

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Sixth Form College Colchester (The)

Date of visit: 28 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 currently available data and value added data for 2005/06 show are the achievements and trends for learners?

- Data for 2005/06 show that learners have continued to achieve well and make good progress in 2005/06;
- Of particular note are the very good results in the International Baccalaureate where students achieved 100% pass rate compared to a UK average of 89.3%. The average point score of 34 points was equivalent to 4 grade As at GCE A level;
- At level 1, the small number of students in 2005/06 achieved outstanding results with 100% success, retention and pass rates. This represents a very significant improvement from 2003/04 when all three areas fell to significantly below national averages and success rates were 38%;
- At level 2, for the years between 2004/06, success, pass and retention rates have been significantly above national averages. The 2005/06 entry has risen slightly to 1,835 from 1,798 in 2004/05. The 2005/06 success rate at 95% is twenty two percentage points above the national average;
- Level 3 is the largest area of the college with an entry in 2005/06 of 10,682 having risen steadily from 8,584 in 2002/03. Retention in 2005/06 at 94% has fallen by one percentage point from the year before, but remains above the high national average. Pass rates have fallen by the same percentage, but also remain above the national average. Success rates at 87% are significantly above the national average of 82%;

- Overall pass rates 2005/06 for GCE A levels were 97% with 43% passes at grades A/B. This represents an increase of one percentage point in pass rates and two percentage points increase in high grades. High grade passes are two percentage points above the national average;
- Overall pass rates 2005/06 for AS levels were 92% with 37% at grades A/B. This represents an increase from 2004/05 of six percentage points for pass rates and four percentage points at high grades. High grades are four percentage points above the national average;
- Separate subject results for GCE A levels show 46 areas of which 5 are shown as having significantly higher than national average pass rates. These include accounting; archaeology; computing; electronics; environmental science; music; physics and Spanish. Of these, apart from electronics with a pass rate of 91%, all others have 100% pass rates. Only one subject, dance, has significantly below national average pass rates at 86% compared to 96%. This subject also has significantly below national high grades at 21% compared to 34%;
- High grades at GCE A level show that of the 46 subjects, 14 have significantly higher than national average high grades. Subjects achieving these grades include sociology, geography and media studies. Of particular note for their high proportion of grades A and B are economics, geology and government and politics. However, equally, there are 14 subjects where high grades are significantly below national averages including English language and literature and mathematics;
- The college uses the ALPs value added analysis to measure students' progress compared with their prior attainment. Results for 2005/06 show an institutional score for GCE A level of 3 which represents very good value added. The score for AS of 4 suggests that these students also make good progress;
- Students studying GCSE achieved good results at grades A\*-C in English, media and Spanish. However, achievement of these grades was lower in mathematics, sociology and business and communication systems. The college has taken vigorous and appropriate action to address this issue although it is too early to judge their impact.

How effectively are data and value added information used to monitor performance and raise standards? How well have areas for improvement been identified and addressed?

- The college carries out several very detailed analyses of all achievement and value added data. Areas of strength and those which require improvement are identified accurately. Appropriate and timely actions are taken in order to secure further improvements to standards.

## Quality of education and training

How effective and accurate is lesson observation?

- Lesson observation is now comprehensive and improved analysis is taking place in order to secure further improvements. The overall quality of teaching and learning is now explicit and the spreadsheet available to heads of departments provides useful information on the quality of individual lessons observed. However, the presentation of this information is not always sufficiently clear. Managers interviewed were insufficiently clear about the purpose and procedures for completing action and development plans following lesson observation;
- College observations by the Central Observation Group (COG) judge that the overwhelming majority of teaching and learning is good or better. This is supported generally by many of the results achieved and value added analysis. However, staff know too long in advance the lesson to be observed by the COG and no comparison is made between shorter notice departmental observations and those carried out by the COG.

Is good practice shared and disseminated effectively?

- The college has established systematic sharing and disseminating of good practice using the records of lesson observations. A good range of staff training and development supports standards in teaching and learning.

How effective are the links between lesson observation, appraisal and staff development?

- Lesson observation is explicitly linked to review processes identifying training needs of staff. However, as stated previously, there is insufficient clarity by managers in the use of action and development plans following lesson observations.

## Leadership and management

Are leadership and management effective in supporting improvements and raising standards?

- Leadership and management have been effective in supporting the continued high standards achieved by students in 2005/06. The principal provides strong and consultative leadership. Senior managers are highly committed to further improving provision;
- The college self-assessment report (SAR) for 2005/06 is currently in draft form. It identifies accurately strengths and areas for improvement. The strong focus on the central role of teaching and learning in raising standards has been sustained and improved. Very accurate and detailed analyses of data are used to support judgements;
- Early draft SARs for individual departments are equally detailed in their data analysis. Departmental SARs have been improved through a greater focus on teaching and learning. The system for grading and moderating SARs is robust and has been further improved through restructured moderating procedures.

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

- The significant new-build is on schedule to open in February 2007. The new building will provide greatly improved teaching, social and staff facilities for many subject sector areas;

- The college has close links with local schools in order to identify students with specific support needs. The Foundation Programme is successful in enabling many students to progress to further education.