

Ruskin Mill College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Ruskin Mill College is a part of Ruskin Mill Educational Trust (RMET), a registered educational charity. RMET began its work in 1986 and its work is inspired by that of Rudolf Steiner, William Morris and John Ruskin. The Trust operates three colleges including Ruskin Mill. This college is centred on a large landholding in Gloucestershire, including two converted mill buildings. The college is set within a commercial craft and arts centre where visitors attend craft workshops, concerts, lectures and exhibitions. It provides learning experiences, mainly around craft and land-based activities, for young people with a range of learning difficulties.

The college was last inspected in May 2010 when it was judged to be outstanding, with outstanding capacity to improve. All aspects of the Common Inspection Framework were judged to be outstanding, with the exceptions of how well learners improve their economic and social well-being, the college's promotion of equality and diversity and their engagement with users to support and promote improvement, which were judged to be good. The monitoring visit focused on areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, together with developments in the college's procedures for safeguarding. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in increasing the involvement of students and middle managers in college self-assessment and improvement planning? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, there have been significant developments towards increasing middle managers' contribution to the operational management and strategic development of the college and their involvement in the college's self-assessment. This was an area for improvement noted at the previous inspection. These developments are part of increased involvement of all members of staff in the running of the college. Middle managers are part of the newly-formed college management team. This group meets weekly to discuss items at the request of the senior management team as well as those raised by individual members of staff. As such, the group acts as an effective conduit between senior managers and the wider college team. The impact of its activities is evident in improved day-to-day college management. Middle managers are well represented on the self-assessment development group. This group engages with all staff and students to draft the self-assessment report. This draft is then discussed in staff teams and the college management team, as well as with students.

The student council fulfils an important advocacy role for all students in presenting their views to college managers; however, the council is not as effective as it could be. While students who have been at the college for some time are aware of how to

raise any issues of concern or put forward suggestions for improvement to council members, they do not always know if these have been taken forward to college managers and do not routinely receive feedback. Newer students are less familiar with the council's work and the opportunity it provides to make suggestions and comment on their experiences at the college.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in maintaining and building upon learners' outcomes since the last inspection?

Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in addressing the point for improvement from the last inspection relating to the development of students' literacy skills. A new, specialist literacy tutor has been appointed and works closely with the college's functional skills team. An audit has taken place of students who require literacy development, based on individual assessments, and of the opportunities to embed this provision in their learning programmes. There is already evidence of the progress made by these students, especially in improving their writing skills. Students are, for example, contributing increasingly to the college newsletter. Where appropriate, students are working towards nationally recognised literacy qualifications.

Students speak very positively of the benefits they gain from the college. They enjoy developing new skills in a wide range of practical craft activities, such as horticulture, pottery and green woodwork. They also comment warmly on the opportunities for their personal development, for example in gaining confidence through being encouraged to express their views and to work at their own pace. The college has further increased opportunities for students to have internal and external work experience placements. The college has tried to increase its engagement with national employers in work experience since this provides an increased opportunity for students to gain employment after completing their programme.

Leadership and management

Are effective actions being taken to ensure students are safeguarded?

Reasonable progress

Arrangements for communication between, and monitoring by, college managers regarding safeguarding concerns have improved. Where appropriate, this increased awareness informs students' programme planning. Also where appropriate, risk assessments explain strategies that should be used with individual students to help them manage their own behaviour. The college carries out required staff recruitment checks as well as training on safeguarding and the protection of vulnerable persons. This training is updated regularly and there is associated training on anti-bullying and positive approaches to behaviour. The college has commissioned an external review of its safeguarding procedures and this is due to report to managers before the end of this term.

Staff have received awareness training concerning the Mental Capacity Act and the college has arrangements in place to carry out formal assessment required by this act, as appropriate. Managers are planning to develop staff's understanding further so that staff will consistently apply the principles of the act in their everyday work.

Students feel safe and are confident that if they raise concerns, for example about bullying, then these will be addressed by staff. All of the students spoken with during the monitoring visit knew the name of the college's anti-bullying adviser. They have a fair understanding of e-safety, including the precautions they should take when using social networking sites. The college is developing an e-passport to provide confidence that all students have been made aware of the safety considerations when they use the internet and mobile phones.

What progress has been made in addressing the aspects of the promotion of equality and diversity identified for improvement at the last inspection?	Significant progress
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The last inspection highlighted as an area for improvement the active promotion, through the curriculum, of the wider aspects of a multicultural society. Since then, there have been significant developments to promote equality and diversity. A new post has been created to coordinate and monitor this aspect of the college's work. Posters around the college promote diversity, including the achievements of disabled people. Staff have recently received updated training to recognise and promote a wide range of aspects of diversity in their craft and subject areas. Tutors' lesson plans include how tutors will promote diversity. Managers' observation of teaching and learning require specific reference to this aspect of a lesson. A noteworthy development has involved the increased role of job coaches to promote further students' learning within their work experience placements in order to prepare students more effectively for when they leave college. Managers are aware of the need to work more closely with learners who have left the college, as well as their employers and next placement providers, to see how they can further improve their preparation of students for their transition from college.

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