

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Thomas Rotherham College  
Date of visit: 23 November 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

Have the high success rates on GCE A level, key skills and level 2 courses been maintained in 2005/06?

The overall success rate on GCE A level courses has dropped by 2% taking it from slightly above the average for sixth form colleges to slightly below. The success rate on key skills courses has fallen from 71% to 61% which is still well above average. The success rates on level 2 courses have risen; on adult courses by 12% and on courses for learners aged 16-18 by 9%.

Have the improvements in the success rates at level 1 and on courses for adult students continued?

Success rates have continued to improve except on level 1 courses for adult students. The success rate on level 1 courses for learners aged 16-18 has risen by 45%. On level 1 courses for adult students, however, the success rate has fallen by 7% which is due to a drop in the achievement rate. Success rates on level 2 and 3 courses for adults have risen by 12%.

Has the under-performance at GCE AS been tackled?

There is still work to be done to address the under-performance on GCE AS courses. The success rate on GCE AS courses has gone up by 4% which is above the sixth form college average, but the rise is due to an improvement in retention rather than achievement. Value added data show that there are a number of AS subjects where students' performance is significantly lower than expected. These include art and design, chemistry, computing, English literature and language combined and music.

Any increase in the proportion of high grades?

The proportion of high grades at GCE AS level has increased from 26.3% to 28.2% if general studies results are excluded from the calculation. If general studies results are included, the proportion of high grades has fallen by 2.3%.

At GCE A level, the proportion of high grades has risen by 3.4%, when including general studies, and by 7.7% without general studies. Despite the improvements, the proportion of high grades is still below the sixth form college average.

Are retention and attendance rates still good?

Retention rates are still good and they have improved on courses at all three levels. Attendance rates remain high; they are well above 90% on many courses.

## Quality of education and training

Have the strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning been successful? Is the lesson observation scheme being used to improve quality?

The new lesson observation scheme, introduced last year, is robust and it appears that it is improving the quality of teaching. The system facilitates the sharing of good practice, and any observed weaknesses have to be addressed. The system has not been running long enough to be able to quantify any improvements using the lesson grade profile. Feedback from students suggests that the grading is realistic.

Do all students now understand the target setting and monitoring procedures? Are 'planners' being used consistently?

Students have a good understanding of the target setting and monitoring procedures. They know their targets, have a good idea of the progress they are making against their individual targets and they are aware of the review dates. 'Planners' are no longer intended to play a part in the monitoring process.

Has the learning support team been expanded to meet the growing need? Is the college monitoring the effectiveness of learning support?

Three new staff have joined the learning support team and they have brought with them a range of expertise. The team has a good blend of specialist skills and includes literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners as well as staff with expertise in supporting students with dyslexia, dyspraxia and Asperger's syndrome. Teachers and students speak highly of the support that is provided. The support team has worked hard to raise the awareness and profile of learning support across the college. The college has begun to

measure the effectiveness of support and the indications are that it is effective.

## Leadership and management

Are the quality assurance systems understood by all staff? How have they been strengthened?

Staff have a much better understanding of quality assurance this year and they are fully aware of the self-assessment process. The system has been strengthened by giving the self-assessment process a much clearer focus. This is supported by a more robust lesson observation system. The new Principal has been able to use his knowledge from other colleges to make sure that the grades are realistic.

Is there an effective programme of training and development for managers? Have they all completed their equality and diversity training?

All managers have now completed their equality and diversity training and the final governor training session is scheduled for December.

Are the mechanisms for sharing good practice effective? Evidence?

There are several mechanisms for sharing good practice. Any good practice seen as part of a lesson observation is highlighted in reports that are circulated to managers. Staff lead training sessions to spread their good practice and teachers are being encouraged to use peer observation as a way of seeing good practice in action. Teachers also share good practice within their teams on a more informal basis. There are many examples of good practice being shared.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

- There was not enough time to look closely at the management training programme.

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

- Staff and students say that there is a new mood of optimism in the college and communications are much improved. Teachers say that

the new Principal listens to their views and has already identified the key priorities for improvement.

- The college continues to enjoy excellent financial health and has reached its enrolment target. The local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) assesses the college as low-risk under each of its risk assessment categories.