

Inspection of Croydon College

Inspection dates: 6 to 9 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Inadequate
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Education programmes for young people	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

In March 2019, Croydon General Further Education College (Croydon) and Coulsdon Sixth Form College (Coulsdon) merged to become Croydon College. Both Croydon and Coulsdon are in the London Borough of Croydon.

Croydon provides education and training from entry level through to level 6 in a wide variety of vocational subjects which includes a discrete provision for learners who have moderate learning difficulties and disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum. Croydon provides standards-based apprenticeship programmes from level 2 through to level 5. A high proportion of apprentices complete their studies at level 3 building services engineering installer and plumbing and domestic heating technician, and level 2 carpentry and joinery. Most of the adult provision at Croydon is English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Coulsdon College provides A-level and vocational education and training for learners aged 16 to 18 across a wide variety of subjects. A high proportion of learners complete their vocational studies at level 3 in national extended certificates in business, digital film and video production, and health and social care. A large proportion of learners study A-levels in art and design, sociology, criminology and business. There is a discrete high needs provision (The Pathways Centre) located on

the grounds of Coulsdon College for learners who have severe and complex learning difficulties and disabilities which is managed by Croydon College.

At the time of the inspection, there were 2,585 young learners. Approximately two thirds of young learners study at Croydon College and one third at Coulsdon College. There were 2,620 adult learners, 217 apprentices, and 200 learners with an education and health care (EHC) plan who have high needs. Most learners who have high needs study within the main college programmes.

Croydon College has alternative provision for learners aged 14 to 16. A high proportion of the learners are new arrivals to the country. At the time of the inspection, there were 63 learners.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

The experience of young learners at the two campuses and across different courses, is characterised by the considerable variation in the quality of teaching they experience. Young learners at Croydon College mostly have a positive experience and welcome the chance to develop their knowledge and skills. At Coulsdon College, too many learners have a poor experience, which is reflected in the low proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications.

Young learners' attendance is too low across the two colleges and particularly at Coulsdon. Leaders do not have high enough expectations regarding attendance and tutors do not consistently challenge lateness. Learners who have high needs and adult learners attend well.

A significant proportion of learners who inspectors spoke with do not feel comfortable at college, particularly when using the communal and social spaces. While this applies at both campuses, it is more marked for learners at Coulsdon. Equally, a significant minority of learners told inspectors they experience homophobic language and taunting and at Coulsdon, female learners do not feel comfortable in areas such as the student common room. Leaders, managers and tutors have not done enough to create a welcoming environment and do not set high enough expectations for learner behaviour.

Adult learners enjoy a positive learning environment and value very highly how they are taught and the support their teachers provide. Learners who return to study after a significant period develop in confidence throughout their course. They have positive attitudes to learning and develop good study skills.

Adult learners benefit from well-planned and taught courses that enable them to learn the knowledge and skills needed to go to university or into a career of their choice. The many learners who study ESOL acquire the language skills they need for employment and to integrate into their local communities.

Apprentices have positive attitudes to their learning. They are motivated to do well. They enjoy a curriculum that helps them develop highly relevant industry skills and behaviours. They readily apply their new skills and knowledge at their workplaces. For example, apprentices on heating and ventilation programmes gain the skills to interpret technical planning drawings. They accurately calculate the quantity of materials they need to install pipes for heating. Apprentices on level 4 construction site supervisor programmes know the basic facts that effect 'thermal comfort' and how this impacts the decision on the materials they use. A few apprentices benefit from additional learning outside of their programme. For example, business administration apprentices learn how to take minutes at meetings.

Learners who have high needs enjoy their programmes of study. Most benefit from a well-planned curriculum that helps them develop skills needed for independence, employment or further vocational learning. However, the quality of teaching and learning learners experience varies too much across programmes and campuses.

These learners do not make good enough progress towards achieving their EHC plan outcomes. This is because tutors set targets for learners that are too broad and do not link suitably to EHC plan outcomes. Learners receive effective support from learning support staff.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have a clear strategic priority for the college to provide a curriculum that meets local skills needs and those of the community. Leaders work effectively with a range of stakeholders such as the South London Partnership and Greater London Authority. As a result, they understand what the current and future skills needs are in London and how the curriculum the college offers can contribute to meeting these needs.

Leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum is aligned effectively to the priority sectors in London, including courses to meet the needs of the health and social care, digital and construction sectors. For example, the health and social care curriculum provides a variety of pathways for local young people and adults to access training and jobs in the healthcare sector from entry level to professional status. Leaders and managers have worked effectively with Roehampton University to offer nursing degrees in Croydon. These courses provide good progression opportunities for local people.

Leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum reflects the needs of the community. For example, they have increased the number of courses at entry level and level 1 in most subject areas to meet the needs of those learners with no or low-level qualifications.

Leaders, managers and staff have developed a range of partnerships with employers. However, the involvement of employers in contributing to the curriculum varies between courses and campuses and is underdeveloped. This means, for example, that students do not consistently get access to well-planned work experience and work-related learning opportunities. Leaders and managers recognise that this is an area of work that they need to further develop.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and governors have faced several recent challenges, including staff recruitment issues and the aftermath of a flood at Croydon College. In the wake of these challenges and following disruption due to COVID-19, they have not taken effective and rapid enough action to improve the quality of provision and learners' attendance across the colleges. This is particularly marked for young learners at Coulsdon College and for learners who have high needs at both colleges.

Overall, learners at Coulsdon have a poor experience. Over the past three years, the quality of education has declined. In particular, leaders, managers and tutors have been slow to adapt to the change in assessment through examination on vocational programmes. Tutors failed to prepare learners well enough for these examinations and too many learners did not achieve their planned goal.

Leaders and managers do not set high enough expectations for young learners' behaviour and attendance. While apprentices, adult learners and those with high needs attend well, are polite, respectful and keen to share their positive experiences at the college, a significant minority of young learners do not interact with tutors and their peers in a respectful enough manner. Leaders have not ensured that tutors have successful strategies to manage learner behaviour in lessons. For example, learners are not respectful enough of each other's views in class and too often do not wait to hear their peers' opinions or responses. As a result, tutors do not adequately enable learners to develop the essential skills of positive interaction with others and respect for themselves and others.

Leaders have a clear rationale for the range of subjects they teach and the progression pathways they offer. This meets well the aspirations of their learners, of local communities and the needs of employers. They have a broad curriculum offer at levels 1 and 2, which provides a suitable entry point for learners who arrive at the college with low levels of prior attainment. The wide range of curriculum and levels provides ample progression opportunities for learners and apprentices to continue with learning including higher education, gain employment and develop independence in adult lives. Leaders, managers and staff have good oversight of learners who are in or have left care. They provide effective support so that learners complete their courses and continue with further education.

Most tutors sequence the curriculum well so that learners and apprentices sufficiently build their knowledge and skills over time. For example, level 2 culinary skill tutors plan the theory and practical curriculum to complement each other. Learners initially learn how to name quality points of ingredients and then apply the skills in the practical sessions. In level 2 engineering, teachers make sure learners know the technical vocabulary related to the subject and understand the properties of different metals before moving on to practical tasks. However, for a minority of programmes for young learners, teachers do not always plan and teach these appropriately. For example, on level 3 engineering at Coulsdon and level 2 vehicle technician at Croydon teachers do not give learners sufficient time in workshops to develop their technical skills.

Leaders do not ensure that tutors teach young learners a sufficient, well-planned personal development curriculum. Learners in the discrete high needs provision develop suitable knowledge about consent, relationships and how to live a healthy life. However, too often, tutors in vocational and academic programmes use the tutorial lessons as an opportunity for learners to catch-up with their coursework. This means that learners and apprentices have limited knowledge and skills needed to make safe and informed decisions on relationships, to understand the dangers of extremism and radicalisation, and to lead a safe and healthy life.

Leaders and managers of the adult programmes ensure that learners benefit from a well-taught curriculum that enables them to acquire the good knowledge and skills they need to succeed on their programme. Teachers provide helpful feedback to learners about their work. They outline clearly what learners do well and what they need to improve. Most learners achieve their qualifications and many learners on access to higher education programmes achieve high grades. Learners progress to positive destinations, enabling them to achieve their long-term career goals. For example, a high proportion of access to higher education learners go to university on completion of their programme to study vocations such as nursing.

Leaders and managers of the apprenticeship programme have good oversight of the provision. They ensure that apprentices enjoy a good quality of education and training. Leaders, tutors and assessors have high expectations of apprentices. They give apprentices effective support and information to prepare apprentices for their final assessments. The majority of apprentices achieve their programme and a high proportion achieve high grades in their assessments.

Staff recruit apprentices appropriately. They assess apprentices' prior knowledge and skills sufficiently. However, they do not always assess apprentices' behaviours thoroughly enough. As a result, tutors and assessors do not know the specific areas that apprentices need help with. Apprentices who have been on programme for some time, for example on level 2 carpentry, have experienced disruption in staffing which has had an adverse impact on the progress they make.

