

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Strode College
Date of visit: 20 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 success rates improved at all levels for students of all ages in 2005/06?

- Success rates remain well above the national average for students of all ages at levels 1 and 3. For example, success rates are 18% and 13% respectively above the national average at level 1 for students aged 16 to 18 and adults. At level 3, success rates are 15% above the national average for 16 to 18-year-olds and 7% higher than the national average for adult students. Success rates at level 2 are 9% above the national average for adult students but they are 9% below the national average for students aged 16 to 18. The low success rate is due mainly to all full-time students being enrolled on a part-time level 2 ICT course, in addition to their main qualification, which has not been successful. Overall success rates have improved for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 1-3 and for adults at level 2.

Have lower success rates in a few sector subject areas in 2004/05 been successfully tackled?

- Low success rates for adult students were identified in two sector subject areas and in one area for students aged 16-18. The low success rates of adults have been successfully tackled. The college has put remedial actions in place and is carefully monitoring the performance of ICT for students aged 16 to 18.

What are the success rates in WBL?

- Overall success rates for work-based learning are satisfactory. Success rates in hairdressing are particularly strong. The success rate of full frameworks in hairdressing in 2005/06 was 75%. However, there have been no completions so far on the care programme. The care programme was delivered in partnership with the local NHS Trust which experienced difficulties in supporting students in gaining the

technical certificates. The college is now taking action to address this issue.

Are students making at least the progress expected based on their prior attainment?

- Students taking GCE A levels and AVCEs make significantly better progress than expected based on their prior attainment at GCSE. In 2005/06 the proportion of GCE A-level passes graded A or B was high at 56%. The progress made by students taking non graded qualifications in 2004/05 is positive but within the normal range of expectation based on their prior attainment.

Have success rates for key skills improved?

- Success rates in the communication and application of number key skills improved overall between 2003/04 and 2005/06 from 6% to 34% for students aged 16 to 18. Over the same period success rates for communication improved from 19% to 36% at level 1 and from 1% to 41% at level 2. Success rates for application of number improved from 34% to 39% at level 1 and from 4% to 26% at level 2. Whilst the rate of improvement is good, success rates are low.

Quality of education and training

Has teaching been strengthened effectively to meet the individual needs of students?

- The college has continued to focus sharply on raising the standards of teaching and learning and meeting the individual needs of students. All teachers are systematically observed on at least one occasion each year. Lesson observation records are scrutinised effectively and key issues in teaching and learning across the college are identified. Weekly surgeries are run in teaching and learning and the use of ILT which are readily available to staff. The professional development centre is used by staff on a drop-in basis. Expert support and opportunities for practice, for example in the use of interactive whiteboards and in the development of IT skills are provided; there are also opportunities for the sharing of good practice. The college has identified that the standard of teaching and learning has improved.

How much progress has the college made in developing 14 to 19 learning pathways?

- The college has made some useful progress in developing learning pathways for 14 to 19-year-old students. So far it has developed pathways in six areas including health and social care, engineering, hairdressing, sport, hospitality and administration. The college is working

with eight partner schools in writing a bid to run four specialised diplomas from 2008. Delivery patterns have been agreed in outline.

How effectively are students supported?

- A wide range of information about the college is available for students and their parents with specific advice and guidance on subject choice at interview. The information, advice and guidance provided to adults meet their needs well. An extended induction programme helps students to settle in quickly to college life in general and into their individual courses. At induction, students who have not achieved a grade C in English and mathematics take an initial assessment. All students also complete an essay which is used as an additional means of identifying support needs. Effective, targeted learning plans are developed. Support is well documented in student records and individual learning plans. In many cases very detailed notes are made by learning support assistants providing a good, clear picture for tutors. Students' progress is monitored carefully and frequently. Attendance monitoring is rigorous and attendance rates are high. The college evaluates the impact of additional learning support thoroughly. Students interviewed by inspectors speak very positively about the quality of teaching and specialist support.

Leadership and management

How effectively are data used by senior managers to monitor trends in performance and plan for improvements?

- Data are used frequently by senior managers to monitor college performance and put actions in place to improve provision. Most areas of underperformance have been successfully tackled and success rates are generally high.

How effective are strategies to improve quality?

- The self-assessment report has been strengthened and the use of data has been extended to include an analysis by ethnicity and gender at curriculum level. The Every Child Matters themes are dealt with more extensively than previously. The college has improved its focus on teaching and learning through better training for observers. The training now highlights more effectively the evaluation of learning. However lesson observation records do not always ensure that key messages are sufficiently crisp in text used to feed back to teachers. The text does not always clearly justify the grade awarded.

What improvements have been made to work-based learning provision in the last year?

- The management of work-based learning remains satisfactory. The number of students on work-based learning programmes has reduced from 90 in 2003/04 to 32 in 2006/07. Tutors work with students throughout their programme and combine key skills with practical assessments. Students' progress reviews are conducted by a senior member of staff who also assures the quality of employers' provision. Partnership working with the local NHS Trust has not been effective and students have not progressed well due to problems the trust had with the assessment of NVQs and the delivery of technical certificates. The college is now addressing these issues and has begun to manage the programme for the Trust. Following a review by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the college has taken responsibility for the quality assurance of some new hairdressing provision from another training provider.

How much progress has been made in implementing the Skills for Life strategy?

- The college has made good progress in implementing the Skills for Life strategy. Skills for Life, key skills and essential skills are now managed in the same department. This has improved the coherence and cross-college focus on these activities. Staff teams teach and share good practice across the three areas. A clear and appropriate policy provides direction for staff and managers. Teaching staff have undertaken appropriate Skills for Life training in literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Staff are able to provide support for students with their literacy, numeracy and language needs in addition to the specialist support they receive. Success rates are high and they improved in 2005/06.