

The City of Liverpool College

Board meeting held on 25th August 2015 at 4pm

Present: Elaine Bowker (Principal & CEX), Sue Carmichael, Clare Crowther, Peter Grieve (Chair), Viv Lacey, John Nolan, Phillip Powell (President of Students' Union/Student Governor), Stephen Sankson, David Wilson

Apologies: Louise Barry, Gemma Charters, John Denny, Ian Pollitt, Peter Tavernor.

In Attendance: Angela Cox (Deputy Principal), David McIntyre (Deputy CEX), Simon Pierce (Vice Principal – Curriculum), Christine Lenderyou (Clerk).

The meeting was a single item meeting convened at the Board's request during the 27th July Board meeting to discuss the implications of the public examination results received in August 2015. As such no other Board business would be addressed other than the Chair welcoming Mr Powell and Mr Sankson to their first Board meeting.

15.84 **Summary of Outcomes for City 6 Academic Year 2014/15 and Proposals for 2015/16**

The VP Curriculum tabled a paper explaining that alterations to grades were ongoing in terms of requested remarks, etc. The Chair requested that governors be given time to read and digest the information contained within the paper so the meeting was paused.

For the benefit of new governors the VPC explained the background and the additional scrutiny the Board had placed City 6 under because of concerns around success rates; the Board had agreed that City 6 would continue in 2014/15 under very strict conditions such as maximum recruitment numbers, minimum entry requirements and close scrutiny by the Board including via the Performance and Quality Task and Finish Group and strategic planning day as well as tracking a detailed action plan. In May 2015 the Board had received sufficient assurance on the basis of the April mock examinations that City 6 provision would continue in 2015/16 subject to final confirmation of results in August. The VPC referred governors to the appendices which followed the format of previous information given to governors.

AS targets had been largely met as the further 0.2% would be met by re-marks and queries being resolved. The pass rates represented a significant improvement on the previous year, in particular for some key subjects. A2 had improved by 3.4%. The Principal reminded governors that the targets had been discussed at Board level in respect of how realistic was and the Principal had agreed it was extremely aspirational, but the decision to keep this target had been vindicated. Governors were in agreement that Value Added measures which measured progress were agreed as being particularly relevant to the College. A2 achievement was now very close to national rates for FE Colleges at 96.6% against 97.1%. There were very few ungraded results and 23 out of 33 subjects had a 100% pass rate.

Governors were reminded that the results only included funded learners. Spanish, History, Maths and Science were highlighted as particular success stories with Physics being highlighted in particular and the performance of maths and science was valuable given the new STEM centre.

AS results showed some work to do on retention but there were significant improvements in success rates.

Sociology had produced some anomalous results which two teachers who were also examination board markers thought a number of should be sent back for remarking; this seemed to bear out stories in the national press regarding pressures on examination markers in particular subject areas. The Deputy Principal gave some more context regarding the process and timescales for examination marking.

GCSE achievement rates had increased by 5% to 95.9% which was above the national average of 93.9%. The number of students getting A*-C had increased. Further improvement was required in terms of high grades although the Board acknowledged the increase in results there too.

AS and A2 targets would be set to be at the national success rates for 2014/15. The paper tabled by the VPC did not propose a target for GCSE given that the College was already above the national rate. Governors were concerned that not setting a target for GCSE would send out the wrong message regarding how aspirational the College was. The Principal understood this but reminded governors that the Board did not set individual targets for specific areas; all Curriculum areas were given targets by management and tightly managed through internal performance reviews and agreed quality assurance and improvement processes. English and maths would be scrutinised by governors during the strategic planning event as well as throughout the year. For the benefit of newer governors the Principal explained that across the sector resit GCSEs were challenging for Colleges; anecdotally there had been a 33% success rates across the sector with English and maths being at 8 and 11%. She stated that this was poor performance and the College needed to be much more aspirational and this would be reflected in the target setting.

Governors digested the information and a detailed discussion took place around the implications. Key points raised included:

- Governors felt positive progress had been made.
- The Board needed to look at the success rates for the high level target and focus on anywhere where there needed to be more challenge.
- Governors were understandably nervous around reducing the amount of scrutiny but accepted that there were other priorities within the College.
- The Deputy Principal reassured the Board that there would be no reduction in focus within the College.
- Governors questioned whether Ofsted would expect to see a target set for GCSE and were advised that the distance travelled and ALPs scores (the independent measure of value added) would be important for this purpose to demonstrate the value added. The ALPs score was not yet available.
- Governors challenged on the improvement in Law but the decision to remove the provision. The VPC said it wasn't just about performance but about what was best for the students and universities didn't rate that A level as a facilitating subject. Provision would still be available via the BTEC route.
- Universities had increased their focus on facilitating subjects which had filtered through to students.
- Geography results had been disappointing but it was a core subject and was in demand as a facilitating subject. It would be remiss to remove it and governors were assured that improvements to the delivery were ongoing.

