

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Longley Park Sixth Form College

Date of visit: 6 March 2007

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

The college exceeded its recruitment targets in 2004/05 and 2005/06. In 2005/06, however, a smaller proportion of Year 11 leavers were recruited from 6 of the 7 feeder schools. What are the reasons for this? What action was taken? Has the trend continued in 2006/07?

- The college has identified the reasons why recruitment has fallen from its feeder schools in the last two years. Hillsborough College, a new sixth form college that is part of the Sheffield College, opened in the north of the city in September 2005. Hillsborough College attracted students from a number of the seven feeder schools especially where convenient bus links made travel easier than to Longley Park. Another factor is differences in the range of courses on offer at the two colleges. The pattern of recruitment is still settling down but post-16 participation has increased in the north of Sheffield over the past few years and both colleges have reached their recruitment targets.
- The college has maintained strong links with all its feeder schools. Managers are school governors; staff deliver GCSE courses in schools and provide support and advice on vocational courses. A number of initiatives were introduced in 2006 to attract Year 11 pupils from feeder schools to the college. The proportion of Year 11 pupils progressing from the feeder schools increased slightly in 2006 to 25.3% from 24.9%.

In 2006/07 proportionately fewer students have progressed to the second year of their studies. What are the reasons and what action is being taken?

- The major reason why students do not progress from the first to the second year of their course is that they fail year one of the programme. A number of students insist on studying on GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) courses even though this is not the most appropriate course for them. Many of these students are retained by the college and are placed on alternative vocational courses. Guidance staff ensure that students receiving disappointing AS results receive prompt advice and support. They are encouraged to return to college on a more appropriate course of study. The college is widening its range of vocational courses and enrolment advice is becoming more effective. As more students from vocational courses progress to higher education, the vocational route is being seen as a well-founded way to gain a place at university.

The overall attendance rate did not improve in 2005/06. What action is the college taking to address the issue this year? How do current in-year attendance data compare with last year?

- Attendance monitoring is robust and systems have been strengthened this academic year. An attendance clerk monitors attendance closely and contacts parents by telephone and letter. Students who are not in lessons are sent text messages and those whose attendance falls below 90% have to contribute towards their examination fees. All tutors receive absence lists on a daily basis and the college management team reviews attendance monthly. The attendance rate for this academic year is 89.05% which is slightly higher than last year's overall attendance rate of 88.4% but slightly lower than the target of 90% set by governors. Attendance data are analysed carefully in order to spot any patterns and identify areas for attention.

Quality of education and training

Success rates and self-assessment grades vary considerably within and between areas of learning. Is good practice being shared effectively? What is being done to improve performance in the weaker subjects?

- The quality of provision in the weaker areas is under close scrutiny and action plans are in place. In music, for example, GCE AS and A level courses have been replaced by a BTEC national diploma in popular music which is better suited to the interests and learning styles of the students. Similarly, GCE AS and A2 accounts will be replaced by a BTEC course in September 2007. This will be combined with the UK Careers Academy trust provision that provides internships for students. In biology, students who are better suited to a vocational course are receiving careful advice and guidance at enrolment. A pilot scheme, providing a personalised support package, has been introduced for GCE AS and A level students especially those with weak GCSE profiles. The college is committed to widening participation and has decided to offer targeted support to those at risk of failing rather than introducing higher entry qualifications.

The self-assessment report identifies weaknesses in initial assessment, key skills and Skills for Life qualifications. What action is being taken? What progress has been made in 2006/07?

- The learning support team was strengthened in 2005/06. The team have forged closer links with feeder schools to ensure a smooth transition for students with identified support needs. In 2006/07, initial assessment was carried out early and support was put in place quickly for students on level 1 and 2 courses and those with English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) support needs. However, there are many students on level 3 programmes who have the minimum entry qualifications and many level 3 students are bilingual learners. The college is not receiving sufficient learning support funding to be able to meet their needs fully. Record keeping has been strengthened and a database system has been introduced. The data are not yet being used to measure the effectiveness of learning support but the feedback from student questionnaires is very positive.
- Key skills provision is being improved this year. Preparation for tests has been improved and tutors have received training to help them support portfolio building. Test results for this year are not yet available but the college expects a significant improvement. The college recognises the need to integrate key skills development into a student's main programme of study and work has already begun. Students recognise the importance of key skills and many are keen to achieve a key skills qualification.

- A good range of Skills for Life courses are offered that enable students to achieve literacy and numeracy qualifications. Care is taken to make sure that students are placed on courses at the appropriate level. Students on two year courses are encouraged to progress through to level 2 before moving on to a GCSE English or mathematics if appropriate.

Are the weaknesses in the tutorial system and the arrangements for monitoring and supporting 'at risk' students, identified in the 2005/06 self-assessment report, being addressed?

- There is too much variation in the quality of the tutorial provision. Some students receive very good individual tutorial support and find group tutorials valuable but other students are not having regular one-to-one reviews with their tutor and do not see the relevance of the work done in group tutorials.
- A number of initiatives have been introduced to support those students who are 'at risk'. The student action group (SAG), which includes senior managers and support staff, meets regularly to monitor those at risk of not achieving using a database and traffic light system. A transition and liaison officer works closely with the students drawing up contracts and referring them for relevant support. Support includes courses run by the college counsellor in personal effectiveness.

Leadership and management

At the last AAV, 80% of teaching and learning had been judged good or better but there were indications that the grading was over-generous around the satisfactory/good boundary. Has further training been given to observers? How are grades moderated? What is the grade profile this year?

- The college has done considerable work to improve the lesson observation process. All observers have received further training and the moderation of judgements and grades has gone a long way to address the issue of over-grading around the good/ satisfactory boundary. The grade profile

so far this year is much lower than in the previous two years which suggests that grading is more realistic.

The self-assessment report identifies the need for the management team to improve their budget management and target setting skills. Are they being given the necessary training and support? Is it having an effect?

- The new finance director has provided a range of training and support for budget holders which they have found very useful. The individual support that they have received has been particularly effective and they feel much more confident. Target setting is developing and teachers and managers are becoming more skilled at setting challenging targets for their courses and areas. Target setting in the performance management process does not always address issues raised in lesson observations.