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Dear Mr Leighfield

### **Estyn Annual Review of Performance report on St David's Catholic College**

Following the Annual Review of Performance visit to your institution on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> May, this letter forms an annual report based on the outcomes of that visit. The letter is published on the Estyn website.

Rachael Bubalo HMI evaluated the current performance of the institution and reviewed the progress made against the recommendations arising from earlier inspections. This has led to further areas for improvement being identified, which are set out at the end of the letter.

Rachael Bubalo HMI held discussions with the principal and senior leaders tutors, learners and members of the governing body. She scrutinised documentation, including evidence on the progress made against each of the previous inspection recommendations. She also considered the quality of teaching and learning through conducting a learning walk, a sample of lesson observations and scrutiny of the provider's lesson observation process.

At the end of the visit, Rachael Bubalo reported her findings to the principal of the institution and other members of the senior leadership team.

### **Outcome of the link inspector visits**

Estyn inspected St David's College in 2010 and judged its overall performance to be excellent, with excellent prospects for improvement. Since the inspection, the pace of improvement within the institution, as well as the progress against the recommendations left by the inspection team, has been good.

## **1 Outcomes and standards**

The all-course data for 2012-2013 shows that the rates at which learners complete and attain their qualifications (success rates) have continued to improve over the last three years. The college's overall success rate in 2012/13 for all courses was 83%, against a national comparator of 85%. Eighty-three per cent of the college provision is made up of Level 3 long courses, which had a 84% success rate for 2013 which resulted in the college being ranked first in the sector for performance in these. At AS/A2 level, the overall success rate is 85% and above the sector average. The performance of Honours programme learners (more able and talented) is particularly strong with 100% of learners achieving grades A\*-C in 2013. However, for A/B grades overall, St David's remains below the national comparator for institutions in Wales.

In subject sector areas, the college's data shows that four out of 11 have success rates above national comparators. These four areas constitute over 60% of the college's provision. However, there is too much variation in learner outcomes between courses overall.

Success rates on Essential Skills Wales are well above national comparators and the college is ranked first for all levels and qualifications.

## **2 Essential Skills**

The college pays good attention to improving learners' essential skills and includes this as a strategic objective in its three-year plan. It screens all learners and puts in place comprehensive support arrangements including workshops, peer mentoring and drop-in sessions.

The college has embedded initiatives to improve skills well. All learners have access to personalised online resources. These include literacy and numeracy toolkits in all curriculum areas and additional support materials provided in pastoral programmes. Staff record learners' essential skills profiles on their eLLP. Support for ESOL learners is also good.

The college monitors provision well to ensure that the quality of support remains high. The college trains all staff well. The college also trains learning coaches to play an important role in the support arrangements for learners.

Systems to collect data on learners' needs and the support they receive is good; however, the college does not yet measure the value-added benefits to learners of their time at the college.

The college has undertaken a useful research project on the teaching of reading skills in A level subjects. The results will inform improvements to the teaching of literacy.

### **3 Teaching and assessment**

The college has effective systems in place for improving teaching and assessment. Senior staff observe all teachers annually to improve their teaching practice. New staff are observed on four or five occasions. Observers pay good attention to ensuring that teachers focus on improving the essential skills of learners. In 2013, the college judged nearly all lessons to be good or better.

Observations are thorough and provide first-hand evidence of the quality of learning at course and programme level. Managers use the results well to set targets in teachers' annual performance appraisals. Learning coaches are usefully included in these arrangements. The college provides appropriate support for teachers who are required to improve their practice.

Areas for improvement are reflected appropriately in the college staff development programme. The college uses this process well to improve areas such as assessment practice, and ensure variety and challenge in lessons. As a result, there is now a much stronger focus on learner-centred approaches to teaching.

### **4 Curriculum**

The college makes good use of a range of labour market information to plan its curriculum. It responds well to local and national priorities and has identified two key areas for development. These are science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and modern foreign languages.

Cardiff University, with whom the college has a good and developing partnership, is hosting what looks like an exciting summer conference for up to 400 of St. David's students. These learners will be able to take part in workshops and lectures designed to promote interest in subjects such as engineering, physics and astronomy.

Work is also progressing in relation to modern foreign languages. A planned programme of activities will include university Master Classes for students and a summer school.

The college has responded well to the needs of local employers for school leavers to have good generic skills. It has developed a Professional Skills Programme to develop leadership and management skills and improve learners' employability. This course is open to all learners in the college.

The college pays good attention to developing higher level skills within the curriculum for learners who progress to university and on to post-graduate levels of study. For example, it has developed a functional mathematics course for learners to improve their skills in this subject.

The college is offering a number of new courses in 2014. These include Level 3 computing, classical civilisation and use of mathematics and new vocational provision at Level 2 in partnership with a local school.

## **5 Leadership and management**

The senior leadership team sets a clear direction for the work of the college. It successfully balances achieving high quality outcomes with meeting the needs of its faith community, while at the same time widening participation to become a socially diverse college. In 2013, the proportion of learners from minority ethnic communities was 26.8% and the proportion of learners from areas experiencing educational deprivation was 47%. The college is popular and over-subscribed.

