

# Strode's College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130833

**Name of lead inspector:** Russell Jordan HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 2 February 2011

**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Strode's College is located in Egham, Surrey. The college has around 1,300 full-time students. It caters primarily for students aged 16 to 18, most of whom are on advanced level courses. Students' prior attainment is broadly in line with the sixth form college national average. In 2008/09 just over a third of these students studied courses in either of two subject areas: science and mathematics, or visual and performing arts, and media. Most of the 2,000 part-time adult students study in the community and pay their own fees. The proportion of the college's students from a minority ethnic heritage is significantly larger than in the local population. Strode's College draws students from over 80 schools, covering a wide area of north-west Surrey, Berkshire and some of the outer London boroughs.

At the college's last inspection in May 2009, inspectors judged that overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision, and leadership and management were good. They judged that three of the four subject areas inspected were good, and that the fourth, science and mathematics, was satisfactory.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

<b>What progress has Strode's College made in ensuring that self-assessment is rectifying areas for improvement from the last inspection?</b>	<b>Reasonable progress</b>
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At the last inspection, inspectors judged that self-assessment was very accurate. The current self-assessment report is appropriately self-critical and reliable in capturing key strengths and areas for improvement. The college has focused on strengthening the rigour of self-assessment at subject area level, and this is evident in the quality of self-assessment reports seen by inspectors in the science and mathematics, and leisure, travel and tourism subject areas. The college is taking appropriate and well-designed actions to rectify areas for improvement from the last inspection and to improve performance in the areas of work identified in the remaining themes for this monitoring visit. Self-assessment is central to driving these improvements. These can be seen in the current academic year, although the progress made to date has been inconsistent across the areas considered as part of this monitoring visit.

#### Outcomes for learners

<b>What progress has Strode's College made since the last inspection in improving outcomes for learners?</b>	<b>Insufficient progress</b>
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At the last inspection, success rates for 2007/08 had improved from well below average to well above average. Success rates for A-level courses were consistently high, and retention and pass rates were also above the high sixth form college

average. In 2008/09, success rates declined significantly, due mainly to a fall in retention. Pass rates remained similar to those for the previous year. In 2009/10, retention rates improved back to the levels of 2007/08, and success rates increased, but not sufficiently to bring them to the levels at the previous inspection due to a fall in pass rates in most curriculum areas. Success rates for adults on long courses remain above national averages.

For most types of course, students' progress from their starting points on entry has declined since the last inspection; the majority of students on A- and AS-level courses do not achieve the grades expected. However, students studying on a significant number of courses, including computing and drama at A and AS levels, make good progress. The college recognises the issues around students' performance and is taking appropriate action such as improving its entry procedures, expanding its vocational curriculum and ensuring that teaching challenges all students.

### **Quality of provision**

**What progress has the college made in ensuring that teaching challenges all students to make at least the progress expected of them, taking into account their prior attainment?**

**Reasonable progress**

The college is taking well-considered steps to ensure that teaching challenges all students to make at least the progress expected of them, given their results at GCSE. Current students' views on the improvements the students have seen in their lessons and learning reflect the college's drive to ensure challenge for all students.

The internal lesson observation system, judged thorough at the last inspection, provides an appropriate and sharp focus on students' learning and progress. The college has improved the process so that actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning can be taken earlier and more effectively. On the basis of the lesson observation records sampled, feedback to teachers is clear and constructive and indicates appropriately high expectations of teachers.

It is too soon to assess fully the impact of these changes on students' outcomes. However, value added data point to an improvement in students' progress on AS-level courses in 2009/10.

**What progress has Strode's College made to improve science and mathematics provision?**

**Reasonable progress**

Success rates declined significantly in 2008/09, but improved slightly the following year and are around the national averages for 2009/10. Students' progress improved in 2008/09, but declined in 2009/10. However, managers are aware of the inconsistent performance of the courses and are taking effective actions to improve them. Self-assessment reports are discerning and self-critical, identifying relevant problems and actions to improve the quality of provision. Managers place an

appropriate emphasis on students' attainment and progress, and on students' feedback in surveys, when evaluating teachers' performance.

The college has appointed recently a new manager for psychology and has replaced a number of teaching staff in particularly poorly performing courses. There has been more focus on supporting students who are underperforming as well as ensuring that students have appropriate study and examination skills. More staff and students are using the virtual learning environment to extend and reinforce learning.

Although improvements in students' performance can be seen in assessments in the current year, it is too early for these to be reflected in formal examinations.

**What progress has the college made in improving leisure, travel and tourism provision?**

**Significant progress**

In its 2009/10 self-assessment reflecting the performance of the subject area from the 2008/09 academic year, the college judged this provision to be satisfactory with satisfactory capacity to improve. Success rate data for 2009/10 improved on the previous year, so that performance on long courses (excluding AS and A levels) was further above the national average for similar colleges than in the previous year. The rate of improvement was greater in AS- and A-level courses in the subject area than in other long courses, so that course performance in leisure, travel and tourism drew closer to the national average and was broadly average. However, in sport courses performance remained below average, as a result of significant under-performance in AS-level physical education (PE). Students on advanced level courses across the subject area made broadly average progress from their starting points on entry, except in AS-level PE, where they did not make expected progress.

The current self-assessment for the subject area provides an appropriately self-critical and detailed evaluation of the area's performance. Leaders and managers are taking well-considered steps to improve the provision further.

**To what extent has Strode's College broadened its vocational curriculum?**

**Significant progress**

The college is very responsive in ensuring that all students are on the appropriate course for their abilities and needs. It has developed good partnerships with local schools to ensure good progression routes into the college. For example, it has recently introduced an advanced diploma course in performing arts, and a football academy in partnership with local schools. Although it maintains the ethos of a sixth form college, the college has continued to develop vocational courses where it identifies a local gap in provision and a local skills need. Conversely, it has recently stopped its offer of health and social care courses after a decline in enrolments due to competition from other local provision.

In September 2010 the college introduced advanced level diplomas in sport and travel and tourism, and an intermediate diploma in sport. It also introduced new

modules to complement existing courses, for example a certificate for airport ground crew as part of the travel and tourism course. From September 2011, the college plans to replace Applied AS-level courses in information and communication technology, business, and leisure and travel with advanced vocational diplomas, and the GCSE science course with an intermediate vocational diploma. Students on existing vocational courses are already making good progress and gaining good pass rates.

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