

London Borough of Croydon Youth Service

Croydon Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. The Borough of Croydon has a population of 342,700. There are about 31,800 young people in the 13-19 age group, around 40% of whom are of Black or minority ethnic origin. Youth work is provided by Croydon Youth Service through a mixture of directly managed and commissioned services. It reaches around 25% of 13-19 year olds. Currently the service is managed within the Children and Young People and Learners' Directorate. At the time of the inspection the council and its partners were in the process of establishing new structures for an integrated inclusion and youth support service.

2. The 2007-08 council's budget for youth work was £2.267 million. The youth service attracted an additional £578,000 from, among other sources, Croydon Housing Department, the Connexions Service, the Behaviour Improvement Programme and Positive Activities for Young People. The staffing complement for the youth service is equivalent to 52 full-time posts. Youth work takes place in eight centres, three of which are designated as specialist centres. Four of the centres are council owned and maintained and four are leased from voluntary and community sector organisations. Work is carried out in schools, through detached work and in specialist sports and residential settings outside the borough. In addition, work is commissioned from private and voluntary organisations including Croydon Youth Development Trust and Croydon Youth Theatre Organisation (CYTO) to provide specialist arts, drama, music and detached work. The voluntary organisation Drop-in is commissioned to provide counselling and advocacy support.

3. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which provides that the Chief Inspector may inspect particular local authority functions. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

4. The quality of youth work in Croydon is satisfactory and the local authority sufficiently secures its provision. Young people enjoy the activities on offer and achieve well, gaining useful social and practical skills, although this achievement is not often formally recognised. Those taking part in the specialised sports and performing arts projects and involved in decision-making bodies benefit a great deal and value their learning highly. Although there are limitations in the overarching curriculum policy guidance, the programme is managed adequately to provide a good range of activities. Youth work attracts young men and women equally. Generic work is adequately resourced; better resourced projects serve targeted vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well. Staff understand the needs of the area and take pride in promoting good relationships among young people and in the community. Managers and staff make good use of established local partnerships to enrich and

extend opportunities for learning and to provide high quality counselling, advice and guidance. Managers have used their longstanding knowledge of the service to shape provision, improve some areas of performance and provide relevant training for staff. However, shortcomings in the use of management information and in quality assurance monitoring systems, with little contribution from young people themselves, limit improvement in the key planning and evaluation areas of youth work practice. Weaknesses identified during the inspection in implementing Criminal Record Bureau clearance policies were dealt with promptly and effectively. The quality of premises is too variable and many are uninviting; a programme of refurbishment and rebuilding is in place but it is too soon to see the effect.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	2
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	2
3	Leadership and management	2

Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale

4: excellent / outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate

Strengths

- Young people's achievements are good, in particular in specialised arts and sports projects and decision making forums.
- Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities participate in a good range of provision including exciting and challenging activities.
- Strong partnerships greatly enhance the range and quality of provision.
- Positive relationships between young people and adults are universally evident; young people and adults actively promote inclusive attitudes.

Areas for development

- Too few young people benefit from the incentive of gaining formal recognition for their achievements.
- Too much accommodation is of poor quality.
- Curriculum policies do not provide a practical framework for planning and evaluation.

- Too little use is made of young people's views in planning and evaluating youth work.
- Quality assurance monitoring systems are insufficiently rigorous and systematic to bring about improvements.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

5. Overall young people's achievement in youth work is good. In the majority of settings they make good progress; in the remainder, young people make some gains. Young people enjoy taking part. Almost without exception young people treat each other and adults with respect, making the most of opportunities to socialise and make new friends.

6. The best achievements are found in expertly led specialised projects. Around 90 enthusiastic young people involved in CYTO develop outstanding performance and technical theatre skills which are regularly celebrated through shows. The small groups of young people contributing to the Youth Parliament steering group and the Youth Opportunities/Capital Fund panel benefit personally, with growing understanding of team work, decision-making and political structures, which they value highly. These groups make a significant contribution to promoting positive attitudes to social diversity in the community.

7. Targeted groups focus on improving learning and life skills. The Potential group of young men have overcome traumatic circumstances following the murder of a friend and now offer mentoring to others. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do very well in highly challenging activities such as archery at the Special Blend residential event. Young women gain confidence through single gender work at Buff. Young people who have benefited from counselling at the drop-in project are furthering their personal development through a leadership group. Isolated groups engage well with the detached teams in streetwork and on the well designed bus. Carefully targeted *Positive Activities* are successful in engaging those at risk of offending. A few young people have been motivated to go forward for training in youth work.

