

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: St Mary's Sixth Form College
Date of visit: 31 October 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

Has the college maintained high retention and pass rates on level 3 courses in 2006?

- Retention and pass rates on A-level and advanced vocational courses remain above the national average. College data indicates that the pass rate at AS level is in line with the national average but retention was slightly below in 2006. The college has recognised retention as a key area to improve.

Achievements on level 2 courses declined in 2005. Have these improved in 2006?

- GCSE A*-C pass rates improved in 2006. All courses are above benchmark except single award science. English language and media studies GCSE pass rates were very good in 2006.

How much progress are learners making? What does value added data tell us?

- Value added data indicates that learners make very good progress at A-level and the college is in the top 25% nationally. However, at AS level progress is overall satisfactory with significant variations across subjects; almost one third of courses had low value added in 2006.

The college's success rate on level 1 courses, mostly adult learners, declined significantly in 2005 to below the national average? Have strategies to improve the success rate on level 1 courses been successful in 2006?

- Analysis of college data indicates a level 1 success rate of 53%. The majority of the college's ESOL provision is at entry level and success rates on these courses are around 30% and the college recognises this

as an issue. The courses offered are highly responsive to the needs of the local community. The college has introduced a number of measures to improve retention and pass rates which include revised enrolment criteria and the use of more focussed individual learning plans to monitor learners' progress on accredited courses.

Has internal progression improved further?

- Internal progression has continued to improve and is good. Around two thirds of level 2 students progressed to an advanced level course and 92% of level 3 students have progressed onto the second year of their programme.

Quality of education and training

Has the college successfully increased its level 2 provision in 2006/07?

- In line with the college's plans provision at level 2 has expanded with the successful introduction of the early years course.

What is the college's current strategy for enrolling adult learners?

- The number of adult learners on ESOL courses has increased to meet the local needs of the community and the skills for life strategy. The college has developed good links with a range of external agencies to offer flexible courses all of which now lead to external accreditation.

Have the strategies to improve teaching and learning and share good practice had an impact? What do the outcomes of the college's lesson observations tell us about the quality of teaching and learning?

- The college has put considerable time and effort into improving its lesson observation system. All staff have been trained on the purpose of observations and peer observations are being introduced this term. The outcomes of observations indicate a high proportion of good or better teaching; identified aspects of good practice are beginning to be shared within and across departments. Course teams discuss teaching and learning strategies at regular scheduled meetings.

How have teachers embedded the use of information learning technology (ILT) to support learning?

- Significant progress has been made in using ILT to support learning with the introduction of a new college virtual learning environment (VLE) using “moodle”. Staff at all levels are enthusiastic about the ILT developments and the VLE is being used in imaginative ways to support learning and assessment of students’ progress.

What strategies has the college implemented to improve the success rates in sector subject area 6, information technology?

- Pass rates on European computer driving licence (ECDL) courses have improved significantly from 38% in 2005 to 79% in 2006. Information technology (IT) key skills success rates have improved to 83%. Pass rates on AS and A-level computing and IT courses are at or above national averages however, retention is low.

Leadership and management

Has the college’s self assessment report (SAR) and its action plan been amended to better reflect the new management structure and areas of responsibility?

- The college’s SAR for 2006 was in draft format at the time of the visit. The new format now fits more coherently into the college’s structure. The action plans indicate a clearer link between the identified areas for development and strategies to be used to maintain the strengths within each curriculum area. The college recognises that the timing of self assessment activities can be brought forward to better influence planning for further improvements.

Has the college evaluated the impact of the strategies introduced in September 2005? Are managers clear about the priorities for improvement across the college?

- Self assessment is robust in its coverage of all aspects of the college’s provision. The process has clearly evaluated the strategies introduced in 2005/06. Staff are very clear about the college’s key priorities for 2006/07. Senior managers meet weekly with heads of faculty to further develop raising achievement and retention strategies, for example, the college is introducing a new monitoring and reporting system. Attendance is monitored very closely and has led to improvements. Revised enrolment and course change procedures are in place to support improving retention.

Has the college accurately identified under-performing subjects?
Are the action plans clear and leading to improvements?

- Underperforming subjects have been accurately identified and are being closely monitored and supported by senior managers and heads of faculty. Students who are significantly underachieving against their target minimum grade are allocated a senior manager as a mentor.

Has the college revised its safeguarding children procedures in line with the new guidelines?

- The college's arrangements for protecting and safeguarding children partially meet the statutory regulation and recent guidelines. The child protection policy has been revised. All staff and governors have received child protection training and procedures for vetting staff are in place. The college is in the process of compiling a single central record of all staff. The staff working in the college canteen have not all been CRB checked as routine.

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- The college is making good progress with its revised accommodation strategy. The £8.5m investment in new buildings and refurbishment is well under way, the science block is on target for completion for 2007 and the foundations of the new performing arts block are in place.
- A new assessment and coursework policy was introduced in 2005/06. This has had a good impact on students meeting deadlines and producing coursework at least in line with their minimum target grade. A number of courses have introduced an annual assessment calendar, students find these useful in helping them manage their time and comment that they are not yet in place on all courses.