

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College

Date of visit: Friday 17 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

- What do the 2006 data show about success, retention and achievement rates in 2006?

For students aged 16-18 the college 2006 data show overall improvements in success, retention, and achievement rates. The success rate for all long courses in 2006 was 85% compared with 82% in 2005. For GCE AS courses, success rates rose from 76% in 2005 to 81% in 2006. For GCE A levels the respective figures were 94% and 95%, and for AVCEs 85% and 90%. The retention of students from the first year to the second year of GCE A level courses also showed a significant improvement. Two subjects had unsatisfactory results in 2006. For the very small number of adult students success rates improved.

- What do value added data show about students' achievements in GCE AS and A level examinations in 2006?

Value added data which compare students' attainment at GCSE with their GCE AS and A level results show that overall students do much better than would be expected. This is the case for both GCE AS and GCE A level courses. In 2006 the college performance on these measures was better than in the previous three years.

Quality of education and training

- What evidence is available about the quality of teaching and learning?

The college internal observation data show that 78% of lessons were judged by college senior staff to be good or better. The appointment of a director of teaching and learning has led to several initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Different groups of teachers meet to discuss aspects of teaching and learning and

assessment for learning. A new assessment policy is in place. The new faculty structure is used appropriately to focus on teaching and learning, for example through discussions about good practice at faculty meetings. Some teachers have visited other colleges to gain new ideas. Individual support and coaching is offered to any teacher awarded an unsatisfactory grade for a management lesson observation. All teachers are required to do at least one peer observation annually. The college intranet is used to disseminate materials from the teaching and learning group. Students who met the inspector spoke very highly of the help they receive from their teachers, both in lessons and at other times.

- Is ICT being used appropriately in teaching and learning?
Internal college lesson observations showed that in 2005-06 48% of observed lessons featured some use of ICT. There was considerable variation between subjects. Electronic whiteboards and data projectors have been purchased and are now fitted in most classrooms. Teachers have received training in the use of electronic whiteboards. Many teachers have used peer observation to focus on developing ideas for increasing their own use of electronic whiteboards. Students who met the inspector reported that ICT is used in different ways. Students have good access to computers and the network is reliable. Students value the virtual learning environment.
- Are there sufficient enrichment activities for students aged 16-18?
The college offers a range of sports activities and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The student union is active in promoting activities such as charitable fundraising. Some courses organise trips abroad which are greatly appreciated by the students. The college does not have a set time for enrichment activities or a common lunch hour for all and there is no formal requirement that students should participate in enrichment activities. Students who met the inspector raised no concerns about enrichment and were happy with the opportunities available.

Leadership and management

- What progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses identified at the last inspection?

The evidence suggests that weaknesses in teaching and learning, including the use of ILT, are being addressed. Arrangements for sharing good practice are now in place.

Accommodation issues have not yet been addressed, but consideration has been given to accommodation needs and preliminary discussions with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) were due to take place shortly after the annual assessment visit.

Access to management information is reported to have improved. Quality assurance is now more consistent. A central quality team oversees the process. The college has a new system in place for continuous review, action planning and monitoring.

- What progress has been made in improving consistency in the leadership and management of different areas?

The new faculty structure has streamlined and improved management accountability. Self assessment suggests that more subjects and curriculum areas are now graded good or better. The improved retention rates and examination results demonstrate that strategies to raise achievement are effective in the majority of areas. College staff report that the culture is now much more focused on the quality of teaching and learning. The faculty structure enables heads of faculty to support subject leaders where results are not as good as elsewhere. The four heads of faculty have a sound understanding of their role. They meet their staff regularly and monitor the activities of their various subject teams carefully, intervening when necessary.

- Are leaders and managers developing appropriate strategies to raise achievement further?

The college vision is shared and there is a collective focus on continuous improvement. Communication both up and down is reported to have improved. There are appropriate strategies in place to further improve teaching and learning. Comprehensive student support systems are in place. Attendance monitoring has improved, for example through the use of first day calls to check on absentees.

Overall attendance has improved. The improved outcomes in 2006 are clear evidence of the success of the strategies in place. Students are clearly happy at college. They enjoy their studies and feel well supported by their teachers and other staff.