

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Coulsdon College

Date of visit: 1 November 2007

### Context

Coulsdon College is a sixth form college established in 1988 that is located at the southern-most point of the London Borough of Croydon, on the borders of Surrey. Approximately 70% of students come from Croydon and a further 30% come from other parts of South London. The college offers principally academic and vocational qualifications at advanced and intermediate level to 16-18 year old students. The college has expanded its vocational provision with BTEC National, First and Introductory courses now being offered. The college offers courses in ten of the fourteen areas of learning. The college is in the bottom five sixth form colleges nationally in terms of the low GCSE results of learners on entry. Croydon LEA's average figure for pupils gaining five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE including Maths and English in 2006 was 42.7%, below the national average of 45.8%. There are 1,300 students with around 10% receiving additional learning support.

Coulsdon College is about to complete the first phase of a major capital project that will involve complete redevelopment of the current site. Detailed approval for phase 2 of the project is expected early in 2008 and work will begin soon after. It is currently proposed that the new building will be in occupation by September 2010-11. The first phase of this development included building the Pavilion, a new Sports and Performing Arts facility with classrooms and external sports areas and is shortly due to be occupied. The college provides a bus service from Croydon town centre to supplement local buses. Croydon has an increasing minority ethnic population that includes economic migrants from Eastern Europe. The student population reflects this well. The percentage of students identifying themselves as coming from minority ethnic communities stands at 60% in 2007-08. Croydon residents have variable qualification levels compared to the London region. A higher proportion has an NVQ Level 2 or equivalent but fewer at Level 4 and above. Those residents with no qualifications increased from 11% in 2005 to 13.8% in 2006 and are now similar to the regional average.

## Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates for long courses?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Overall college success rates in 2006-07 rose by 4% and have continued the trend of improvement in recent years. Success rates for long level 1 courses rose by 15%, taking them to 63%, slightly below national averages for sixth form colleges. Success rates for long level 2 courses improved substantially by 17% to 85%, above national average. Long level 3 courses improved by 1%, but within this success rates for BTEC National courses were 31% above national averages.

College learners have a particularly low profile of prior attainment and many are making good progress based on their prior GCSE results. Value added data for 2006-07 suggests learner performance significantly above normal, an indicator that teaching and learning is a significant factor in influencing the improvement. Performance from value added data at the time of the last inspection was below normal. Learners receiving additional support performed well in 2006-07. The college has continued to implement a 'Success Review' process that identifies under-performing courses and ensures appropriate remedial action.

## Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing a more rigorous lesson observation scheme that can be used to improve the quality and consistency of teaching?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The college has taken significant steps to improve the robustness and use of results of the lesson observation system. Senior and middle managers have a detailed understanding of teaching and learning in the college. Graded observations are carried out by a central team. A quarter are jointly observed. 'Mock inspections' use external specialists who also reinforce observation training and moderate findings and grades. Moderation of grades is now more timely. Tutorials and additional learning support are observed. An improvement resulting from this is a smaller team of staff undertaking tutorials. Results are used to target both individual training and cross-college themes such as improving the use of questioning. Data from the past three years indicates a decrease in the proportion of good or better teaching; this is clearly a result of stricter moderation.

Staff development days focus on improving teaching. A well-received 'learning fair' promoted good teaching practice. Staff participate in weekly one hour development slots. Good use is being made of technology. Software to analyse findings of observations to better say what makes good teaching to target improvement has been introduced. A staff training focus on e-learning helped increase learner use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) by 340%. The college is involved in local peer referencing pilots.

What progress has been made in improving punctuality and attendance of students?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Over recent years, the trend of attendance rates has steadily improved following the implementation of a range of strategies. Overall GCSE attendance has improved from 72% at the last inspection to 80% in 2006-07. College attendance overall stands at 83% for 2006-07, which is favourable compared to similar colleges. Current attendance indicates further improvement. A reform of the tutorial system and the creation of a senior post with responsibility for learners have led to a more effective approach in dealing with poor attendance and punctuality. Staff have been trained in the use of an attendance monitoring software system to ensure immediate attention to live results. The college has devised it's own web-based information system (e-couldson) that enables parents or guardians to review instantly their child's attendance and course progress. Early signs are of good take-up, with 300 parents having accessed the system since its introduction in October. In a further recent development, the college has purchased an innovative web based text messaging system to contact parents regarding issues around attendance. This goes live in December. The introduction of a college bus service has helped in improving punctuality of students.

What actions have been taken to improve the embedding of key skills as part of the curriculum entitlement?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

The college has reevaluated the best way to support the needs of learners by negotiating a change in approach with the local LSC from an offer of key skills tests and portfolios to adult basic skills literacy and numeracy tests. These are more suitable for many of the learners receiving additional learning support who have low prior attainment. Success rates have improved significantly. For example, success rates for level 1 learners taking level 1 literacy have improved from 3% to 34% in 2006-07.

Success rates for level 1 learners taking level 1 numeracy have risen to 88% in 2006-07, which is substantially above national averages. Literacy learners are able to access either GCSE English or adult literacy levels 1 or 2, with easy transfer between qualifications. Online assessment for adult numeracy tests were made available during 2006-07 and were positively received by learners. They are being made available for literacy in 2007-08. The college has obtained funding to introduce mobile learning technology to change student attitudes to learning literacy, and ultimately to improve success rates. Success rates for IT key skills, an optional qualification, were poor in 2006-07 following a misunderstanding of the awarding body guidelines for portfolios. Over half of the learners will resubmit portfolios for potential achievement in 2007-08.

What progress has been made in improving the accessibility of premises for learners with disabilities?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

At the time of the previous inspection there was very limited access to the college premises for learners with disabilities. This has been addressed well with a new building that is about to open and major changes to the main building. The library and open access information technology resources have been re-sited to the ground floor with new corridors built. A lift and wheelchair ramp lifts have been installed to give access to the upper floor and to corridors where there are small flights of stairs. A disabled toilet has been built. The refectory has had walls knocked down and improved furniture has been introduced. Modifications to teaching areas have been made with lower moveable furniture. Disabled parking spaces, automatic sliding entrance doors, low level swipe card readers, clearer signposting and lower kerbs have been introduced. A new reception area with a low level desk and a hearing loop have been created. Plans for new buildings include compliance with the relevant legislation.

#### Leadership and management

What progress has been made in increasing the involvement of staff at different levels in the self-assessment process?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Previously staff had limited involvement in self assessment. The current draft report based on 2006-07 performance has involved staff at all levels producing assessments of their areas, to a concise format that is more

evaluative than previous versions. Area reports are moderated and used as the basis of the college report. This is moderated by senior managers and governors. Key to area self-assessment reports are much improved review of performance along with availability and use of data. All learners are initially assessed for value added data to be produced. Along with success data this is used in annual 'success reviews' to make judgements for self assessment and to set targets for the coming year. These reviews clearly point to areas of good or under performance on courses, linked to other data such as learner feedback and results of observations. Appropriate action planning is linked to area and college self-assessment reports, focusing on improving the experience of learners. Staff feel better informed about the performance of their areas and the college. Judgements for 'Every Child Matters' are collated by student services.