Leaders and managers of the discrete high needs provision ensure that most learners have a curriculum closely suited to their needs and interests. The programmes prepare learners well for a range of different progression routes, such as supported living, adult day services, further study or employment. Most achieve their qualifications. However, too many learners do not undertake purposeful external work placements. Tutors do not individualise work-place tasks for learners that build towards more complex tasks. As a result, learners have limited opportunities to help them develop the knowledge and skills they need for future employment.

Learners' and apprentices' work is mostly of an appropriate standard. For example, art and design learners produce detailed portfolios and practical work where they develop new techniques, such as textile dyes or photograms. Learners base their work on well-researched artists and stimuli. As a result, they develop good standards of photography exploring topics such as identity.

Leaders and managers have not adequately ensured that young learners have good quality work-related experience as part of their study programmes, including work placements. Learners do not have sufficient opportunity to gain a good understanding of employment in the sectors they study.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that young learners receive suitable levels of support to enable them to fully access their programmes and make progress. This includes accessible teaching and learning resources for learners who have a physical

disability, and extra time to complete coursework for learners who have declared a learning difficulty such as dyslexia. For example, in level 3 E sport, a significant number of learners who have a learning difficulty do not receive sufficient support with the development of their English and mathematics skills and knowledge, which has a negative impact on the progress they make and the quality of their work.

Leaders and managers have not planned and implemented effective enough careers advice and guidance for learners. Too many learners and apprentices do not benefit from timely advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about their progression and next steps. Apprentices receive limited advice and guidance about higher level apprenticeship programmes. Too many learners, including those who have high needs, are not clear about the variety of career pathways available, including apprenticeships, upon completion of their course. Staff give good information about progression to higher education. They provide good support to adults and young learners with their applications and personal statements.

Tutors do not ensure that young learners have a good understanding about British values and how they apply to their lives or their future careers. For example, A-level art learners do not explore the law around image protection or intellectual property. However, adult ESOL learners have a sound knowledge of British values. They understand respect, democracy, and the rule of law. As a result, they see this newly acquired understanding as important for people from different nationalities and religions to be able to integrate successfully in London.

Leaders and managers do not provide a sufficient of range opportunities for learners and apprentices to explore and develop their talents and interests through a structured and purposeful enrichment programme. Most learners do not benefit from physical or cultural activity, team sports or knowledge to help improve their personal health. As a result, too many learners do not have purposeful pursuits through college that help their social, mental or physical well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors instil a positive culture of safeguarding learners and apprentices across both colleges. Governors have strong oversight of safeguarding processes and concerns. Leaders work effectively to ensure that staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Through their relationships with external partners, leaders and managers are aware of local risks and vulnerabilities their learners face.

Leaders ensure that a suitably trained and experienced safeguarding team responds quickly and effectively to safeguarding concerns. This helps learners and apprentices receive timely support when needed. Leaders and managers have effective systems to identify potential at-risk learners who need early help and intervention.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that staff are suitably skilled and trained to teach young learners and those who have high needs. On vocational subjects with external examinations, they should ensure that learners have the knowledge they need to pass these examinations.
- Leaders must ensure learners have high attendance and punctuality to lessons particularly at Coulsdon.
- Leaders must improve the culture across the college, particularly at Coulsdon, so that learners feel comfortable when on campus. They need to ensure they understand the experiences of different groups of learners and eradicate inappropriate behaviour. They should ensure that learners understand appropriate forms of conduct and behaviour, including respect for each other and how to conduct themselves in lessons.
- Leaders must ensure that learners who have high needs have specific goals that provide them with planned opportunities to work towards achieving their EHC plan outcomes. They should ensure that learners who require therapeutic input receive this in a timely manner so they can make good progress.
- Leaders must ensure that young learners and those who have high needs are supported to participate in meaningful and timely work-related and work experience opportunities.
- Leaders must ensure that tutors teach learners and apprentices about the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders must ensure that tutors teach learners a personal development curriculum so that learners and apprentices can develop their talents and interests beyond the curriculum and make informed decisions on how to lead a healthy and safe life.
- Leaders must ensure that learners and apprentices receive impartial careers advice and guidance, so they are appropriately prepared for their next steps.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130432
Address	Fairfield Campus College Road Croydon Surrey CR9 1DX
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Website	www.croydon.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Caireen Mitchell
Provider type	Further education
Date of previous inspection	28 April 2014
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal of Croydon College and Principal of Coulsdon College, as nominees. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection reports. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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