

Sutton Coldfield College
Reinspection of Mathematics: October 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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Sutton Coldfield College
West Midlands Region

Reinspection of mathematics: October 1999

Background

Sutton Coldfield College was inspected in January 1998. The inspection findings were published in college inspection report 42/98. Mathematics provision was graded 4.

The teaching in GCE A level mathematics was generally of a good standard and students were enthusiastic. Teachers provided students with extra help when required. There was a useful mathematics support service in the open learning centre. The recent introduction of new courses had broadened the range of mathematics provision. However, these strengths were outweighed by weaknesses. In many lessons there was insufficient involvement of students in learning activities. Some teachers failed to meet the needs of students with poor social and mathematical skills. Students' punctuality and attendance were often poor. Retention rates were low and pass rates were low on many courses, especially GCSE mathematics. Arrangements for collating and analysing information on students' achievements were unsatisfactory. There was a lack of planning and co-ordination in the teaching of GCSE mathematics and the key skill of application of number on GNVQ courses. Resources were insufficient and some accommodation was unsuitable. Teachers had received little recent staff development.

The provision was reinspected over three days in October 1999. The inspector observed 12 lessons, held meetings with teaching staff and managers, scrutinised students' work and inspected documentation relating to course management, planning and students' achievements.

Assessment

The college has made significant progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Learning activities are much more varied. There were good examples of lively sessions with students enjoying the challenge of problem-solving exercises. In a GCSE lesson, a student used a computer spreadsheet to manipulate data. Mathematics and the application of number key skill are well managed and there is close liaison between the two areas. Comprehensive course documentation is in place, including detailed schemes of work. There is particularly good practice in the setting and marking of homework and other assessments. Support for students is good. Well-resourced mathematics and key skills workshops complement the support available from the learning resources centre. Teachers have undertaken retraining, focussing particularly upon teaching methods. All level 2 and many level 3 students receive additional support in the classroom. Students' punctuality is good. The introduction of alternative qualifications to GCSE is meeting the needs of students. On GCSE and C&G numeracy courses students' achievements are above the national average. Some weaknesses remain. In some lessons, not enough attention is given to students' differing levels of ability. Some classes suffer disruption due to poor planning in allocating students to teaching groups. Students' attendance remains poor in some groups. Retention rates for GCE A level are poor and pass rates are well below the national average. The college changed to a modular scheme in 1998 in response to this weakness. Some accommodation is still inadequate.

Revised grade: mathematics 2.