

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Joseph Chamberlain College

Inspectors: Anne Taylor HMI,

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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 college maintained high success rates on level 2 and level 3 courses for 2005/06 and improved success rates on level 1 courses?

- The college has maintained high success rates on both level 2 and 3 courses and success rates on level 1 courses are now above national rates. There are some variations by age with success rates on level 1 and 2 courses being well above national rates for students aged 16 to 18 and success rates on courses at levels 2 and 3 being well above national rates for adult students. Short courses for adults have success rates significantly below national rates.

How successful has the college been in raising achievement on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, identified as a weakness at the last inspection?

- Success rates on ESOL courses have risen significantly in 2005/06 and are now at least satisfactory, with further improvement planned. They were very weak at the time of the last inspection. There are variations across the provision with success rates on day courses at the main site generally being higher than those in the community or evening provision. Learners on community courses are amongst the most disadvantaged in Birmingham. The improvement has arisen because of the success of a range of strategies taken through 2005/06. These included clearer entry procedures, intensive revision and support for learners, better preparation for examinations, and a re-alignment of the course offer to the needs of learners. This has been supported by extensive staff training, including four paid sessions per annum run on Saturdays for ESOL teachers in the community. There are significant numbers of community staff and they are well supported through cluster arrangements. There are strong quality assurance processes within the community.

Success rates at General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A level were around the national average in 2004/05; however AS pass rates were below the national average. What action has the college taken to increase the overall pass rate and the proportion of high grades?

- The success rates on AS courses have risen significantly in 2005/06 to the national rate. Retention is very high. Achievement is rising incrementally and while it is below the national average, the value added by the college is especially high, particularly for those with both low and high prior attainment. The college performance at AS is in the top 10% of colleges participating in the 'ALPS' value added system.
- The college has implemented a range of actions to increase pass rates and high grades across all AS subjects. In addition, in those subjects where achievement is low action plans are agreed and these are very closely monitored by senior and middle managers as described below. The college has an extensive range of support available, including language support, additional homework clubs, and additional individual tutorial sessions with staff. Learners speak highly of these sessions and the general support they receive to raise their aspirations and improve their chances of success.

Quality of provision

How does the college identify trends in teaching and learning in order to bring about further improvement?

- There is an extensive system of formal lesson observation, plus an informal system of peer observation and management visits to lessons which take place within a supportive and developmental atmosphere. Heads of department conduct formal observations on all their staff once a year and as part of the quality system they meet with their senior manager annually to discuss broad outcomes of the observations and learners' evaluations. However there is no formal reporting process to enable trends in teaching and learning to be identified.
- The college has good communications and is aware of many general themes and issues arising from teaching and learning in the college. It has a comprehensive continuing professional development (CPD) programme

including an annual residential training session for heads of department and senior managers at which many college priorities are explored.

The college continues to develop the use of Information and learning technology (ILT) in and out of the classroom. What progress has been made?

- The college continues to invest in ILT hardware and software and most teaching rooms are well equipped with interactive white boards. Since moving to a more user-friendly virtual learning environment (VLE) the take-up by college staff has increased significantly; all curriculum managers agree annual targets for the inclusion of materials. In addition there has been extensive training for staff in ILT.

The college has developed more suitable courses to enable adults to progress, such as the Access to further and higher education programmes. What indicators are there for progression?

- Learners at the college are able to access good internal progression routes from entry to level 3 in most curriculum areas. All courses include high levels of language development to match the needs of learners. In 2005/06 additional programmes have been added to the offer to improve adult progression further, one in ICT in the community and the Access courses to further and higher education. These enable learners to progress to teaching and to nursing and health studies. The Access to higher education course is available over 1 or 2 years and early indications are positive as several learners have applied through the University Central Admissions System (UCAS) for a 2007 start.
- The college is rightly proud of the progression of its learners. It has developed strong links to a number of universities including Cambridge and Birmingham and a high proportion of eligible learners do progress.

The last inspection reported that there was insufficient monitoring of the impact of additional learning support. How is this area for improvement being addressed?

- The college maintains good records of progress against targets for individual learners who are in receipt of learning support. However, the college does not collate this to show the value added by the individual support. Although there

is extensive support for learners, most of it is available to all learners and is funded by the college as normal activity.

Leadership and management

Achievements and standards are good. The previous annual assessment visit identified a number of strategies being used to raise performance further and tackle courses that are underachieving. How effective were these in 2005/06?

- The college operates robust course monitoring processes. All courses are reviewed twice a year by senior and middle managers, including the principal. Course managers have good data available to them including national comparisons and a range of value added measures, and judgements are made on the success of each course separately. Data is available on individual learners and heads of department work jointly to identify learners who are at risk of underachieving and they devise individual support programmes to increase learner achievement. Additionally each year the college identifies a number of courses where results are giving cause for concern and agrees specific action plans for improvement. These are subject to especially close monitoring by senior and middle managers twice per term. Of the 12 courses identified as 'cause for concern' in 2005/06, 11 have shown improvement in end of year results.
- Improvement strategies agreed in 2005/06 included revisions to schemes of work, changes to delivery and teaching methods, extra timetabled sessions, homework clubs and more strict enforcement of homework arrangements, better use of interactive whiteboards, improved VLE and resources, better development of learners' study, research and analytical skills and closer monitoring of learners' progress. A new post of head of access and progression has been established this academic year, formalising and co-ordinating many learner support processes. This includes co-ordination of the academic buddy system, where more able learners support others who need extra help in the subject.

The college has an increasing commitment to work with partner schools. How effectively are these partnerships managed?

- The college has partnership arrangements with six local schools across a broad range of courses in several subject areas from entry level to AS. These are mainly for 14-16 year olds but also include a post-16 partnership with a special school in performance art. Arrangements include pupils' attendance at the college, delivery by college teachers in school and also joint delivery by staff across institutions. In media studies learners studying AS at the college in year 11 are able to progress to A level at the college in year 12.
- Partnership arrangements are well managed by a senior manager and positive links are fostered between college and school staff, for example through joint curriculum and staff development. There is close monitoring of progress and attendance of the learners whilst on college premises.

The previous inspection report highlighted the issue of poor and deteriorating buildings and action that was being taken to improve the resources available to learners. What plans does the college have to improve the situation further?

- In September 2008 the college will move into new, purpose-built premises very close to the existing building. The new building has been designed as a secure and supportive learning environment in an area of social and economic disadvantage. There has been close co-operation between the architect and college staff in designing the learning spaces. The academic learning environment is built around extensive courtyard and garden space, making it very easy to oversee. The new building will enable some further expansion to take place. The college will continue to serve the existing catchment area. It is intended that the college mission will remain unchanged so that local people have good access to education, training and future progression.