

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Palmer's

Date of visit: 23 February 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

What are the current achievements of students? Achievement at level 3 shows a close match between male and female students. Is there a similar close match between students achieving high grades? How well is the college encouraging students to achieve the highest grades?

- College data show that level 3 results have improved in 2005/06 and are above the 2004/05 national averages. Success rates have risen from 80% to 86% (national average 82%). Both retention and pass rates are slightly above national averages at 92% and 93% respectively. The very small number of adults studying level 3 courses achieved a 94% success rate compared with the national average of 59%;
- There were very few learners aged 16-18 on level 1 courses in 2005/06. Success rates were above the national average of 64% at 71% but retention rates declined from 86% to 75%. Level 2 success rates in 2005/06 continued to be significantly above national averages at 81%. In particular, pass rates rose from 96% to 99% (national average 87%). Retention rates remained at 82% (national average 84%);
- College data show that in 2005/06, 43% of GCE A level students achieved high grades compared to the national average of 41%. At AS level, 28% achieved high grades compared with the 33% national average. Female students gain a significantly higher proportion of high grades compared to male students. The college has not yet considered this evidence when examining their teaching and learning strategies;
- Many minority ethnic groups are too small for robust statistical analysis. However, college data show that in 2005/06, the largest group, 105 black African students at level 3, achieved well with a 91%

success rate compared with the national average 79% and the college overall figure of 86%. Students with dual heritage achieved an 87% success rate compared with the national average of 80% at the same level. Success rates for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability are 83% compared with the college success rate of 86%. In 2005/06, college data show attendance on courses as 90% with tutorials having 88% attendance;

- The college uses the ALPs value added system. The overall institutional scores for 2005/06 were 4 for AS level and 3 for GCE A level. This represents very good and excellent progress respectively compared with students' prior attainment. AS level psychology, with 199 students scored 1 as did four other subjects at this level. Mathematics, with 47 students scored 2. English literature, with 107 students had a decline in its score from 2 to 6. However, within these generally high ALPs scores, there is a minority of subjects showing consistently low scores at both AS and GCE A level;
- ALPs scores for GCE A levels show students in psychology, English literature and English language making excellent progress. However, students in mathematics and business studies make less progress compared with their prior attainment. The institutional score of 3 for GCE A levels show students overall making excellent progress at this level.

Quality of education and training

How accurate and effective in securing improvement is lesson observation?

- Lesson observation is firmly established and comprehensive. Grades are now awarded and useful analysis of results is possible through new software. Observers have been trained extensively and joint activities have contributed to the confidence and expertise of the core team. Written records are detailed and, in general support the grade given. However, in the small sample examined, there was insufficient emphasis on the progress of students and the specific standards achieved by individuals or groups. Records are sometimes generic and fail to explicitly judge the standard of students' work in relation to their abilities and potential. The sharing of good practice is encouraged

through its identification on observation records. Continuing professional development (CPD) activities are aligned with needs for teachers awarded grade 3 but are far less detailed or helpful on those awarded either a two or one. Teachers know too far in advance which of their lessons will be observed. Clear links with appraisal have been established and the review action plans taken from observations form an integral part of performance management.

Additional support is judged by the college to be outstanding. What impact can be demonstrated and what is the current take-up of additional support?

- Students' progress is monitored closely through college systems including subject and tutor reviews. The present management system has limitations to the information and levels of communication that it can perform and the college is working to improve its capability. A large number of students are supported through Study Plus. There is detailed recording and identification of students who may be at risk of not completing their studies successfully and college data for 2004/06 show high levels of success and retention for these students. The college states that the take-up of such support is 100% (including in-class support). Data demonstrating the take up and impact of additional support are not always presented sufficiently clearly for strategic management purposes. However, available college data show a very high success rate of 98.5% for young people in receipt of additional learning support. Particular and targeted provision for disaffected young people of school age has been highly successful in promoting their progression into further education at the college.

Leadership and management

How accurate and robust is the self assessment report (SAR)? Are staff now more fully involved in the self assessment process? What impact has equality and diversity training had on students' achievements, support and teaching and learning?

- Quality is well led and managed and has achieved many changes and improvements from the time of the last AAV. The SAR is thorough and built from a comprehensive process of subject and faculty SARs. Very

thorough moderation processes have been established including peer reviews with another sixth form college. Staff are now much more fully involved with the SAR process. However, some subject SARs demonstrate staff difficulties with the demands of writing such documents. The language used is often not sufficiently evaluative and there is too little detail on teaching and learning, even where it has received the highest grade. Data have improved and the college is now in possession of accurate and timely reports for performance management. Too few managers currently have access to on-line reporting and the college has been slow to train all staff in the use of management systems. Equality and diversity training and development have resulted in positive practical outcomes including improved lesson planning, the support and management of students with mental health issues and the achievement of black male students.