

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Cheadle and Marple Sixth form College
Date of visit: 10 July 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 2005/06 self assessment report (SAR) notes a drop in level 3 success rates to just below the national average from 82% in 2004/05 to 81% in 2005/06. The college's own analysis of this slight decline has identified a drop in achievement at GCE AS level. What actions has the college taken to address this underperformance?

- The college has implemented a range of strategies to tackle underperformance including greater rigour in the recruitment process, stronger liaison with schools and extra time given to academic support for students, especially those at risk of underperforming. Alongside these strategies, there is a whole college approach to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to share best practice.
- Results from the January examinations show improvements at GCE AS level in many areas, significantly so in subjects where achievement had been particularly low, namely, biology, chemistry, business studies and English language and literature. Improved results were also recorded in AS computing, economics, electronics and sociology and in GCE A level biology, business, chemistry law and media studies. However, in AS physical education (PE) and in psychology, pass rates have fallen further below the national average and are subject to more robust actions by the college.
- Overall, students make satisfactory to good progress in relation to their GCSE scores. However, the college is aware that there is still too much inconsistency in curriculum performance and significant numbers of students do not achieve the grades expected of them. Plans to tackle underperformance in a few curriculum areas are not yet formulated.

At the last inspection achievement and standards in biology and chemistry were judged to be inadequate. What actions have been taken and what evidence is there that progress is being made?

- Biology and chemistry were put into 'special measures' by the college following the inspection and have been the focus of regular meetings involving the line manager for the area. There has been increased monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment and external consultants have been used to advise on a number of issues. Academic support for biology and chemistry students identified as 'at risk' of under-achieving has increased.
- Results in January 2007 examinations show significant improvement compared to results in 2006. In AS biology, pass rates increased from 75% to 95%, and in chemistry, from 77% to 95%, including an 11 percentage point increase in the number of high grades. GCE A level biology results in January examinations show an improvement from 56% to 79% with high grade pass rates rising from 15% to 47%. There has been a small improvement in GCE A level chemistry pass rates. College data indicate that retention in biology has increased by 2 percentage points from last year. In AS chemistry retention remains at the same rate as last year but in GCE A-level chemistry the number of students staying on the course has fallen. Overall retention in biology and chemistry is at or around the 2004/05 national average.

Have there been improvements in retention in the current year?

- College data indicate that overall retention for learners aged 16-18 in 2006/07 has increased by two percentage points to 92%.

The 2005/06 SAR notes improvements in level 2 success rates. What evidence is there that have been sustained in 2006/07?

- Strategies to sustain and improve further success rates at level 2 include greater use of initial assessment to identify students' literacy and numeracy skills to ensure students are placed on the right course. The college reports improvements in retention at level 2, particularly in GCSE English and mathematics which represent 50% of all level 2 qualifications offered at the college. College data indicate that retention in GCSE mathematics in 2006/07 has increased by approximately nine percentage points to 82% which is around the 2004/05 benchmark. If achievement

levels remains as high as in previous years, the college predicts that success rates at level 2 will continue to improve.

What do value added data tell us about students' progress?

- Under the value added system to which the college subscribes the college's score for GCE AS and A levels indicates that overall, in 2006, students made satisfactory to good progress. In four out of the 48 subjects offered at GCE A level, students made outstanding progress. However, in fourteen subjects students did not perform as well as predicted by their GCSE scores. In a few subjects at GCE A level, including art and design and dance, there is a consistent pattern of underperformance which is not clearly identified in the college SAR. At AS level, students make outstanding progress in eight out of the 41 subjects offered. In thirteen subjects students did not perform as well as they should.

What are attendance rates for 2006/07?

- Attendance has improved slightly from 90.7% in 2006 to 91.5%. However, there are differences in attendance rates between the Cheadle and the Marple campus: attendance at Marple is higher.

