

South Kent College
Reinspection of Mathematics and Computing: November 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 02476 863000
Fax 02476 862100
website: <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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**South Kent College
South East Region**

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Background

South Kent College was inspected during October 1999 and the findings were published in the inspection report 17/00. Provision for mathematics and computing was graded 4.

The strengths of the provision were: prompt action of new managers to address identified weaknesses; and comprehensive and well-documented schemes of work for all courses. These strengths were outweighed by weaknesses which included: an inadequate range of appropriate teaching methods; teachers' low expectations of students; poor retention rates; unreliable record-keeping; poor attendance; out-of-date bookstock; and inadequate staff development.

Two inspectors reinspected the provision over two days in November 2000. They observed 13 mathematics and computing lessons, held meetings with senior and curriculum managers and teachers, examined students' work and a wide range of documentation relating to computing and mathematics courses and visited learning resource centres. Inspectors also checked the accuracy of student achievement data for 1998-99 and 1999-2000 against primary sources such as registers and examination results published by examination boards.

Assessment

The college has made progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the inspection. Changes have been made to the management and organisation of mathematics, computing and IT courses. Some new teachers have been appointed and there are now clear lines of responsibility and accountability. Entry criteria for courses have been set and these are being adhered to. The college has improved the guidance and testing arrangements for the selection of new students. Induction arrangements for new students have also been improved. Additional learning support is provided for foundation level students during lessons. All students in need of help are encouraged to attend lunchtime workshops or the additional arrangements made available to them. All GNVQ students undertake work experience as part of their course. The standard of observed teaching is satisfactory or good. In the better lessons teachers are aware of the needs of all students and ensure their learning needs are being met. Course and lesson planning is good. Internal verification procedures are adequate and external verifier reports are mostly good. Student retention has improved on most courses to at or just below national averages. The most notable improvement is an 18% increase in GCSE mathematics. In-year retention for all courses this year is good. Students' achievements on the first diploma in IT, GCSE mathematics and the numeracy course are above national average. Teachers are being provided with ongoing staff development to improve their teaching skills. The specialist resources for courses are generally good, including new library books. There are some weaknesses still to be addressed, for example: some teaching that focuses on the requirements of the course rather than the needs of the learner; poor retention on GCE A level mathematics; inconsistent marking of students work on some courses; and some unmanageable group sizes.

Revised grade: mathematics and computing 3.