The senior leadership team communicates its vision well to staff at all levels. All staff have a good understanding of their role in improving outcomes for learners. Management structures are clear. Managers tackle underperformance head on. Staff have good opportunities to feed their views to senior managers and they pay good attention to listening to learners.

Governors understand their roles, are well informed and have a good understanding of the areas within the college that need improvement. They receive regular performance reports and the curriculum committee provides realistic challenge to the target setting process. Governors recognise the importance of strategic alliances and pay good attention to developing and supporting them.

## **6 Leadership and management (Quality Assurance)**

The college has robust and effective quality improvement systems in place. The annual quality calendar provides regular opportunities for all staff and learners to become involved in the self-improvement journey. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and evaluative.

Managers make good use of a range of data to quickly identify and improve underperforming areas. The college has developed an effective range of support for areas requiring improvement. These include peer observations, visits to other colleges to observe good practice, peer-mentoring and support for lesson planning.

The college analyses the outcomes achieved by different groups of learners by gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background well to identify whether learners make the progress expected.

Staff in all programme areas take good responsibility for producing diagnostic action plans and comparing their performance against national and other benchmarks.

The college pays very good attention to the views of learners and takes effective action in response to negative feedback. The Learner Voice Wales survey results are supplemented well by the college's own research and the views of learners are sought at regular intervals. There are good arrangements for consulting with parents.

The quality development plan appropriately identifies the main areas for development. The college has put in place a number of actions to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection.

## **7 Summary on progress on the recommendations outlined in the report of 2010**

The college has produced a detailed action plan showing how it has met the five recommendations from Estyn's 2010 inspection report. Three of the recommendations relate to improving aspects of teaching and learning. In response, the college has reviewed its teaching observation scheme and lesson planning to take better account of learners' needs identified in the eILP.

The fourth recommendation was to focus on more subject-specific issues in course reviews. In response, the college has developed a system of annual course team reviews to ensure greater focus on subject-related issues.

The final recommendation was to improve the way the student council communicates and engages with learners. The college has achieved this through a variety of communication strategies, including the use of social media and a dedicated website. The college also makes provision for the Student Council office with a PC and phone line.

## **8 Other aspects**

### **Learner Voice**

The college pays very good attention to the results of the learner survey. It produces detailed plans showing the actions it will take to respond to the feedback. The college also has its own effective systems for gathering the views of learners. It takes very good account of these to improve learners' experience of college.

In 2014, 899 learners took part in the Learner Voice Wales survey. This represents half of all college learners. Eighty per cent of all learners in the survey rated the college as good or very good overall. This is marginally better than the sector average. Eighty-seven per cent said their course was better or as expected. This is in line with the sector average.

Seventy-six per cent of learners in the survey rated their teaching and learning as good or very good. However, in the area of information and advice – both for information when choosing a course and the options available when the course was chosen – learners scored the college lower than in 2013.

Overall, the college has improved its own performance in the survey since 2013. However, in nearly all areas, the college compares less well with national benchmarks for further education learners in Wales.

## **9 Welsh language**

The college demonstrates a very good commitment to promoting the Welsh language, and the 'Welsh dimension' in its curriculum. It has reviewed its Welsh Language Scheme, appointed a bilingual champion and agreed challenging three-year targets with the Welsh Government. All staff are supportive of the development activity in this area.

In the Learner Voice survey, 93% of learners said they preferred to learn in English. However, the college also makes good provision for learners who want to learn in Welsh. The number of students following Welsh-medium or bilingual courses far exceeds the college target.

The college has developed successful initiatives for first language Welsh students including terminology booklets and delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate through the medium of Welsh.

Initiatives to further embed the Welsh dimension in the life and work of the college include reviewing the Wales, Europe and the World element of the Welsh Baccalaureate and having a Welsh stand in Fresher's Fair to raise awareness of the language support available to students.

The college does not anticipate that its planning model will be affected substantially by the introduction of Learning Area Programmes. However it has developed a learning portfolios curriculum planning model to allow for more tailored programmes of pastoral support. The college has also recognised that it needs to improve its destinations information for learners who do not progress to university.

The college has increased the number and range of its strategic alliances and partnerships. It works effectively with the local authority, the 14-19 Network, other further education colleges, schools and higher education institutions. It aligns its activities appropriately with local and regional strategic planning arrangements. It places a high priority on outcomes, quality and choice for learners, parents and other stakeholders.

### **Recommendations**

In order to bring about the necessary improvements in a timely manner, the college should do the following.

- R1 Reduce the variance in success rates between sector subject areas
- R2 Improve high grade attainment rates in 'A level' provision to be at least in line with national comparators
- R3 Implement procedures to track the value added for learners in their Essential Skills
- R4 Improve the tracking of the destinations of learners who do not progress to university

### **Next steps**

Rachael Bubalo HMI will continue to monitor overall progress through her link role with the college.

Yours sincerely

**Lin Howells**  
Assistant Director