

Bexley College
Reinspection of law, history, economics, psychology and sociology: April 1999
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. 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.

Reinspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Where the original inspection was carried out before September 1997, the reinspection is carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. 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.

For reinspections carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28 the grade descriptors are:

- grade 1 - provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 - provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 - provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 - provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 - provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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**Bexley College
Greater London Region**

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Background

The college was inspected between May and November 1995 and the inspection findings were recorded in the FEFC's college inspection report 14/96, published in March 1996. The college's provision in law, history, economics, psychology and sociology was awarded a grade 4.

The strengths of the provision were: some good teaching, with clear structures and lesson planning; effective tutorial provision with good support from teachers; knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers; students developing appropriate levels of knowledge; and pass rates above the national average in GCE A level law. The weaknesses were: in some sessions teachers did not check that learning was taking place; some students did not participate fully in lessons; poor examination results; poor retention rates; no overall marking and assessment policy or practice; and insufficient annotation of marked work which did not enable students to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The provision was inspected by one inspector over three days in April 1999. Inspectors observed 12 lessons, met with managers, teachers and students, examined students' work, and scrutinised a wide range of relevant documents. Under normal circumstances, the reinspection should have been carried out within one year of the original inspection. However, at the request of the college, the reinspection was delayed to allow sufficient time for measurable improvements in the provision to occur.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses which were identified in the earlier inspection, while retaining and developing the strengths. Staff across the college have responded positively to the issues raised during the initial inspection. The quality of teaching has been improved through the implementation of strategies which include the observation of lessons by managers. Schemes of work and lesson plans have been produced to a college-defined standard, and although some inconsistencies exist, teachers regularly evaluate their courses, leading to some improvements. The range of courses has been revised and more appropriate syllabuses have been introduced. The value-added initiative applied to GCE A level courses has now been extended to GCSE provision. These changes have resulted in an improvement to some examination pass rates.

Students' achievements have improved on GCE A level sociology and law, and in 1997-98 were significantly above the national average for these subjects. Pass rates on GCSE history and law have also improved, and in 1997-98 were above national average figures. However, pass rates for the GCE A level psychology course remain poor. Since the last inspection, the college has developed strategies to improve retention rates. The implementation of these has resulted in the closer monitoring of students' attendance, maintaining records of the reasons why some students leave their courses early, and the provision of additional counselling of students by teachers. Retention rates have improved over the last two years and are good on GCE A level law and GCSE history courses, but

remain low on the GCE A level psychology course. Teachers have developed and implemented policies for the setting and assessment of coursework and homework, and have introduced clear grading and marking criteria. Students' work is carefully assessed and teachers' comments on students' written work are constructive and encouraging, indicating how students may improve their performance.

The college should address: some of the weaknesses in teaching, particularly the limited use of visual aids and IT; the methods used for teaching small groups of students; and the retention and achievement rates on some courses.

Revised grade: law, history, economics, psychology and sociology 3.