

Basildon College
Reinspection of English and Access to Higher Education: 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 findings were published in inspection report 14/00. Provision in English and access to higher education was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: some good teaching and well organised schemes of work and good enrichment activities. The main weaknesses identified at inspection were: poor achievement rates on all GCSE and GCE A level courses; poor retention on all GCSE and GCE A level courses; declining enrolments; no overall co-ordination of English courses; inadequate course planning; insufficient focus on meeting the learning needs of individual students.

The provision was reinspected in February 2001. Inspectors observed 10 lessons and held meetings with managers, teachers and students. Students' work was examined, together with a range of documentation prepared for the reinspection.

Assessment

The college has responded positively to the outcomes of the previous inspection. The weaknesses identified are being addressed and there is improvement in the provision. The strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained. Pre-course guidance has generally improved and strict criteria for entry onto GCSE and GCE AS courses have been introduced. GCSE and GCE A level English literature courses have been discontinued. The introduction of a certificate of achievement in English has provided a suitable alternative to GCSE English for some students. The decline in enrolments has been halted. Overall student attendance continues to be low and therefore some small class sizes remain an issue.

Base rooms with resource banks have been established. The management and co-ordination of courses and curriculum planning have improved. Managers monitor retention and achievement carefully and systematically. Teams hold regular minuted meetings. They are beginning to analyse critically issues and devise responses but reviews are not yet conducted with sufficient rigour in all areas. An English and communications strategy focusing on teaching and learning has been developed with the active involvement of all teachers. However, it is too early to identify many direct effects. The induction of full-time students has been improved since the last inspection. GCE AS induction included a research project involving the use of information and learning technology. A screening test was used to identify additional support needs in literacy and numeracy. Key skills diagnostic assessment was undertaken by each student to inform the construction of individual learning programmes for the development of key skills and to help teachers to concentrate appropriately on developing each student's language skills. The varied needs within groups are also identified so they can be taken into account in teaching and lesson planning. This development has increased the focus on meeting the learning needs of individual students. In some instances this is not yet being used to its full potential. Where appropriate, students have been encouraged to attend for additional learning support. Additional English workshop sessions have also been established.

All but one of the lessons observed were satisfactory or good. Most lessons are well planned and purposeful. Teachers have a good rapport with students. In the better lessons a variety of appropriate activities support learning and motivate and challenge students. Students collaborate well in paired and group work. They respond well to questions and are confident. They are able to express their own views clearly and support them with evidence. Teachers encourage individuals to build on their own knowledge and experience. However, in some lessons teachers dominate in discussions. In some the timing and pace of lessons is less well managed. Teachers do not always check students' understanding sufficiently. Some handouts are dated and of poor quality. The overall progress of individuals is monitored and reviewed regularly. As part of new tutorial arrangements, tutors and students carefully complete review documentation and set targets for improvement. The attendance and progress of individual GCSE and GCE A/AS level students are monitored regularly by both tutors and the head of school. This close monitoring is to be extended to the access to higher education course.

In 2000, retention on GCSE English improved by 7%. Achievement also improved by 6% and is broadly in line with the national average. Retention on the access to higher education course is good. Retention on GCE A level courses remained at the same level but achievement improved by 11% to 69% in 2000. In-year retention figures for 1 February 2001 show early indications of further improvements in retention in all areas.

The college needs to address the following issues: some less effective teaching; student attendance; insufficient rigour in course review in some areas; and increasing the focus on meeting the learning needs of individuals still further.

Revised grade: English and access to higher education 3.