

Waltham Forest College
Reinspection of Science and Mathematics: 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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**Waltham Forest College
Greater London Region**

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Background

Waltham Forest College was inspected in April 1999. The inspection findings were published in the college inspection report 92/99. Provision in science and mathematics was awarded a grade 4.

The main strengths identified during the inspection were the wide range of science programmes, good students' achievements on the GNVQ intermediate science and access to higher education courses. The major weaknesses were: the poor quality of some teaching and learning, low retention and achievement rates on many programmes, inadequate analysis of students' achievements, and poor management and overview of GCSE mathematics.

The provision was reinspected in September 2000. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors scrutinised students' work, held meetings with teachers, managers and technicians and examined self-assessment reports and action plans, minutes of team meetings, and minutes of boards of study. All of the science laboratories and work areas were inspected, as were the preparation and storage areas.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. The management and oversight of the GCSE mathematics course have been improved. Centrally produced reports on student achievement and retention rates are of a higher quality than those available during the last inspection. Consequently, there has been much improvement in the monitoring and analysis of students' performance by course teams, although target-setting remains underdeveloped in some areas. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching and learning has improved. In the better lessons observed, students' interest was maintained through appropriate changes in learning activity. Students often worked well together. Practical lessons were well managed and students benefited from effective technical support. In the poorer lessons, teachers missed opportunities to reinforce important points identified during the lesson, and paid insufficient attention to the wide range of students' abilities. Some students had difficulty with both general English and technical language. Students' attendance and punctuality were particularly good. There have been good achievement rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses, GCSE and access to higher education courses. The progression of students from the GNVQ intermediate science course to the advanced programme has been good also. As recognised in the self-assessment report, the retention rate on a number of courses is poor. Retention and achievement rates on GCE A level science courses are well below national averages. Some students' work is untidy, indicating a lack of pride in their work. Teachers sometimes fail to provide helpful comments on students' work, or to correct spelling and grammatical errors. Since the last inspection, a mathematics room has been established with computers and other specialist learning resources.

Revised grade: science and mathematics 3.