

# John Ruskin College

## Reinspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130434

**Name of lead inspector:** Harriet Harper HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 29 September 2010

**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

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## **REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

John Ruskin College is located in South Croydon. It is unusual in that, as a sixth form college, it offers only vocational programmes. As of 2010/2011, it stopped offering AS- and A-level courses. The college has nearly 1,000 full-time students, approximately 88% of whom are aged 16 to 18. It has enrolled 100 pupils aged 14 and 15 on different courses and 115 learners on Train to Gain programmes. Just over half of all students are studying at advanced level, around 38% at intermediate and 10% at entry level. The college attracts students from a wide geographical area, mostly to the north of Croydon, and approximately 85% of them are from minority ethnic groups.

The college was inspected in March 2010 and judged to be inadequate. Outcomes for students and leadership and management were inadequate. Capacity to improve, quality of provision, safeguarding and equality and diversity were satisfactory. Of the four subject areas inspected, two were inadequate and two were satisfactory.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**To what extent have changes to quality assurance and curriculum management led to increasing expectations for staff and students and more effective action planning?** **Reasonable progress**

Since the inspection, the college has undergone a significant period of change and now has in place a more secure foundation for further improvements. To raise expectations, there has been an emphasis on professional development for staff and a focus on more stringent enrolment criteria and progress monitoring for students. Quality assurance arrangements have been streamlined and self-assessment has become an ongoing, and more rigorous, process. Quality improvement plans are being monitored effectively by managers to check progress against stated objectives or targets.

Evidence is emerging of the impact on staff of these changes. First drafts of 2009/2010 team and college-wide self-assessment reports indicate a realistic view of strengths and areas for development and effective use of quantitative data to inform judgements. The impact on students is also evident. College data indicate improved outcomes for students in 2009/10 and second-year students interviewed by inspectors confirm better course organisation and teaching in the current year. Staff are positive about the changing culture within the college but recognise that much still needs to be done to maintain momentum and to secure long-term improvement.

## Outcomes for learners

### **What progress has been made in improving students' success rates, attendance and punctuality?**

**Reasonable progress**

Success rates improved in 2009/10 by around 11 percentage points. The college has a curriculum offer that is more akin to a further education (FE) college than a sixth form college and its success rates, when aggregated, have risen to be broadly in line with the FE sector average. Success rates for long courses rose at all levels, although at entry and foundation levels they remained significantly below average. The improved success rates reflect a rise in achievement, particularly at advanced level, but not in retention. Many new systems and procedures have been introduced in the current academic year to address poor retention, attendance and punctuality, the impact of which is yet to be evident.

The rise in success rates in 2009/10 was not consistent across subject areas and, in general, students on vocational programmes were more successful than those on academic courses. Success rates declined on A-level courses, which were offered for the last time in 2009/2010. A high proportion of Train to Gain learners complete their programmes within the required timeframe. The college has yet to analyse 2009/10 data by different groups or by progress relative to prior attainment.

## Quality of provision

### **What progress has been made in improving the standards and quality of provision in science and mathematics?**

**Reasonable progress**

To improve standards in science and mathematics, which have been inadequate for several years, the college has revised the departmental structure and curriculum offer to focus solely on vocational provision. In 2009/2010, success rates remained below average for the last cohort of students at the college to take A-level biology, chemistry and mathematics. Although success rates for GCSE mathematics were in line with the sector average, the proportion of high grades was low. A foundation applied science course has been introduced in the current academic year to provide an appropriate pathway on to the higher-level course. College data indicate that success rates on applied science courses, at both intermediate and advanced levels, improved in 2009/10 and compare well to national averages. Areas for further development in science include the need to improve retention on the first diploma applied science, increase the proportion of good and better teaching, introduce more vocationally relevant visits, and improve attendance and punctuality. As the new academic year starts, managers are poised to monitor carefully the success of plans to tackle these issues.

### **What progress has been made in improving the standards and quality of provision in business, administration and law?**

**Reasonable progress**

Success rates improved in 2009/10 and underperforming A-level courses have been discontinued. On the advanced level national diploma, success rates rose

considerably, albeit from a low level the previous year. Meetings with students' parents and a tenacious approach to following up absences have contributed to improved attendance and retention. Teachers are encouraging students to have high expectations and are rigidly enforcing assessment deadlines. Stricter entry criteria and better initial assessment have given staff confidence this year that students are better equipped to complete their courses successfully. Assignments have been revised and the monitoring of students' progress has improved with the introduction of a new electronic system. Second-year students report that lessons are now more interesting. They are supported well, with extra help when necessary and an enhanced tutorial system. Managers set clear targets for staff and monitor them regularly.

**What progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses identified in teaching and learning and in the lesson observation scheme? Reasonable progress**

Performance management measures have been effective in identifying and dealing with poor teaching. Senior practitioners support teachers well to develop their skills and improve their practice and new staff are mentored effectively. Several teachers are benefiting from training to become 'subject learning coaches' and they, in turn, will support their colleagues to improve their teaching. Second-year students confirm that teachers who have had training in the use of the virtual learning environment are using it to good effect and that lessons now involve more interactive activities. The lesson observation system has had a positive impact on improving teaching. However, managers and teachers acknowledge that the current system is still too complex, inconsistently used, and focuses too much on teaching and not enough on the knowledge and skills students are acquiring and developing. Consequently, a new system has been developed for the current academic year. It includes the observation of a wider range of events, clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities and the introduction of 'learning walks' for staff to sample particular aspects of teaching and learning.

**What progress has been made to improve initial advice and guidance and students' literacy and numeracy skills? Reasonable progress**

Managers have made significant changes to the ways in which students receive advice and guidance. Entry criteria for each course are clearly defined and rigidly enforced. At the time of the last inspection, too many students did not have sufficient literacy and numeracy skills for the level of course on which they were enrolled. All students now complete an initial assessment before enrolment, and staff have been trained to interpret the results so as to avoid placing students on inappropriate courses. College audits suggest this has worked well, and early withdrawals have reduced significantly when compared to the same time last year. Thorough diagnostic tests for all students generate individualised targets and customised support materials, an improvement on past practice when only those with very low scores received systematic help. The tutorial programme, too, has been revised.

An appropriate policy on Skills for Life has been drafted but is yet to be fully implemented. 'Champions' are in place, ready to support their colleagues in the current academic year. Managers acknowledge that further training is needed to ensure that all staff teaching vocational subjects are able to develop their students' literacy, numeracy and information technology skills.

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