

Coulsdon College

Partial reinspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Jo Parkman HMI

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Address: Placehouse Lane
Old Coulsdon
Surrey
CR5 1YA

Telephone number: 01737 551176

Introduction

Coulsdon College was last inspected in November 2008 and its overall effectiveness was satisfactory. The quality of provision was satisfactory or better in all areas except science and mathematics, which was judged to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Science and mathematics	4	3

Context

Coulsdon College is a sixth form college in South Croydon. Approximately 75% of its students come from the borough and the remainder from neighbouring parts of South London. In 2008/09, 63% of the students attending the college had a minority ethnic heritage. This is significantly higher than the local population. At the time of the inspection 777 students were taking science and mathematics courses. The vast majority are aged 16 to 18 and study on full-time courses at levels 2 and 3. Some 301 students are on General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A levels in biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and psychology. The college also offers Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national and first diplomas in science, GCSE science and mathematics, and adult numeracy courses at levels 1 and 2.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates are high on numeracy courses and satisfactory on BTEC diplomas. For A-level courses, success rates are broadly in line with the high national averages, except for A level physics where success rates declined sharply in 2008/09. Success rates for AS levels, although improving for psychology and biology, remain below the national averages. Success rates for GCSE mathematics and science are low.
- Students' work is at least satisfactory and often good. Students are able to express their ideas clearly and their written work is generally good. Attendance is satisfactory, although students are not always punctual and some classes are disrupted by students arriving late. Students work well in their classes and are making satisfactory progress in gaining new skills and knowledge.
- Students' progress is satisfactory overall. The average level of attainment of students enrolling on level 3 programmes at the college is significantly lower than for sixth form colleges nationally. In nearly all AS- and A-level subjects students make the progress that would be predicted according to their prior attainment. Students completing level 3 courses frequently progress to higher education.

- Students feel safe and well supported by their teachers and tutors. They know whom to refer to if they have issues regarding their safety. Classroom practices are good with appropriate attention to health and safety.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons and teaching schemes are well planned. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Students receive good written feedback on their work which helps them to improve. Students taking biology and chemistry at AS level find the approaches taken by their teachers made for especially interesting and varied lessons.
- In a minority of lessons teachers set tasks which are not challenging enough. Some students are not working at a level which allows them to reach their potential. Tasks do not always allow students to develop their skills of analysis to work out solutions to challenging problems. In these lessons too much of the teaching is dominated by the teacher talking or overuse of undemanding worksheets.
- Students' progress is now carefully and frequently monitored by their teachers. Teachers and tutors set clear targets for students to achieve which they monitor closely. Students value the specific additional workshops which they are required to attend if they are having difficulty meeting their targets.
- Information about students' progress is shared particularly effectively through the new electronic personalised learning plans available online. This has improved the communications between tutors and subject leaders and has greatly improved the monitoring and reporting of students' progress.
- The range and content of the courses offered meets the needs of students particularly well. The college has extended its BTEC science provision to include two specialist national diplomas and a first diploma. All three programmes have proved popular with students. An increasing proportion of the college's students are now pursuing a vocational route to higher education which better meets their needs.
- Initial advice and guidance is now good. Entry requirements for level 3 science courses have been raised and students are now being recruited to courses where they have a good chance of success. The college now makes particularly good use of initial assessment, including information on prior attainment, to match students to suitable courses.
- The self-assessment report is comprehensive and realistic. It provides a sound basis for the quality improvement plan. While there has been a focus on staff development to improve teaching and learning, staff do not currently make arrangements to visit good or outstanding sessions to observe good practice that might be helpful in their work.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. A new director of science and mathematics, appointed in September 2009, has a clear view of the actions for improvement that are needed and how to implement them.

What does Coulsdon College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates especially on AS-level and GCSE courses by monitoring students' progress frequently and rigorously. Ensure prompt action is taken to support any students failing to meet their targets.
- Improve students' progress relative to their prior attainment by ensuring that all students are effectively challenged by the work they are set in lessons and for homework.
- Implement effective arrangements for monitoring and improving punctuality. Ensure that these are applied consistently by all staff.
- Develop and introduce a programme of visits for teaching staff to view good practice in other colleges, especially in GCSE mathematics.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in using the results of observations of teaching and learning to contribute to self-assessment and lead to improvements in the quality of teaching? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving the use of observations of teaching and learning. Senior staff fully analyse the results of observations to look for common themes, both within subject areas and for the college as a whole. The college uses students' perceptions of teaching effectively to contribute to planning staff development activities. Observations from 2008/09 indicate that the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has fallen to two percent. The college has taken effective steps to prevent observers overestimating the quality of the teaching and learning, resulting in a reduction in the number of lessons judged to be outstanding. Senior managers review the content of subject area self-assessment reports carefully to ensure that they contain clear judgements on teaching and learning that are well supported by evidence. The systems for identifying and sharing good practice have improved and the college is focusing strongly on improving the proportion of good or better teaching. So far two subject areas have been subject to external quality reviews as part of a joint college scheme. The college has made effective use of the results from these reviews to support the development of teaching. The current format of the self-assessment report has resulted in very short subject area reports which can lack sufficient judgements and the college is planning to develop a new format for the next report.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving students' progress at AS level relative to their prior attainment? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving students' progress at AS level, although it remains satisfactory overall. The overall average level of attainment of the college's students is below the national average for the large majority of AS- or A-level subjects it offers. Nevertheless, most students make at least the progress that would be expected. At the previous inspection progress was significantly better than average for two subjects, but lower than average for six subjects at AS level. In 2008/09 this improved, although progress remains inadequate for some students in the three subject areas of photography, drama and theatre studies, and history. The college has identified that improving teachers' ability to successfully meet the needs of all learners in mixed ability groups is a common theme for staff development. Plans are underway to provide a raft of different staff development activities to address this theme.

