

Basildon College
Reinspection of Health and Childcare: 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. Provision in health and childcare was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: effective incorporation of equal opportunity issues in the majority of lessons; and well-organised distance learning provision. The weaknesses were: poor teaching; poor management of health and childcare courses; low pass rates on several courses; poor retention rates on most full-time courses; and the lack of established progression routes from the health and safety course.

The provision was reinspected over four days in February 2001. Inspectors observed 12 lessons, held meetings with the head of the programme area, team leaders, teachers and students, and scrutinised a wide range of college documents and students' marked work.

Assessment

The college has made significant progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has generally improved. The proportion of lessons assessed as good or excellent by inspectors has improved to 58% from 18% in the previous inspection. Although this profile remains below the programme area national average of 65% for colleges inspected in 1999-2000, only one lesson was assessed by inspectors to be less than satisfactory. The average class size of 6.75 is low. However, attendance has improved to 84%, above the appropriate national average. In most lessons teaching is well planned and includes an appropriate and effective variety of learning activities. Teachers make effective use of a range of audiovisual aids and well presented handouts. In theory lessons strong links are made with students' experience on work placement. Students are well motivated and enthusiastic about their studies. In a few lessons planning is less effective, there are insufficient checks on students' learning and teachers dominate class discussion.

In 2000, pass rates for most full-time childcare courses improved to above the national average. Full-time health and care courses were transferred to Thurrock College in September 2000. The self-assessment report identifies that retention on the majority of courses remains low. Although there have been improvements in the retention rate for the CACHE diploma in nursery nursing and the national certificate in childhood studies, retention has declined on both the CACHE certificate in childcare and education and the national diploma in childhood studies. However, during the current year, retention on most courses has improved. The standard of students' work is generally good. The best examples are well presented and make good use of IT. The marking of students' assignment work has improved. Teachers generally make detailed comments and give clear guidance on how students' work can be improved. The marking of assignments on the intermediate diploma in care delivered by distance learning is particularly detailed. Students on full-time courses receive effective tutorial support. Tutors' records are well maintained and an appropriate emphasis is given to monitoring attendance and students' progress. The college recognises that tutorial arrangements for distance learning courses are less well developed. The recording of tutorial activity for these courses is imprecise.

More effective leadership of the programme area has resulted in noticeable improvements. Regular school and team meetings have been established with clear agendas and action based minutes. The allocation of a specific timetabled period for these meetings enables more staff to attend regularly. Appropriate emphasis is given to the monitoring of student retention and achievement. Course reviews are generally thorough and evaluative and clearly identify issues to be addressed. Links between the care curriculum teams and those responsible for distance learning provision in care and health and safety remain underdeveloped. The increasing range of distance learning provision in health and safety and health and social care has extended students' progression opportunities.

There have been improvements in the provision of specialist resources to support childcare courses. All courses have been allocated baserooms which are well furnished and contain attractive displays of students' work. Teachers are well qualified and many have relevant professional practitioner experience. Good attention has been paid to appropriate staff development.

The college needs to address: low retention on the majority of courses; some less effective teaching; the need to establish more effective internal curriculum co-ordination for distance learning provision.

Revised grade: health and childcare 3.