Quality of education and training

Teaching and learning were judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. There was little inadequate teaching but also too little that was good or better. What actions have been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

- The college has worked hard to ensure that improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are given a high priority. Processes for the observation of teaching and learning, in place at the last inspection, have been strengthened. Teachers negotiate individual action plans following the observation, with development points linked to personal reviews. The timing of observations is planned to change for September 2007 to allow more time for professional development in the course of the academic year. There is also more rigorous follow up of teaching that remains consistently satisfactory. Central to the college's aim of improving

teaching and learning is the increasing dissemination of good practice, making effective use of external consultants and internal teaching specialists.

- Analysis of lesson observation reports in the current year indicates an increase in the proportion of lessons that are graded good or better. There is detailed analysis of the outcomes of teaching and learning both at college and departmental level and this is used well to inform further training and development needs.
- In the best examples of lesson observation reports there was appropriate emphasis on what the students were learning and the progress they were making. However, in some reports there was too much focus on what the teacher was doing and insufficient information about student activity.

What progress is being made in the use of information learning technology (ILT)/e-learning?

- Whilst there is improved use of ILT, there is wide variation in practice and the further development and use of ILT has been constrained by limited college resources. ILT is not routinely reported on in lesson observations and it is difficult for the college to ascertain the full extent of its use to enhance learning. A delay in the production of the college's e-learning strategy has meant that overall progress in this area has been slow. However, a new e-strategy is now in place which clearly identifies the college's commitment to the use of e-learning strategies in the future.

What has the college done to improve the quality of tutorial provision?

- Following the inspection, observations of group tutorials were included in lesson observation programme. In the recent management restructuring, a new head of student support has been appointed. A quality review procedure, which applies college quality assurance processes to tutorial provision, is now in place. Personal tutors are required to undertake an individual review of tutorial provision with the same degree of rigour that teachers review the quality of their subject work. It is too early to comment on the impact of these changes.

Leadership and management

How is the college responding to the slow progress made since the previous inspection, particularly with regard to performance in biology and chemistry, the effectiveness of group tutorials and the use of ILT/e-learning? How rigorously is the post-inspection action plan monitored?

- Against a background of uncertainty caused by a recent restructuring of middle and senior management, progress in raising achievement and retention in biology and chemistry has been good: results in the January examinations indicate much improved performance. Overall achievement at level 3 for students aged 16-18 also shows signs of improvement in most areas. There has been a clear determination from senior management to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The college's financial situation is improving and the college is on target to move from Category C financial status to Category B by 2008/09.
- In a number of areas, actions to address weaknesses have been slow. In the main, this has been due to changes in staffing, particularly at a senior level. For example, actions to ensure greater consistency in tutorial provision have been delayed until the recent appointment of the Head of Student Support. Plans are now in place to address tutorial issues. Aspects of the college's human resource strategy, including a review of the staff appraisal process, have also been delayed pending the arrival of a new senior post holder in August. Work on the college's accommodation strategy is overdue but the college is working closely with the Learning and Skills Council to remedy this.
- Robust procedures are in place to monitor the post-inspection action plan.

Have the improvements in student recruitment been maintained in 2006 and what are indications for 2007?

- The college anticipates that student recruitment targets for 2007/08 will be met. Early indications show that there will also be an increase in the number of students, already at the college, who will progress to the next level of their course.

Have arrangements to promote equality and diversity improved since the last inspection?

- Whole college in service training (INSET) focussing on the promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum took place in March 2007. A new and attractive prospectus celebrating the ethnic diversity of the student population has been published. Greater attention is given to classroom displays. The college continues to promote the talents and interests of all of their students through formal presentations and events to raise awareness of all religious festivals.

The SAR indicates that a staffing re-structuring will take place in 2006/07. Has this happened and if so, how well was it managed?

- On the basis of a very small sample of staff interviewed during the visit, the management re-structure was thought to have been managed well.

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

- Key skills success rates continue to be high. For example, college data for 2006/07 indicate success rates in numeracy are 87% at level 1 and at 84% at level 2.