

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Evesham and Malvern Hills College
Date of visit: 13 June 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

How well did students achieve in 2005/06 and how well are they performing in the current academic year?

- Finalised data for 2005/06 shows that success rates for students aged 16 to 18 years old improved at level 1 and 2 and are above the national rate. Success rates for this age group declined at level 3 to well below the national rate, mainly due to low retention rates caused largely by mid-way transfers from unsuitable courses to more appropriate ones. The college has now tightened up management procedures to ensure that the set up of all courses is thoroughly checked, based on clear and reasonable criteria, before they are allowed to run.
- Success rates for adult students are well above the national rate at level 2 and 3, but dipped considerably at level 1 to be in line with the national rate. The college has analysed carefully the factors that contributed to this dip and taken appropriate action to address relevant issues. In particular, it has improved the advice, guidance and tracking of progress on ESOL courses at both campuses.
- Retention rates for the current academic year, after the last census date, show considerable improvement in the rate for students aged 16 to 18 years old on level 3 programmes. However, the rate for ESOL learners at level 1 remains low.
- Nearly double the numbers of students are entered for key skills qualification in the current academic year compared to the previous year. The number of portfolios already assessed as up to standard or awaiting assessment is much increased. Students complete on-line testing; however it was not possible to assess pass rates in tests on the day of the visit. The college's management information system (MIS) cannot yet produce reports that show test results, exemptions and portfolio completions as a single report, making it difficult for managers to track progress easily. Managers do not regularly consider key skills

performance by level and subject and base their overall evaluations on aggregate success rates. This restricts the extent to which they can monitor performance in detail.

How well are work-based learners achieving?

- The overall success rates for all apprenticeships has increased year on year from 38% in 2004/05 to 40% in 2005/2006 and 79% as at period 9 for 2006/07. The incidence of learners continuing beyond their predicted end date has decreased dramatically to the point that overall and timely success rates for the current year are almost identical. The tracking of learners' progress is much improved and appropriate action is taken to retain them and to ensure timely completion. Learners whose personal circumstances impact on their progress have their predicted end date appropriately amended.

Quality of education and training

What improvements have been made to the quality of provision for work-based learners?

- Key skills are now introduced and completed in the early stages of the programme of study. This both assists with completion of the NVQ and technical certificate work as well as reducing the numbers of learners leaving the programme without completing the framework. Frequent assessor and internal verification visits to the work place are used well to review progress and set targets, as well as to keep employers informed and involved. A business development manager is tasked to further increase employer support and interest in apprenticeship programmes. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this strategy.
- The college employs a traffic light system to show how close a learner is to their predicted end date and to prioritise any additional support or other action to enable them to complete their programmes within the planned timescales. Learners' progress is discussed at monthly curriculum managers' meetings and action plans are produced to rectify slow progress. Assessments are appropriately conducted on simulated tasks when there is no opportunity for that activity in the work place.

What improvements have been made to the quality of provision in key skills?

- Much of the work that has been done over the last two years to improve the quality of provision in key skills is starting to bear fruit. Senior

management intervention has been effective and subject coordinators have supported considerable curriculum area development. Curriculum managers have appropriate targets for achievement of key skills set within their performance objectives and which are considered as part of their annual performance review. This has increased their accountability for ensuring that students are successful.

- The college holds direct claim and remote monitoring status. Many more students are now entered for qualifications and success rates are improving. Tracking of progress takes place more frequently. Most students study two core key skill subjects over their period of study, but the college does not yet make provision for study of all three. As the quality of provision has improved, the college is now in a much better position and plans to revise its policy to ensure that all students work towards a level 2 qualification in all three core key skill areas.
- Learning of key skills has been successfully integrated into several curriculum areas including animal care and computing and information and communication technology (ICT). This has proved effective in redressing some of the negative views of key skills held by students. However, in other areas such as engineering, this has been less successful and opportunities to make links between vocational and key skills teaching are not yet maximised.

What improvements have been made to group tutorials and the uptake of learning support?

- Group tutorials are timetabled weekly. Since the beginning of this year, in addition to the work on university applications and the production of personal statements and other activities, the college has introduced themed group tutorials of a more general nature from a list of suitable topics. Tutors are also given advice on resources to support these sessions. Previously this time had been used by subject tutors to support subject specific work. The implementation of this approach is not yet consistent. Although some students recognised this change in approach, others were unaware that these more generic themes were being covered. Evidence from curriculum area reviews shows uneven practice in this area.
- The college has a timetabled an extra two hours per week as 'gold time' during which students can access additional learning support as well as undertake other planned learning activities. New additions to the MIS are planned to allow better tracking of the uptake of this support. Although overall figures are not yet available, the number of hours used to provide

additional learning support has increased considerably, indicating better uptake. Learning support specialists also provide effective in-class support where this is indicated by initial assessment or screening.

- Additional learning support is comprehensively provided for full and part-time students and also for those undergoing work-based learning. Vocational tutors with appropriate training are increasingly involved in delivering additional learning support. Most learning support is in literacy and numeracy with very little language support. Migrant workers and others requiring language support generally attend dedicated ESOL training.

Leadership and management

How has the college improved aspects of quality assurance?

- The use of curriculum area reviews has strengthened the college's quality assurance procedures. In particular, the frequency of lesson observation has increased and during a review week all teachers will be observed. Four of the six curriculum areas have been reviewed with the remaining areas scheduled for the autumn term. The review process is largely comprehensive, although not enough evaluation is made of the standards of work or the effectiveness of internal verification. Reports are useful but are generally too supportive in nature and lack some rigour. The college recognises that this aspect needs to be strengthened. Sampling approaches used are not always valid and action plans are often over general and miss important areas for improvement.

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

- The college has firm plans to purchase the Malvern Hills campus, which will allow it to make the much-needed improvements to accommodation. It has well-advanced plans, supported by the LSC, to develop the campus to make better provision for a 14 – 19 curriculum to meet local and regional needs.