

Croydon College
Reinspection of Science and Mathematics: January 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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**Croydon College
Greater London Region**

Reinspection of science and mathematics: January 2001

Background

Croydon College was inspected during May 2000. The findings were published in the inspection report 96/00. Provision for science and mathematics was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: positive staff/student relations and good support for students; well-organised practical work in science; and effective technical support on science courses. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses which included: poor punctuality and poor attendance; low levels of retention and achievement on many courses; little use of IT in mathematics; and insufficient student involvement in some lessons.

The college's most recent self-assessment for mathematics and science highlighted the steps taken to address the weaknesses identified in the inspection in 2000.

The provision was reinspected in January 2001. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors scrutinised students' work, held meetings with staff and students, examined data on student achievement and retention and looked at a range of college documentation relating to the college and its courses.

Assessment

The college has made some progress in addressing weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. A pre-GCSE level numeracy course has been introduced. Course teams now meet regularly. Science practical lessons are well organised and science technicians continue to provide a high level of support for teaching and learning. Many lessons are now well planned and some high-quality learning materials are used. Teachers continue to provide effective support to students. Mathematics and science staff are beginning to make effective use of information and learning technology to improve their teaching. A small information and learning technology suite has been set up for science students and staff. Homework is set regularly and the marked work is returned to students promptly. The quality of the feedback given to students by teachers has improved since the last inspection. Curriculum managers have developed systems to improve student attendance and retention. Analysis of college data on retention rates for the current year indicates that there is some improvement in the retention rate, compared with the same period last year, but it is too early to judge the impact on overall retention. Pass rates for most courses increased in 1999-2000, and students in both GCSE chemistry and physics achieved results above national averages.

However, despite these improvements, there are still significant weaknesses. Some aspects of the quality of teaching require further improvement. In some lessons there was little variety in the learning methods used by the teacher and some teachers failed to check students' understanding regularly during lessons. The average attendance rate in the lessons observed was 58%, which is similar to that in the previous inspection and significantly below the national average for science and mathematics students. The poor punctuality of some students also continues to cause disruption in some lessons. Student retention rates for all GCSE and GCE A level subjects remain below national averages. In 1999-2000 the retention rates of 38% for GCE A level physics and 37% for the two-year GCE A level mathematics course were particularly poor. Value-added data show that students are underperforming in

all science and mathematics subjects. Despite improvements, most pass rates remain below the national averages for similar colleges. For example, in 1999-2000 the pass rate on the GCE A level mathematics two-year course was 34%; on the GCE A level physics course it was 38%. The number of GCE A level science and mathematics students obtaining passes at grades A to C is also low for most subjects. The college self-assessment report acknowledges the poor achievement and retention in many subjects. Although the college offers a broad range of GCSE and GCE A level provision it does not currently offer vocational science courses as an alternative.

Revised grade: science and mathematics 4.