- New linear programmes would impact on students as previously students had studied 4 AS subjects and might previously have chosen to continue with 3 on to A2 programmes but this would not be an option to them in the future.
- Answering how the College would promote the improved success rates the Principal advised that both city radio stations had reported from the College on results day and coverage in the Liverpool Echo had taken place.
- Governors agreed that focussing on the areas of the College which needed most support and challenge would improve the overall performance of the College.
- The Principal suggested that governors could take assurance from courses which were subject to an internal Notice to Improve being reported to the Board, possibly via the PQTFG which would allow detailed scrutiny.
- Governors acknowledged the increased success rates and the increased demand from students in the city.
- The DCEO highlighted that some risk around inspection had been mitigated due to the improvement in success rates.

Proposal to increase AS numbers

- The VPC asked the Board to consider a modest increase in the numbers of AS students admitted and went on to outline the educational reasons for this. Evidence suggested A Level students performed better in larger classes.
- Governors requested clarity on what “modest” meant. The VPC said around 50. The capped intake last year was 250.
- The Chair challenged that if numbers had previously been reduced to improve quality of provision, could the improved standards be maintained. The Principal said that it would still be less than in previous years (500) and would be larger groups rather than more groups. Students performed better in larger groups and this provided a better learner experience.
- The entry criteria was now much tighter than it had been in previous years and only students who had met the entry requirements would be considered, supporting the College’s commitment to ensuring students were on the right courses for them.
- There was significant demand for the places. The Principal was receiving a number of complaints each day from parents because their children didn’t have a place.
- Governors pushed on whether students were being diverted to other areas of the College which could adequately meet their needs. The Principal advised that a number of students wanted A Level or nothing although some people had taken up apprenticeships instead.
- Governors sought assurance that the resources were in place and that there would be no detriment to the quality of provision. The Principal and VPC said that this was the case, with the VPC detailing the rigour of the applications and admissions system.

Governors discussed the proposal in detail and felt the three main issues to consider were:

1. Ensuring that the right students were recruited to the right courses which had already been addressed by the VPC.

2. Tracking and marking had developed considerably in 2014/15 but there were some areas where tracking needed to improve further and this correlated with areas for improvement.
3. Teaching and learning which had improved considerably.

The Vice Chair challenged on how scrutiny would continue and was informed subjects would be continually examined and underperforming areas would ultimately be removed.

Governors asked what were the financial implications of 50 extra students. The Principal advised that it was £4K per student adding that class sizes were too small in City 6 and the smaller class sizes had performed worse with the bigger class sizes in science having been most successful. The Board queried why 50 students and were advised this number meant there would not need to be more groups at this number which meant that no increased resources were required.

The Board agreed with the Chair's summary that the Board would approve the increase on the basis that protocols and good practice which had been put into place would be continued. The proposal to increase AS numbers was approved.

Proposal to decrease GCSE numbers and programmes

The Board were asked to consider a reduction from 100 to 80 for GCSE programmes as well as a reduction in the number of GCSE programmes as the GCSE programme was supposed to serve as a pathway to a Level 3 study programme. The aim was to increase the number of students getting C and above. The Deputy Principal cautioned that if retention was poor, a decision should be taken more quickly regarding whether the course continued to run. The overall pass rate was good. There were a number of professional vocational qualifications available to students. Governors acknowledged that offering a strong core of subjects may be more effective, but challenged why GCSE Geography would not continue in that case. The VPC clarified that Geography was being retained at AS/A2 and most students coming from school would have either Geography or History GCSE.

The Board agreed to the proposals to refine the GCSE offer.

Other related issues

Governors discussed recent commentary from a think tank that schools should pay a levy for resits for English and maths. Governors agreed that regardless of how realistic that was, it was good to see some coverage of the disparity between schools and FE colleges highlighted in the media.

[removed for confidentiality]

The City Council were also reviewing sixth form provision in the city; College governor Peter Tavernor was on the steering group. The Principal had been clear when publicising the examination results that the College was the City's sixth form college and offered a breadth of provision not found elsewhere. The Deputy Principal reminded governors that schools reported differently and retention was not a factor which skewed comparisons.

Getting AS and A2 to national rate and the Board challenging on Value Added would be key features of Board meetings through 2015-16. Governors were emphatic that the systematic

approach from the Board and College had led to improvements which were not fortuitous but the result of substantial measures and were sustainable.

Governors asked about the messages going out to staff. The Principal had written to Dr Spall (Assistant Principal for City 6). Managers then distributed the message to staff. [removed for confidentiality] The Vice Chair asked whether the Board should send a message about being pleased with the effort and rigorous approach pursued which were vindicated in the results obtained. As an example of the lengths to which staff had gone to support students, governors were advised of a thank you card from a student who had taken an exam on a psychiatric ward which the College had facilitated.

There had been a consultation on Community and College Start. The financial context could not be separated from the curriculum. The balance with the trade unions was being tested, but seemed to be holding. Governors felt that when progress was evident staff would understand why decisive actions had been taken.

Items for the strategic planning day would include English and maths, any additional information regarding national performance which was available, an update on the sector and area reviews, plus an Ofsted briefing.

The Chair thanked everyone for their time and closed the meeting.