

Regent's Vocational College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134635
Local Authority	Hackney
Inspection number	316267
Inspection date	2 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Stuart Charlton

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	31
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Ms K Jefferson
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 1970
School address	Nile Street London N1 7RD
Telephone number	020 7251 3932
Fax number	020 7250 0740

Age group	14-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Regent's Vocational College is a pupil referral unit (PRU) which opened in September 2006. It provides education for students who have been excluded from their mainstream schools and serves an area of high social deprivation. All students have had significant periods of absence at their previous schools and consequently their attainment on entry is much lower than would be expected. The majority of students have a statement of special educational need usually associated with behaviour. The college provides a purely vocationally based curriculum and most students stay on until they reach age 16.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Regent's Vocational College provides a satisfactory education for its students. It has several strong features and is held in high esteem by students and their parents and carers. As one parent commented 'I have never seen my daughter so happy to learn and want to go to college'. The headteacher has a very clear vision of how the college should develop and provides the drive, determination and commitment to ensure that it is realised. The ethos that all students deserve a second chance, through the provision of high quality resources which will help them to obtain qualifications to prepare them for the future, pervades all its work.

In the year since it opened, the college has established good systems to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. Through these systems it has a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses and has drawn up a comprehensive development plan. However, it does not yet have sufficient information about trends in its work over time to be able to identify objectively how well it is performing. Consequently, it still has some way to go before the full impact of these systems on students' personal development, and the standards which they attain, is realised.

In the June 2007 public examinations, students achieved a range of BTEC and adult literacy and numeracy qualifications, many at a level equivalent to GCSE. Before they came to the college these students had missed considerable proportions of their education due to absence and/or exclusion. Consequently, even though the standards they attained were below those which would be expected, they represent at least satisfactory achievement given the students' starting points. The present students are also making satisfactory progress, based on satisfactory teaching. However, the pace of improvement in the quality of teaching is increasing rapidly. This is due to the good systems which are in place to monitor teaching and its impact on students' learning, and to help and support teachers in developing their practice. Teachers' planning now has a clear focus on the needs of individuals, based on the challenging targets which are set. Teachers do not always use assessment consistently to identify to students what they need to do to improve their work. There are good systems in place to monitor students' behaviour and appropriately challenge them to improve and these are applied consistently in all lessons. Many students have made significant changes for the better in their attendance and attitudes to learning. Nearly two thirds of the students now have attendance rates over 90%, which is a radical improvement compared with that at their previous schools.

The headteacher is well supported by her senior management team. Middle managers are quickly developing the confidence to move their areas forward. A significant feature in the success of the college is the strong teamwork and sense of purpose which have been established. The management group is still coming to terms with how it can act as an effective critical friend to the college. The details of its remit and its relationship with the secondary placement panel are not sufficiently clear. Good relationships have been established with a wide range of agencies and these contribute well to the support and guidance which students receive. The arrangements for safeguarding students are robust. The college is at a critical stage in its development but the ethos which has been established enables it to look forward to the future with confidence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the amount of teaching which is good or better to ensure that all students achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- Ensure that teachers make it clear to students what they need to do to improve to meet the challenging targets which have been set.

- Clarify the remit of the management group and its relationship with the secondary placement panel so that it can act effectively as a critical friend to the college.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

In the June 2007 public examinations, all students in Year 11 and those in Year 10 who had completed a one year BTEC programme, attained nationally recognised qualifications equivalent to GCSE. Several students attained grades equivalent to A* to C at GCSE. Given their starting point on entry to the college this represents satisfactory achievement. When they start at the college, there is little objective information about the achievements of the majority of students. The college now has secure systems in place to benchmark these achievements particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy. However, this information was less secure for the 2007 GCSE cohort and the present Year 11. Consequently, it is difficult to quantify the achievements of these students accurately. All the present students in the college who attend regularly are making good progress against their starting points. The college is now able to set challenging targets for these students and as data about students' progress is built up these targets become more effective in driving up achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

