

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Peter Symonds College
Date of visit: 26 September 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

Do the provisional results for 2005/06 indicate that the college has maintained its high standards?

- The college has improved on the already very high standards found at the last inspection and at the last annual assessment visit.
- In 2004/05, the overall success rate for students aged 16-18 on long courses (11453 enrolments) was 90%, some 9% above the national average. The college has carried out a detailed analysis of the results for 2005/06 and this indicates a further rise in the overall success rate to 92%. This is the fourth consecutive annual rise in the overall success rate.
- Level 3 courses account for approximately 98% of enrolments for students aged 16-18. Of these some 97% follow AS level and GCE A level courses. In 2005/06 the success rate for AS level courses for students aged 16-18 was 90.3% against a 2004/05 national average of 77.7%. The success rate on GCE A level courses was 96.2% against a 2004/05 national average of 91.9%.
- In 2005/06 the percentage of students aged 16-18 who gained higher grade passes on AS level courses was 48% against a 2004/05 national rate of 32%. On GCE A level courses the higher grade pass rate was 56% against a 2004/05 national average of 41%.
- The success rate on level 3 vocational courses for students aged 16-18 was slightly below the national average. However, the success rate for level 2 vocational courses, at 85%, was significantly above the national average, as was the success rate on GCSE courses. The average point score (APS) in 2005 was 372.6 against a national average of 269.2.

Has the college continued to address effectively the small number of courses that performed poorly?

- Of the small number of courses that the college had identified in 2004/05 as not performing as well as others, almost all have shown significant improvement in 2005/06. For example, there have been very impressive and significant improvements in success rates to above the national

averages in history, most product design courses and environmental science. There have also been significant improvements in success rates on general studies and key skills courses.

Has the college maintained the improvement in success rates for level 3 courses for adult students?

- Adult students account for a very small proportion of total enrolments. Success rates on AS level and GCE A level courses for adults are now significantly above national averages. Success rates for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) have continued to improve and are now at the national average.

Quality of education and training

What curriculum developments have taken place since the last AAV?

- The college has developed an innovative link with the Army and is providing training in literacy to around 350 young recruits. Applied A levels are now being delivered and the college is involved in a consortium of local schools to develop Specialised Diplomas for 14 to 19 year olds. There are approximately 100 students who successfully mix vocational qualifications with AS level and GCE A level courses to form a programme to meet their individual needs. The college continues to provide non-accredited courses for adults within its adult and community education department. General studies courses have been revised and embedded successfully into the tutorial programme.
- The enrichment programme is outstanding and includes a wide and exciting range of accredited courses, sporting and cultural activities and opportunities for students' personal development. This is a very important aspect of college life and is valued very highly by students. Many courses also involve a range of curriculum related trips and visits.

Has the college maintained the very high levels of student support found at the last inspection?

- Support for students was judged to be outstanding in the inspection in 2004. This continues to be the case.
- Initial advice and guidance for school leavers is provided through the admissions team who liaise closely with the college's main partner schools in and around Winchester. A wide range of information about the college is available and students are given further advice and guidance on subject choice at interview. Students who do not have higher grade GCSEs in mathematics or English are encouraged to gain these during their time at college. Almost all do. The information, advice and guidance provided to

adults meets their needs well and the college has delivered nearly 1,000 advice and guidance interviews to adult students through the Next-Step programme.

- The induction programme helps students to settle in quickly to college life in general and into their individual courses. The relatively small number of students who wish to change courses or subjects during the induction period are catered for well. Students report that any early concerns they had about their courses were dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- The tutorial programme is efficient and effective. Lead tutors, pastoral tutors, academic staff and student services staff work extremely well together to provide a coherent and highly valued “all round” service to students. Students who board at Peter Symonds feel they are supported well. Tutors and teachers know their students well. Most, but not all students have a tutor who teaches them as well as acts as their personal tutor. All students have target grades for each subject. A small number of students in the sample selected by the college for a discussion with inspectors thought that although targets were revised as they progressed through the course, they were set initially too low.
- Students’ progress is monitored carefully and frequently. Any issues or difficulties are highlighted quickly and appropriate action is taken. Staff and students are supported well in this monitoring process by the outstanding intranet system where causes for concern and actions taken are recorded. The monitoring of attendance is extremely rigorous and results in very low levels of absenteeism.
- Students receive outstanding support with their applications to higher education. The college is successful, through a specialist tutor, in helping nearly fifty students each year gain entrance to Oxbridge. The college also has excellent links with medical and veterinary schools and other universities. A general careers programme is delivered within the tutorial programme. There is a specific careers programme for students on level 2 courses.
- Students benefit from extensive support services including welfare and hardship, finance, transport, counselling and the Students’ Union. There is also a college chaplain, catering for all faiths and those of no faith and a very active Christian Union. Evaluations of these services show a very high level of student satisfaction.

- With regard to academic support, students speak very highly of the help and extra support they get from their teachers, who they find to be very enthusiastic and approachable. Students feel they are prepared very well for examinations and are confident that they can perform to the best of their ability. They value the subject workshops and find them invaluable should they need extra support or wish to carry out additional work in a particular subject. From discussions with the sample of students mentioned above, it is clear that the college and subject intranet sites are beginning to provide an excellent support service to students and staff.

How is additional learning support provided and evaluated? What is the role of learning support assistants?

- All students receive a thorough initial assessment of their individual learning needs. The take up of additional learning support by students diagnosed as requiring it is very high at about 90%. Additional learning support enjoys an excellent reputation within the college. Students speak very highly of the extra help and support they receive from learning support assistants (LSAs) and the staff working in various areas of specialism such as dyslexia. The college evaluates the impact of additional learning support thoroughly. There is evidence that concludes that of the students who have been diagnosed as requiring additional support, those who take it up perform significantly better (around 0.5 of a grade) than the relatively small number of students who do not access the support available. Students with mobility difficulties are supported well.
- Learning support is available to adults, largely on a self-referral basis. Systems have been adapted appropriately to meet the specific needs of adult students but the impact of these has yet to be evaluated formally.

What progress is the college making on delivering the “Every Child Matters” outcomes?

- Peter Symonds College’s long-standing motto is “Counting in Ones”; central to this notion is that “Every Child Matters”.
- The college has identified its current contribution to the five outcomes (being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being) through an extensive and detailed audit of its current practice. This provides evidence that the college makes a significant contribution to the outcomes through much of its current work. It is now ready to move to the next phase of developing its provision to promote the outcomes even more.

Leadership and management

- College leaders have been very successful in developing a common vision that is supported by staff and, importantly, by students. Senior leaders know their college exceptionally well. They have an excellent record of recognising and correcting any under-performance. Communication is excellent and lines of accountability and responsibility are clear and understood well by everyone in the college. Self-assessment is embedded very well in curriculum areas and increasingly well within the cross college areas.
- The college places students and their success at the centre of all of its activities. Students are proud of their college and of their achievements and they recognise and value the support they get from staff and managers at all levels within the college.