

Newbury College
Reinspection of Mathematics and Science: December 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. 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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**Newbury College
South East Region**

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Background

Newbury College was inspected in October 1998 and the findings were published in inspection report 13/99. Provision in mathematics, science and computing was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: the well-planned vocational computing courses; the good learning support on GNVQ intermediate IT; the high retention and achievement in GCSE mathematics; and the comprehensive assessment of students' work on vocational computing courses. The main weaknesses identified at inspection were: the ineffective teaching in GCE A level science classes; the poor teacher attitude to students experiencing difficulty in GCE A level classes; low retention on many courses; low pass rates on most GCE A level courses; ineffective management of GCE A level and GCSE area; and inappropriate initial assessment of level 3 students.

The college's self-assessment report identifies a set of performance standards against which strengths and weaknesses are reported. However, the structure of the report makes it difficult to make overall judgements about strengths and weaknesses of individual subjects.

Computing was not reinspected as the weaknesses identified related mainly to mathematics and science. These were reinspected by one inspector over three days in December 1999. Nine lessons were observed, including practical sessions. The inspector scrutinised a wide range of students' work, and the documentation provided by the college. Meetings were held with managers, teachers and students.

Assessment

The college has taken action to improve the quality of provision in mathematics and science but progress has been slow. Through recent restructuring management has been strengthened and resources improved. Measures to improve course documentation have been devised and procedures implemented for tighter monitoring of students' progress. Teachers have undertaken training in the development of course files and handbooks, best practice in teaching and the use of IT to enhance learning.

The quality of teaching has improved. Eight of the nine lessons observed were judged to be satisfactory, a marked increase from the previous inspection. However, there are still some significant weaknesses in planning and classroom management. Schemes of work and individual lesson plans are in use but many are only lists of topics. In science, computers in the laboratories facilitate the use of IT in teaching and learning. Progress in the use of IT in mathematics teaching is slow. Procedures for monitoring students' progress have been improved. Regular progress reviews are undertaken with students, including monitoring achievement relative to predicted grades. However, there is insufficient monitoring of the actions agreed as part of the review process. The marking of assessments is now more rigorous.

Because the college has reduced its intake of GCE A level students, the larger numbers of students are following GCSE courses. In 1999, retention and achievements were good in GCSE biology and mathematics courses following two syllabuses. Retention was good in

GCE A level physics, and achievements had improved to the national average. Although GCE A level chemistry and mathematics achievements have improved, they are still well below national averages, as they are in GCE A level biology.

There have been improvements in the management and quality of provision. To improve further, the college should: clarify the lines of accountability within the curriculum area to avoid duplication; make better use of lesson observations to effect improvements; encourage a more self-critical view of their work among teachers; develop better target-setting and course evaluation.

Revised grade: mathematics and science 3.