

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Darlington College

Date of visit: 24 January 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

Has the overall trend of high success rates at Level 1 and 2 been maintained and to what extent have success rates at level 3 improved?

Qualification success rates for learners on long courses have improved significantly over the last five years.

#### Level 1

Success rates for 16 to 18 year olds have been maintained at a high level and for learners aged over 19, have improved even further. Rates are well above the national averages.

#### Level 2

Success rates for all learners are high and well above the national average.

#### Level 3

Highly effective strategies have been used to improve success rates. For 16-18 year olds rates are now around the median and for learners aged over 19 they have improved to well above the national average.

What are the success rates of work based learners and has there been an improvement?

#### Apprenticeships

Success rates on apprenticeships except construction (electrical installation) are at least satisfactory. There is an improving trend and most success rates are above national averages.

#### Train to Gain

Achievement rates are at least satisfactory. Challenging improvement targets have been set for 2006/07.

#### Entry to employment

This is a very small programme with only six learners. Progression rates are good.

To what extent has the improvement in the achievement of key skills qualifications been maintained?

- In 2004/05 there was a significant improvement in key skills achievements across all levels and subjects. This improvement was not maintained in 2005/06. Only half of the students taking information technology at level 1 or 2 gained the qualifications. In communications and application of number results were better but there was still a significant decline. The college recognised this trend and has put in place a focussed action plan for improvement.

## Quality of education and training

What has been the impact of measures taken to improve additional support for learners and the monitoring of progress via tutorials?

- The college has established effective new systems to measure the impact of additional learning support. Additional learning support includes extra tutorial allocation, double staffing in some lessons, specialist basic skills teaching or the individual use of a learning support assistant. Success rates of students who received additional learning support in 2005/06 were 5% above the college average. Better procedures to monitor learner's progress and support those at risk of failing have been introduced via a revised tutorial system.

What is the quality of teaching and learning in work-based learning and key skills?

- The college has developed a useful plan to improve teaching and learning. Observations made by external consultants show that the majority of teaching is good or outstanding and there is almost no inadequate teaching. The information collected on the quality of teaching and learning in work based learning is not analysed sufficiently to allow managers to gain an overview of strengths or areas for improvement in this area.
- The college is determined to maintain the level of improvements seen in key skills in 2004/05 and has put into place a challenging action plan which focuses on improving teaching and learning. Reports to monitor the progressive implementation of the plan are not sufficiently evaluative. Information is not being used to measure the impact of the plan and there is an over reliance on the use of end of year results. Curriculum area

managers are rarely asked for evaluative reports, tutorial records of student progress in key skills are not collated or analysed sufficiently and the observation of key skills lessons are not used to inform managers of particular issues of good practice or areas for improvement.

What are the levels of learner satisfaction in work based learning and key skills?

- Surveys carried out by the college show very positive levels of student satisfaction for college provision overall. The college has carried out specific satisfaction surveys to gain learners' views of work based learning and key skills. The small number of learners who spoke to inspectors expressed a general satisfaction with their programmes. They explained that the new campus was a huge improvement but there were still some issues with shortages of some resources used for practical work.

What plans does the college have in place to build upon its 14-16 provision?

- The college provides a good range of vocational programmes for year 10 and 11 school pupils. The programmes are well designed and the college works well with local schools to meet the needs of pupils who find academic work difficult or who have clear vocational aims. The college is particularly successful at preventing year 11 pupils at risk of leaving school with no qualifications and failing to find employment and training from doing so. The college has developed appropriate plans to build on these firm foundations.

## Leadership and management

What has been the impact of "Every Child Matters"?

- The college has a wide range of enrichment activities which are appropriately linked to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. In particular, students take part in charitable fund raising activities and community activities. The tutorial programme offers a suitably broad range of topics such as drug awareness, countering bullying, racism and financial management. Participation rates are monitored on an individual basis but not analysed in sufficient detail to confirm that activities attract students from across the college. Staff interviewed by inspectors were

aware of the college child protection policy. The college carries out appropriate staff checks under the Criminal Records Bureau system.

What has been the impact of the management restructure?

- The management restructure has considerably strengthened the systems and procedures to promote high quality teaching and learning. It is too early to see the impact of the management restructure on achievements in the curriculum areas graded as satisfactory within the SAR. The college is determined to become outstanding; it recognises that it is not there yet and has put in place a challenging development plan.

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

In September 2006 the college moved to new, purpose built accommodation. The college is currently in LSC financial category C however this has been planned for and the indicative financial forecasts suggest a return to category A by 2009.

Students who spoke to inspectors welcomed the improvement to the campus and the much improved ambience of the college. However several expressed concern about the small size of classrooms, restricted space within the dining areas and shortages of some practical resources.