8. In open sessions good numbers of young men and young women acquire skills in cooking healthy food, safe use of the internet, drama, music and sports, particularly football. However, progression remains limited in popular activities. Too little accomplishment in these areas is valued and recognised. Some young people take up leadership roles and responsibilities sometimes leading to training and paid employment. There are opportunities to offer formal accreditation through the recently strengthened Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, ASDAN awards and in nationally organised sports activities such as sailing. Youth workers are keen to promote learning but miss opportunities to add challenge and incentive through recognition and award schemes in generic work.

9. The quality of youth work practice is adequate overall. Staff understand the different communities in Croydon well and build good working relationships with young people and the surrounding communities, often over many years, as in the Samuel Coleridge Taylor Centre. They pay good attention to the health, safety and wellbeing of young people. Adults provide positive role models and intervene skilfully to resolve minor disputes. Although staff are approachable and act professionally in discussion of confidential private issues there is insufficient thought given in some settings to the storage of confidential information. There is sensible variation in recording work according to the needs of the project. However workers' skills and practice in planning and evaluation are too uneven, and in some cases young people's views contribute only superficially to programming, content and the assessment of quality.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The quality of curriculum and resources is satisfactory with some good features. There is a well considered range of activities on offer in spite of an underdeveloped curriculum policy and too variable quality of the premises. Thoughtful programming and effective guidance from curriculum managers take good account of equality, inclusiveness, diversity. Staff at all levels work towards improving *Every Child Matters* outcomes.

11. There is a wide range of provision for groups and individuals including indoor and outdoor physical activities, use of Information Technology, guidance on lifestyles and relationships, creative activities and participation work. The activities in open sessions achieve a good balance for to interest young men and young women and are for the most part attended equally well by both. Residential visits and expeditions enrich young people's experience greatly. A varied stock of equipment is available for these activities and reasonable action is taken to update resources such as electronic music equipment to meet current needs.

12. Partnership working is a key feature in extending the range of specialised projects on offer. The *Talk Bus* provides well regarded counselling and advocacy services. The service contracts music experts to work in youth centres to improve the attractiveness of youth work for some hard-to-reach groups and commissions facilities in local professional studios. Arrangements with voluntary partners secure a vital detached service in the south of the borough.

13. Premises vary greatly in quality. Despite a measured programme of refurbishment and recent work undertaken to improve accessibility and provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, only one centre is of a good standard. Most look uninviting from the outside. Lack of outdoor lighting and access problems make some shared community buildings intimidating and the attendance of young women there is significantly lower. The staff skilfully make the best use of the space available.

14. Staffing levels are satisfactory but progress in achieving a well qualified work force is slow. The majority of full-time and some part-time youth workers are appropriately qualified. The borough supports not only directly employed staff but workers from voluntary organisations in pursuing recognised qualifications. Performance management arrangements ensure that managers know their staff well and they are deployed effectively in line with their strengths and interests.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Leadership and management are adequate and the local authority sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. The reorganisation of the service in 2005 secured a sound basis from which the service improved from previously inadequate performance to the current satisfactory level. The council has established a strategic vision for young people's personal and social development within emerging plans for integrated services. However, at the time of the inspection ambitions were not yet articulated in service plans. Senior managers recognise there are risks in the tight timetable for change. Strategic and operational targets in the business plan were being refreshed to align closely with revised Local Area Agreement targets. Little information had been shared beyond a senior level, with resultant uncertainty among staff about their future roles and a resultant hesitancy on their part to drive initiatives forward.

16. The service has effective partnerships with key community safety and housing agencies at strategic and operational levels. Good use is made of information gathered from partners to identify gaps in provision and to respond. Well established commissioning arrangements secure provision in areas that are considered a priority for the area. Extra capacity is gained by loaning equipment to voluntary sector partners and training their staff. However, this is not yet part of a comprehensive integrated children's services commissioning strategy. Partnerships with schools are at an early stage of development although set to grow with targeted provision in the extended schools and Building Schools for the Future programme.

17. The budget allocation per head of population for those aged 13-19 is slightly higher than the national average although recharging arrangements to other council departments mean that the disposable youth service budget is moderate. Financial management is sound. Good additional resources are secured through funding for specific work such as the Positive Activities for Young People programme, provision of counselling, advice and guidance and from Croydon Housing Department. Around 2,000 young people have benefited from additional activities and improved equipment through Youth Opportunity/Youth Capital Fund grants.

18. Effective performance management has brought about some improvements in practice but quality assurance monitoring procedures lack routine and are not sufficiently rigorous to be effective. The links between data management and quality assurance systems are underdeveloped. Reliable data is collected from all settings to enable the service to monitor basic performance indicators such as

attendance. Not enough use is made of the feedback from young people. The findings from conferences and surveys are used but there is not yet a systematic approach to consulting young people who do not use the service.

19. There are satisfactory arrangements for health and safety audits of premises and risk assessment procedures are well implemented. Prompt and effective action was taken to rectify deficiencies, identified during inspection, in implementing the local Criminal Record Bureau clearance policies.