

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: John Ruskin College

Date of visit: 17 June 2008

Context

John Ruskin College is a sixth form college situated in the south of Croydon, close to the border with Bromley. It is one of three colleges in the borough. Within the borough there are 33 secondary schools, seven of which have sixth forms. Around 75% of Croydon school leavers remain in full-time education. All the colleges in Croydon have a significant proportion of out-of-borough learners. This is most marked at John Ruskin College where recruitment from local schools has decreased over a period of years. Level 3 learners at the college have one of the lowest General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) points score averages of any sixth form college. Some 86% of the college's learners are from minority ethnic communities. Croydon has high levels of employment, but with several areas of economic deprivation, one of which is situated very close to the college.

Since the previous inspection, the college has significantly changed the range of its provision, with the introduction of more vocational courses, especially at level 3, and the re-modelling of General Certificate of Education (GCE), A level provision. In the last year it has also significantly changed its senior and middle management structures.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made with improving learners' success rates since the last annual assessment visit?	Reasonable progress
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The college is working hard, and to some effect, to improve learners' success rates. A whole college approach is now in place to improve the quality of provision, facilitated by management and staff re-structuring, re-shaping of the curriculum and work to improve quality improvement.

Most learners follow level 3 courses. Success rates on these, for learners aged 16-18, at around 70%, were significantly below national averages for similar colleges over the three years 2004/05 to 2006/07. At the last annual assessment visit, the college correctly anticipated that success rates would recover from a low point of 66% in 2005/06. A much higher % age of this provision is now vocational courses, such as

national awards. Some 75% of Year 1 level 3 learners are enrolled on vocational courses. Firm assessment data for level 3 vocational programmes indicate a significant improvement in overall success rates in 2007/08, to a level much closer to national averages, at around 80%.

As noted in the last annual assessment visit, low success rates for AS level courses and low retention have contributed significantly to the poorer success rates at level 3. Retention at level 3 has significantly improved and January 2008 module achievement shows improvement in a number of subjects.

The college has re-focused its provision, removing some poorer performing and under-recruiting AS subjects and introducing the A+ programme of more cohesive packages of subjects, while continuing to increase its vocational offer. College wide approaches to the better support of learners developed for vocational courses, including extended and improved tutorial support, are now benefiting A+ learners.

Success rates for the significant number of level 2 learners aged 16-18, have improved consistently over the last three years and are around national averages. Pass rates were particularly high in 2006/07 and above national averages. Pass rates for the relatively small number of learners at level 1, mostly on vocational courses, remain high. College data for short course success rates, most of which are known for 2007/08, show an improvement over 2006/07.

The college makes good use of value-added data to measure the progress of its learners. As noted at the last annual assessment visit learners often make satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment. Recent data show that value added is improving in a number of AS and A2 subjects. For level 2 courses, value added is good overall and often high.

Quality of provision

What progress is being made with the improvement of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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The concerted effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning, noted at the last AAV, has continued apace. Evidence for the college's internal scheme of lesson observations shows further improvement in the proportion of good or better lessons. In the second round of observations for 2007/08, in March 2008, 68% of lessons were graded as better than satisfactory, with very little teaching that was inadequate. This shows significant improvement on the outcome of observations in 2006/07.

The college continues to improve the rigour and consistency of its scheme. It is well documented and observers are well trained. External moderation of the scheme and extensive staff development have improved the reliability and consistency of

judgements. The scheme is now an essential part of the college's approach to performance management and teachers' capability. The scheme increasingly provides a focus for staff development and the sharing of good practice. Feedback is designed to engage teachers in the development of action plans for improvement.

Teachers are supported well by the small number of teaching and learning mentors. As the college develops its strategy to improve teaching, which is no better than satisfactory, it plans to significantly increase the number of mentors in the next academic year.

The introduction of internal inspections, with one carried out to date, has helped teachers and managers to further understand the benefits of inspection for quality improvement.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the thoroughness and consistency of self-assessment across the college?	Reasonable progress
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The college has continued its work to improve self-assessment, noted at the last annual assessment visit. Self-assessment is now part of a clearer and more effective quality monitoring cycle. Target-setting and action planning are now more effective, ensuring better and more accurate self-assessment.

The significantly improved scheme of lesson observation provides a good range of additional evidence, which is increasingly well used to inform judgements in the self-assessment report. Learners' performance data is also increasingly well used.

New and simpler documentation, to assemble the evidence for self-assessment, has been introduced, emphasising the quality of course delivery and accountability. Course managers receive a range of agreed learner data to inform their work in compiling their course reviews. The whole college self-assessment report is externally moderated.

What progress has been made with the use of data to inform and promote quality improvement?	Significant progress
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The college has successfully rectified the weakness from the last annual assessment visit, where it was identified that data is used more effectively to analyse students' outcomes retrospectively than during their time at college. There is now thorough and ongoing planned analysis of learners' performance and progress. The setting and use of target minimum grades is now good.

Data is more effectively used to monitor performance overall and are used more effectively in course reviews and in the preparation of course self-assessments. Course reviews are more thorough and action planning clearer and carried out on time. Managers and teachers have been helped to understand their course and learner data better through effective staff development.

Analysis of data is now beginning to prompt changes in the curriculum offer. For example, it has identified weaker courses in the performing arts and led to changes in the course offer in the Creative Academy.