A particularly impressive aspect of the work of the college is the impact it has on improving students' attitudes and behaviour and their attendance. The vast majority have radically changed the pattern of their attendance often from less than 30% to over 90% and in a number of cases to not having missed a day since they started at the college. This success is based on strong systems to promote and reward good attendance. These systems are under continual review and students are fully involved in this process so that the majority are fully aware of the benefits of regular attendance. Behaviour is also good. Again involving the students in the development of the behaviour policy has ensured that they respect the consistency with which it is implemented, prompting a number of comments to the effect it was 'hard but fair'. Improvements in attendance and behaviour have had a positive impact on students' attitudes. All of those who attend regularly enjoy their education and are proud of the college, its facilities and what it does for them. There is now only a handful of students who have not been successfully re-engaged in education and the college continues to work with these young people to change their perceptions. The improvements in attendance are not always reflected in punctuality and some students still have some way to go in this area. All students are involved in the college home economics/cooking programme. Coupled with the healthy options available in the canteen, which is used by nearly all students, this has raised the awareness of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and many are making changes in this direction. The college has good anecdotal evidence to show the positive impact of the smoking and substance abuse sessions which have been run. All students commented favourably on the safe and secure environment which the college provides. As one said 'it should be open all week and have a sixth form'. All involved with the college are working hard to raise its profile with the local community and the improvements in students' behaviour are helping in this. Students' spiritual and cultural development is

satisfactory and their moral and social development is good. All students gain adult literacy and numeracy qualifications which prepare them well for life after the college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is improving rapidly based on the good support systems which have been put in place and the effectiveness of monitoring by senior managers and team leaders and through peer observations. There is a clear focus in teachers' planning on the needs of individual students and good emphasis is placed on setting and using challenging targets. However, these are not yet matched by the feedback teachers give to students about what they need to do to improve their work and gain a higher grade. A strong feature in all lessons is the high quality relationships which are developed and the way these are used to engage students and actively involve them in their own learning. Teachers' subject knowledge and their practical vocational skills are highly valued by all students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

At this stage in its development the college has appropriately focussed on establishing four high quality vocational programmes. These are closely focused on meeting students' needs and are continually under review. As the college gains confidence it has suitable plans to widen the range of options through links with other providers. It has developed and used a wide range of visits to raise students' confidence and self-esteem. There is a well planned and evolving programme of personal, social and health education. This is carefully linked to students' vocational learning and is having a beneficial impact in modifying behaviour, improving attitudes to learning and boosting attendance.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The college has invested a great deal of time and effort in establishing very effective systems to guide and support students' personal and academic development. A crucial factor in the success of these systems has been the key worker programme. On entry to the college each student is allocated their own key worker who acts as their tutor and advocate throughout their time at college. This helps to form the base for the good relationships which are quickly established, and provides the link with the outside agencies who work with students on an individual basis. The college has established its own internal network of links to agencies such as connexions, social services, educational psychologist support and the local authority (LA) youth offenders team. The key worker ensures that these links work effectively and help to develop students' confidence and self-esteem.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The success of the college is based on the vision, enthusiasm and drive of the headteacher. In a very short period of time she has brought together a strong team of managers, teachers and

administrative staff who work together effectively. A clear focus is given to re-engaging students in education by making learning enjoyable and thus enabling them to gain qualifications. They see these as relevant to their future, so enabling them to quickly gain confidence. Good systems have been implemented to address issues around attendance, behaviour and attitudes. The information from these is used well to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the provision. However, at this early stage in its development there is insufficient data about past performance for the college to be able to quantify its success objectively. Given this, its own assessment of strengths and weaknesses is accurate and this has enabled an effective development plan to be put in place. The management group has only recently been established and the majority of its members work directly with the LA learning trust. There is also some overlap between the membership of the management group and the secondary placement panel. The learning trust have identified that this may not be compatible with the management group operating effectively as a critical friend to the college and are undertaking a review of its remit.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Regent's Vocational College, London, N1 7RD

Thank you for all the help you gave me when I visited your college on 2 October 2007. You were very anxious to assure me that it was a good college which had made a considerable difference to your lives. You told me how effective it had been in enabling you to improve your behaviour and attendance and you felt that staff were always ready to help and support you. I agree that these are the real strengths of the college. However, you were also keen to point out how the courses which the college provides are much more exciting and interesting than those in your previous schools and that they enable to get qualifications which will be useful to you in the future.

I agree with your view that teaching has rapidly improved and that you are right to hold in high esteem the practical skills of your teachers and the effective way in which they use these to develop your own skills. I have suggested that teachers should give you more detailed feedback and advice about how to improve your work so that you can achieve even higher grade in your BTEC and adult literacy and numeracy qualifications. Although you have all improved your attendance there are still some of you who are rather casual about punctuality in getting to college and to lessons. You must work closely with staff to improve this aspect of your performance as well.

I have also asked the learning trust to look carefully at how the college's management group operates and how it works with the placement panel so that it can be more effective in helping the college to move forward and celebrate its success.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Charlton

Lead inspector