

Reinspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Reinspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports and confirm that actions taken as a result of previous inspection have improved the quality of provision. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. The opinion of the FEFC's audit service contributes to inspectorate judgements about governance and management.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

Assessments use grades on 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 weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 - poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.*

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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Basildon College Eastern Region

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Background

Basildon College was inspected in October 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 14/00. Support for students was awarded a grade 4.

There was one key strength: good counselling and welfare support for students. The key weaknesses were: poor guidance before and at enrolment; unsatisfactory induction; weak tutorial practice; poor recording of progress and achievement and poor support for students with weak basic skills.

The provision was reinspected over five days in February 2001. Inspectors observed seven tutorials, held meetings with managers, teachers, and students from a range of courses and examined a variety of documentation.

Assessment

The college has made significant improvements in addressing the weaknesses in support for students since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed that the college has improved the range and quality of recruitment and promotional activities. Links with local schools and the community have been extended and procedures for the quality of guidance for students at the entry stage revised to ensure greater consistency. Teachers are responsible for interviewing potential students and standard proforma are used to record interviews and encourage communication between curriculum areas. Students' views on the guidance they receive before and at interview are sought and evaluated. A random sample of interviews are observed by the admissions team. New induction procedures have been developed by student services. The student perception of the process is mixed and staff are reviewing their comments to improve the process. Student services have developed a number of policies including tutorial, absence management and guidance on dealing with unreasonable behaviour and poor attendance. The strength in welfare and counselling support reported in the last inspection has been maintained despite a change in staff roles and responsibilities.

The organisation of additional support for students with poor basic skills is effective and the approach more systematic. All full-time and distance learning students are screened at the beginning of their course to assess their literacy and numeracy learning needs. Due to shortages in staffing, the learning needs of some full-time students have only recently been addressed. Distance learning students receive little additional learning support. Support for students with other identified learning needs are being met. There have been improvements in the delivery and integration of key skills, and all full-time students undertake a diagnostic test to define their level at the beginning of their course. Staff have undertaken training in the integration and delivery of key skills with the curriculum. The college has increased the numbers of staff involved in supporting learning.

There have been significant improvements in the structure of tutorials. A revised tutorial framework, introduced in September 2000 clearly sets out expectations of what students should experience at each stage. The tutor role has been clearly defined and standardised documentation is used to record students' progress and achievement. Tutorial time has been increased and students speak positively about their experiences and the support they receive.

An effective link between tutoring and learning has been made. There is a strong emphasis on monitoring and recording progress and achievement. Teachers compile termly reports to parents and guardians of students under 19 years of age. There is some evidence at course level that student retention is improving, but it is too early to judge the degree of improvement. Although the majority of tutors have undergone training there is some mixed practice in the completion of the reviews and the setting of clear targets for improving student performance. The manager responsible for co-ordinating tutorials carries out regular audits on tutorial files to ensure tutors comply with the guidelines set. Further work is needed to establish the new tutorial system for part-time and distance learning students. There has been much change in management responsibility and curriculum teams. The college recognises that links between curriculum teams and support areas need to be strengthened. For example, key staff are being sought to work with managers in the learning resource centre, the marketing unit and schools liaison. Improvements have been made to the learning resource centre where the majority of tutorials and learning support for full-time students takes place. Resources in the centre have been extended and now include new computer workstations, CD-ROMs, key and basic skills materials and an updated bookstock. The careers library is now situated in the learning resource centre and careers guidance materials have now been updated and are improved.

The college should: improve the quality of some tutorial files; continue to improve pre-entry, entry and induction procedures; further develop current tutorial practice to encompass part-time and distance learning students; improve the timeliness in arranging literacy and numeracy support; extend learning support to include distance learning students; and improve links between curriculum areas and support teams.

Revised grade: support for students 3.