

Ruskin Mill College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 133036

Name of lead inspector: Diane Stacey HMI

Last day of inspection: 28 May 2010

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: Ruskin Mill College
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Information about the provider

1. Ruskin Mill College is part of the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust Limited (RMET), which is a company limited by guarantee and which began its work in 1986. The work of RMET is inspired by the work of Rudolph Steiner, William Morris and John Ruskin.
2. Ruskin Mill College is one of three colleges of RMET that offers learning experiences to young people with a range of learning difficulties, including those who have challenging behaviour. The college recruits students from across England and Wales. There are currently 101 students; 98 are funded through the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), two students are funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, and one is privately funded. Eighty-seven students are residential. Eighty-five per cent of students are male. Ruskin Mill College is centred on a large site in Gloucestershire and provides a curriculum with a wide range of learning opportunities, primarily based on craft activities such as leather, iron and willow work. Land-based activities include organic horticulture, care of livestock and fish farming. The links made with nine local further education colleges and training providers offer additional learning opportunities.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled students in 2008/09
Provision for young students: Further education (16 to 18)	37 full-time students
Provision for adult students: Further education (19+)	56 full-time students

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Grade 1
	Grade
Outcomes for students	1
Quality of provision	1
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2

Overall effectiveness

- Ruskin Mill College has outstanding success in developing students' practical craft and land-based skills. Students have excellent successes in achieving a range of national awards. They develop highly effective communication and personal skills which enable them to participate confidently as valuable members of the wider community. Teaching and related resources are outstanding. Tutors skilfully use a wide range of strategies to motivate, challenge and raise students' aspirations. The range of programmes is very wide, with additional opportunities for students to attend partner local further education colleges to extend their choice of courses. The college has an extended and very useful range of partners that benefit students particularly well. Care, guidance and support are outstanding and transition planning is highly effective. Leadership and the management of the college have improved greatly since the last inspection and the college is outstanding in the way that it provides for its students. Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and extremely well managed. Arrangements for equality and diversity are good but the college needs to extend students' experiences through the curriculum more to broaden their knowledge of cultural diversity. The college also needs to ensure that newly appointed middle managers are more closely involved in the strategic planning of the provision and to extend staff experience in relation to developing a more integrated approach to students' reading and writing skills. The college provides outstanding value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes are outstanding. Achievements of national awards are excellent. Students make exceptional progress in developing practical craft skills to a very high standard. Self-confidence increases significantly and students develop social and communication skills and their ability to manage their own behaviour particularly well.
- Community links are extensive and benefit students enormously. Students develop highly effective employability skills but the promotion of students' understanding of rights and responsibilities at work is not fully implemented. Progression is excellent and the majority of students move into further education, training or employment when they leave the college.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teaching is strongly learner centred. All teaching involves real practical tasks which engage students' interest and enthusiasm. Behaviour management is excellent. Tutors are highly skilled in their own specialism and developing students' communication and practical numeracy skills. However, the teaching of reading and writing skills is not yet sufficiently developed.
- The range of programmes and resources available to students is outstanding. Students have individually designed flexible programmes chosen from an unusually wide range of options. They receive maximum personal attention from working in very small groups. Work experience opportunities are very good. The living skills programme is excellent. Students enjoy a good variety of enrichment activities. Excellent links are established with external partners.
- The college provides outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. The pre-entry three-day assessment is exceptionally thorough and supports students to identify and develop strategies to manage their own behaviour. Students benefit greatly from an extensive range of therapeutic support. Transition planning is highly effective.
- Inspirational leadership realises the college's vision of enabling young people with learning difficulties to develop personally and socially through the application of specific craft skills. The college's demonstrable conviction in the efficacy of what it does leads to ambitious expectations for what students might achieve. This gives students aspiration, confidence and a renewed sense of themselves and their possibilities.
- Managers at all levels communicate and coordinate their work expertly to ensure that the best possible outcomes for students are always the focus of attention. Accountability is clear and management processes highly efficient. However, middle managers have yet to make as significant a contribution to the overall strategy for the college as they merit and wish.
- The college has outstanding procedures and practices to ensure that students are kept safe. These are executed rigorously in a climate that nevertheless encourages students to understand, identify and manage risk for themselves, and ultimately take responsibility for their own safety.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is good overall, with students engaged in a wide range of activities and festivals. The staff population is diverse. However, the work of the newly appointed equality and diversity adviser has yet to impact on how well wider aspects of a multicultural society are actively promoted through the curriculum.
- Students contribute substantially to the way in which their college is run. Staff successfully encourage them to think about and discuss a wide range of issues. They contribute ideas through a number of formal channels. They feel fully valued and responsible.
- The college reflects on, and evaluates, the impact of all that it does in diligent and highly perceptive ways. It is very aware of its own strengths and relative weaknesses. It is extremely well placed to develop its provision further and enact its own plans for further improvement.
- Material and human resources are outstanding. They provide stimulating, exciting and deeply satisfying means whereby students may explore what they wish to do. They lay foundations for assured future growth and fulfilment.