What progress has been made in improving attendance rates? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving attendance rates across the whole of its provision. Attendance rates have improved steadily over the last three years and are now at least satisfactory for all areas of the college's work, except some courses at level 1. The college is in the process of revising its attendance and punctuality policy. Plans are underway to provide further staff training to improve the consistency with which the policy is implemented by staff. Teaching staff receive a comprehensive weekly analysis of attendance data for the whole college which risk bands individual courses according to attendance levels. Two staff work as 'attendance trackers' contacting the parents of all students who fail to attend. These staff help parents to access the college virtual learning environment, which allows them to monitor their child's attendance. The college now has systems in place to measure the impact of the attendance trackers' interventions. In previous years attendance on AS-level courses has declined over the year, in part due to students finding four AS-level courses too challenging and attending poorly prior to dropping one subject. The college has significantly improved its advice and guidance at enrolment to help to ensure that students are not placed on courses which they ultimately find too demanding.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving students' inductions and the use of diagnostic screening to ensure that students are on the most appropriate programmes? Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in improving its initial advice and guidance to students at enrolment. The college has identified that too often learners were enrolled on AS-level courses when they had a poor chance of succeeding due to their prior attainment. Too many students were attempting four AS-level courses, when three AS-level, or a combination of AS-level and vocational courses, might have better suited their needs. The college has made significant improvements to its procedures for enrolment to address this difficulty. In 2009/10 the college raised the entrance requirements for students wishing to take four AS-level courses, and this has resulted in significantly fewer students dropping one AS-level course in the first term. The proportion of the college's students taking AS-level courses has reduced, while the proportion on vocational courses has increased substantially. The college has broadened its curriculum to provide more vocational routes for students wishing to progress to higher education. At enrolment all potential level 3 students receive advice and guidance from trained staff who are able to use data about the students' prior attainment to make informed judgements about the likelihood of their success at AS level. They provide guidance to students and their parents about the options available and help students to choose a combination of courses which gives them the best chance of success. For 2009/10 all enrolments were subject to further rigorous quality assurance checking to ensure that the college's policy for recruitment had been implemented appropriately.

What progress has been made in improving the setting and monitoring of personal targets for students at tutorials? Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in improving the setting and monitoring of personal targets for students. Since the previous inspection it has introduced a new system for risk banding students according to their performance at college. This risk banding is clearly displayed on the students' electronic personal learning plan that is accessible not only by students and staff but also by parents. The electronic learning plan is also new and is an effective tool for setting and monitoring personal targets. Although staff have received training in setting appropriate and meaningful targets, there is still some variation in the quality of targets set. However, in most cases, students are now set targets which effectively help them to overcome difficulties such as poor punctuality or failing to complete work on time. Senior managers devote considerable time to monitoring the progress of students and checking what action tutors are taking to support students flagged as being at risk of failing to complete their courses successfully. Directors now monitor the progress of all students rigorously five times each year.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the collection and use of students' views? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving its collection and use of students' views. Arrangements are in place to collect learners' views through learner voice meetings each term. Currently the views of students on AS- and A-level courses are collected through student representatives, and the college recognises that this is not the most effective way to collect their feedback. Plans are underway to introduce focus groups specifically for individual subject areas at AS and A level. The principal holds a termly question time meeting which is well attended. The college makes good use of questionnaires to gather learners' views about the quality of the advice and guidance the students received at enrolment, and the effectiveness of their induction. These are collated and shared extensively with staff at all levels. Staff are required to respond to students' feedback promptly and visibly by, for example, using posters to communicate the action they have taken. The subject area self-assessment reports all include a section on students' views and the action staff have taken. The college has made many improvements as a direct result of listening to its students. For example, students on courses at level 1 have their own tailored programme of enrichment activities which was developed in response to their feedback.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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