

**Long Road Sixth Form College
Reinspection of Governance: September 2000
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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Long Road Sixth Form College Eastern Region

Reinspection of governance: September 2000

Background

Long Road Sixth Form College was inspected in November 1999 and the findings were published in inspection report 34/00. Governance was awarded a grade 3.

The key strengths were: the broad range of governors' skills and experience; effective monitoring of students' achievements; and regular monitoring of the college's financial performance and financial health. The key weaknesses were: ineffective self-assessment of governance; insufficiently formal approach to governor training and induction; and inappropriate conduct of some corporation and committee business. The FEFC's audit service concluded that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college was adequate. The corporation substantially conducted its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfilled its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

Following the inspection the college prepared a post-inspection plan with detailed actions to improve each of the main weaknesses identified in the governance report. The college revised its self-assessment report in September 2000.

In response to the college request that governance be reinspected to assist in its application for accredited status, an inspector and an auditor reinspected governance over three days from 26 to the 28 September 2000. They examined a range of documents including the new self-assessment report and held meetings with governors, the principal, the clerk to the corporation and senior staff.

Assessment

The key strengths identified during the previous inspection have been maintained. Good progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses. An improved governance self-assessment process has been introduced. An external consultant supported the production of the 2000-01 governance self-assessment report. The report includes appropriate performance indicators for the corporation but there are few specific measurable targets. The governors recognise the need to be involved more at the formative stage of the self-assessment. The corporation has established a standards committee. The aims of the committee include producing the governance self-assessment report and improving the effectiveness of corporation business.

A systematic analysis of governor training requirements has been undertaken. A corporate training plan based on the analysis has been approved for 2000-01. Training required for individual governors, identified through the analysis process, will be provided in consultation with the clerk. Governors undertook a variety of relevant training activities in 1999-2000 including training on curriculum 2000 and attendance at external events. The board has approved an induction programme for new governors. It includes an appropriate mix of meetings with senior corporation members, an introduction to the college, and written briefing material. Six new governors have taken part in the programme. The self-assessment acknowledges that all the activities have not been completed.

The minutes of corporation meetings have been improved to record more accurately the discussions and decisions made. They include statements formally recording the monitoring of the college's operational and strategic objectives. The effectiveness of meetings is being improved and key documents are no longer tabled. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings has dropped from the previously high level but remains satisfactory. The minutes, agendas and associated papers are not widely accessible. The corporation has approved a policy for the nomination, appointment and scrutiny of re-appointed governors. A role description and person specification for use in the appointment process has been approved. The corporation has approved a policy on the public advertisement of governor vacancies. A formal audit of governors' skills has been undertaken and the results presented to the corporation. The audit showed that governors have a wide range of relevant skills.

The remuneration committee has reviewed the appraisal process for senior postholders. An enhanced process is in operation. It assesses the senior postholders' performance against specific, measurable indicators. The process of forming governor links with college departments has been reviewed. The new structure, being implemented in 2000-01, will link governors with specific academic and support departments. Guidance on the focus for visits has been developed. A standard proforma will help to structure reports to the corporation and allow issues raised to be analysed annually.

The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

Revised grade: governance 2.