

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College

Date of visit: 9 November 2006

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 on mathematics and design technology courses in 05/06?

In 2004/05, the college identified 7 courses where performance was below college norms, either in terms of value-added achievement or overall success rates. In 2005/06 there were improvements in performance in the majority of those subject areas. For example, all learners achieved a pass in film studies and the proportion of learners achieving higher grades rose by over 30%. Overall success rates for all courses rose in 2005/06 to 81% and remain above national averages for similar colleges.

In mathematics GCSE, the proportion of students gaining higher grades fell to 13.7% from 24.6% the year before. Success rates on the free standing units at level 2 also fell. Success rates were below national averages in 2004/05 on GCE AS and A2 mathematics courses.

Success rates on GCE AS design technology rose in 2005/06. The proportion of students achieving higher grades on GCE A level rose significantly to 38.5%.

Why did in-year retention fall in 2005/06?

In year retention fell by 3% in 2005/06 to 89.5%. College analysis has identified a number of reasons for the slight decline, such as discontinuity in pastoral management. This affected the timeliness of support for learners at risk of disengagement. There was also lower than expected retention of learners at the early stages of their courses. The college has adapted the curriculum offer for some students to ensure it more closely matches learner needs. Whilst too early to judge the impact of these actions, current in-year retention rates show an improvement compared to this time last year.

Quality of education and training

How effective is college provision for key skills?

There has been improvement in the key skills outcomes, with achievement on level 1 and 2 courses improving significantly, although they remain slightly below national averages. The college has rationalised the extent of key skills accreditation, with key skills being accredited across levels 1-3 in IT in 2005/06. The college is developing its practice to ensure that the literacy and numeracy needs of learners are met at both level 1 and 2, as part of its basic skills provision.

How does the college promote students' future economic well-being?

Internal progression rates are high, and destinations data indicate that over three quarters of learners choose to enter higher education (HE) at the end of their studies. Over two thirds of these learners are the first generation of their families to enter HE. Support mechanisms for learners progressing to HE are robust and students state that support for university application and careers guidance is effective. The college works with students to raise aspirations, through Aim Higher activities. According to college data, approximately 6% of learners entered employment in 2004/05 and 1% were unemployed.

Opportunities for learners to develop skills to support their economic well-being exist across the college. Some vocational courses offer work placement opportunities and access to a range different workplace settings. The college has a comprehensive programme of enrichment that includes activities to develop a variety of skills. For example, the Young Enterprise group has been particularly successful, enabling learners to develop their confidence, presentation and business skills.

Leadership and management

How effective is college provision for key skills?

The newly appointed key skills co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development and accreditation of IT key skills within the college. There is (already) improved accountability as a consequence of better communication and clearer expectations across both discrete and integrated courses.

How effectively are resources deployed to meet the additional learning needs of students?

There has been some improvement in meeting the demand for learning support within the college through the development of drop-in and workshop sessions. Learners and teachers report that these sessions are popular and valued. There are more learners identified with learning support needs than can access timetabled support. Data collection on learner performance and attendance at sessions has improved and is beginning to inform self-evaluation. Communication between additional learning support and curriculum areas is improving, with teachers reporting that they found the data on the student information forms valuable.

How well did students' achieve on mathematics and design technology courses in 05/06?

Identification of relative underperformance in mathematics and design technology has been timely and there has been a thorough analysis of the underlying causes, through the college's internal inspection processes and through learner feedback. The college is confident that it has the correct curriculum solution to ensure that learners' needs are met at level 2 in mathematics, with GCSE and the free standing units at level 1 and 2. Action plans in mathematics rightly focus on on quality assurance, and in particular on improving the quality of teaching and learning to be at least good so that learners make better progress over time. However, plans do not currently identify timescales and short-term success criteria to support monitoring.