

Coulsdon Sixth Form College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Coulsdon Sixth Form College is in the south of the London Borough of Croydon, on the borders of Surrey. It offers a broad curriculum of vocational and academic courses, mainly at advanced level, to students aged 16 to 19. At the time of the monitoring visit, around 800 students were enrolled.

The college was last inspected in January 2013, when it was judged to be inadequate. This followed a previous inspection in October 2011, when the college was also judged to be inadequate. In response to the most recent inspection outcome, it was agreed in the spring of 2013 that the college would form a federation with Reigate College, a sixth form college judged outstanding by Ofsted. Since Easter 2013, the Principal of Reigate College has been acting as the Executive Principal of Coulsdon College, and the governing body has been reconstituted to include governors from Reigate College. As part of a pilot arrangement for supporting inadequate providers to improve, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors visited the college in June and September 2013. The themes outlined below summarise the main areas for improvement arising from the inspection in January 2013.

Themes

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has been made in improving students' attendance and punctuality to lessons, and their attitudes to learning?

Significant progress

The progress made in improving students' attitudes to learning, of which their attendance and punctuality are important indicators, has been remarkable. In a short space of time, staff and students have worked together to establish clear and high expectations on attendance, punctuality, and conduct. Attendance at lessons has improved significantly and is now well over 90%. Most students, most of the time, arrive to lessons punctually, with many arriving early. Most importantly, students arrive ready to learn. Their disposition has been transformed. Whereas on previous inspection visits far too many students displayed a casual attitude to their studies, in lessons now students are attentive and ready to learn. Teachers and students are unanimous in their view that, as a consequence, lessons are much more productive, and inspection evidence confirms this view.

Outside of lessons, students' conduct is now largely exemplary. In the past, public areas of the college had been prone to a degree of low-level disruption, and some boisterous behaviour, that while not malicious was not conducive to a learning environment. Now, students and staff appreciate the calmer atmosphere, and students normally behave with impeccable courtesy. The high visibility of senior leaders has been instrumental in bringing about this cultural shift, along with the

willingness of the vast majority of staff to enforce agreed standards through respectful insistence to students that they abide by the few necessary rules. Students in their second year of studies report that they enjoy college much more this year.

How much progress has been made in improving the quality of lessons, learning outside lessons, and arrangements for monitoring students' progress?

Significant progress

Rapid progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders, managers and teachers have been successful in minimising the number of weak lessons, although, as managers recognise, too few lessons currently are outstanding. In virtually all lessons students focus well on learning, are attentive, and work hard. Measures to improve the quality of teaching have been highly effective. For example, an intensive support programme for teachers whose lessons are not yet good enough has improved the practice of many teachers through a range of techniques including mentoring and coaching. Minimum standards for the quality of lessons are in place, and even in the small number of lessons where teaching is more mundane students are still learning. In a small minority of lessons, teachers are still not doing enough to raise standards as the work they give students is too easy, or is work that could be done in students' own time. The culture of learning now evident across the college has liberated teachers to focus on improving their teaching techniques rather than on improving students' motivation or on classroom management.

One of the explanations for the poor historic outcomes for students is that they were not doing enough work outside lessons. This is being rectified. Regular homework is now set on all courses, and teachers and managers are more assiduous in ensuring that this has been completed. In most cases, homework is appropriately demanding. Students are increasingly using the college's virtual learning environment to access resources in their own time, and measures taken to ensure that this is populated with good resources are impressive. A 'learning improvement programme' is in place for any students who are slipping behind in their studies, and this is effective.

Students' progress is being monitored assiduously, both in respect of attendance at lessons and progress towards meeting challenging targets. Electronic systems for ensuring that this is being done rigorously have been developed, although the full potential of these, for example in setting targets for students and recording the outcomes of reviews, are not yet fully in place. College leaders have been highly effective in strengthening partnerships with parents and carers.

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

Significant progress

Provision in science and mathematics was judged to be inadequate at the previous inspection. Although examination results in 2012/13 improved, they remained below

national averages. Significant improvements in the quality of provision augur well for the future. The standard of teaching is now much more consistent, and weaker teachers are making good progress in improving their practice through the intensive support programme. Significant changes in staffing, especially in mathematics, have strengthened the department. Particularly impressive is the determination to ensure that the large number of students who are taking pre-GCSE or GCSE courses in mathematics receive good provision. In the lessons observed on these courses, students who often had poor previous experiences of the subject were working diligently and were eager to overcome their barriers to success. Curriculum leaders are working with great vigour and increasing effectiveness to ensure that students benefit from good provision.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving leadership and management, including management at all levels, quality assurance and self-assessment procedures?

Significant progress

Under the leadership of the Executive Principal, the fortunes of the college are being transformed. In collaboration with other senior leaders, managers, teachers and support staff, he has implemented judicious priorities very swiftly and paved the way for sustainable improvement. The progress made over the last eight months has been remarkable, although there is still work to do to secure consistently high quality provision across all parts of the college. The partnership with Reigate College has been increasingly productive. Governors provide good oversight and receive detailed reports on the progress being made. Both they and the Executive Principal recognise the significant challenges still facing the college. A new Principal is due to commence in January 2014, working under the overall leadership of the Executive Principal. At the same time, two interim leaders, both former sixth form college principals who have played a significant role in supporting the college's transformation, will depart. Leaders recognise the need to reassure staff, and students, that the impetus for change and improvement will not diminish in the new year. A significant fall in student enrolments in the current year is the other major cause of concern. Governors and senior leaders are deeply conscious of the need to secure financial stability, and are taking appropriate steps to raise recruitment in 2014/15. On the evidence of this visit, the reputational damage caused by previous inspections should no longer be a barrier to recruitment.

Middle managers are developing well. Increasingly, they are taking greater responsibility for improving the quality of provision in addition to the day-to-day operational management of their areas. Performance management is now strong and effective. The focus on improving all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment is unrelenting. The use of data to evaluate provision and to inform actions to bring about improvements in students' outcomes remains an area for further development. Although some managers have a firm grasp of data and use it well, others are less secure. College leaders are yet to ensure that all managers have a shared

understanding of the critical data that need to be used to evaluate and improve performance, and that they have timely access to a suite of relevant information that they can use frequently to analyse teachers' and students' performance and intervene swiftly where appropriate.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has been made in improving students' achievements and the progress that they make?

Insufficient progress

The period between the start of the federation arrangement and students taking final examinations and assessments in the summer of 2013 was not long enough for new leadership to have a positive impact on students' results over the academic year 2012/13. The proportion of students who completed their courses successfully remained well below the average for similar colleges, and there was no significant improvement compared to 2011/12. On advanced-level vocational courses, which now constitute a higher proportion of the provision than academic courses, success rates were close to the average and students made good progress. However, on academic courses, performance was very poor. A-level results declined in comparison with the previous year. Although AS-level results improved, they remained low. Students' progress in comparison with their prior attainment remained very weak, despite some improvement in this measure at AS level, and the proportion of students achieving high grades was very low. At GCSE, a higher proportion of those entered for the examination in English and mathematics achieved a grade A* to C than in the previous year, but far too many students did not complete the course or take the examination.

Current indicators are that students' results are likely to improve considerably this academic year. Students are working harder than previously and most are making good progress. However, it is too early in the academic year to predict with any degree of precision how well students will do by the summer of 2014.

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