What does Ruskin Mill College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop and promote the rights and responsibilities at work framework to ensure that students have a greater awareness of what to expect when they apply for and enter employment.
- Develop the expertise in staff to advance students' skills in reading and writing by an integrated approach: working with partner colleges; speeding up access to specialist literacy and numeracy training at level 5; and ensuring that subject tutors are enabled to integrate the development of reading and writing in their work with students.
- Develop more systematic ways of enabling middle managers to communicate with senior managers so that the former are able to contribute more explicitly to the strategic development of the college.
- Extend students' encounters with diverse cultures through all aspects of the college's taught curriculum so that they develop a broader understanding of the different cultures that permeate and enrich our society.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- the skilled, experienced and sympathetic staff
- the calm and patient approach of the tutors
- the living conditions and the food
- travelling independently between home and college
- the visit to Scotland and the wilderness trip
- feeling safe and knowing what to do if feeling unsafe

- making friends and spending time with them
- feeling more confident
- gaining qualifications
- the outdoor, practical tasks.

What students would like to see improved:

- more choice about activities outside of college
- fewer timetable changes and more choice about any changes
- more independence in the residential houses.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the good support from the college work experience manager
- the good links between training at work and education at college
- the good communication and support provided by the college.

What employers would like to see improved:

- nothing.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

4. The college has outstanding capacity to improve. Since the last inspection, the management structure has been significantly revised to create a more inclusive and responsive community. This has been achieved without compromising the core principles by which the college operates, and has been accompanied by a substantial rise in students' achievements to an outstanding level, and in the proportion of lessons which have been judged to be good or outstanding. The rate and extent of progress made over the last four years is impressive.
5. The college knows itself very well. Quality assurance and self-assessment are conducted collaboratively, are highly evaluative and enable the college to identify accurately strengths and areas for further development. Senior leaders and trustees are highly ambitious for the further development of the college, yet pragmatic in their business and financial planning for the future. With excellent morale, outstanding promotion of staff training, vigorous engagement of students in the daily life of their college and an underlying set of principles that give academic weight and philosophical coherence to all that it does on behalf of students, the college is extremely well poised to make and sustain yet further improvement.

Outcomes for students

Grade 1

6. Students enjoy their time at college and make outstanding progress in developing practical craft skills. Students' successes with externally accredited qualifications are exceptionally good. In 2008/09 78% of students were entered by Ruskin Mill College for craft awards and 100% were successful. Students also gain awards in subjects such as food safety and hygiene. Those who enrol at local colleges achieve a wide range of additional skills and awards.
7. Students demonstrate significant development of social competencies, communication skills and self-confidence and much increased ability to manage their own behaviour. Employability skills are developed very well through work experience. The college has started to introduce and develop students' understanding of rights and responsibilities at work but the framework is not yet fully implemented.
8. Students' progression is excellent. There is very little difference between planned destinations and actual outcomes. Ninety-four per cent of students who left in 2007/08 went into employment or enrolled on to further education programmes, and 60% moved into supported or independent living. All students who left in 2008/09 progressed into either employment or further education or training. An increased number, 82%, moved into supported or independent living.

9. There is a significant development of students' sense of being safe. Students express that they feel safe and are involved in a 'feeling safe' workshop. The college is particularly vigilant with regard to the various potential hazards within practical training activities.
10. Attention to the health and well-being of students is strong, with students encouraged to eat healthily and provided with choices of food that are organically produced. The attention to developing fitness and strength is particularly good through outdoor work and daily walking to the farm and woodland areas. Community links are excellent, ensuring students are at the core of activities.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

11. Teaching and resources are outstanding. Tutors are highly skilled in their specialisms and most have teaching qualifications. Teaching focuses strongly on each student's choices and interests and engages their attention exceptionally well through real practical tasks. Tutors use highly effective questioning techniques to help students think about the task in hand and to check learning. They take every opportunity in lessons to develop students' verbal communication and practical numeracy skills. Students contribute with energy and enthusiasm. Tutors are exceptionally skilled at helping students to manage their own behaviour. Students increasingly take part in assessing and recording their progress after each lesson. However, the quality of short-term goal setting and recording of progress by staff is inconsistent. Tutors are beginning to use more opportunities to encourage reading; however, the teaching of writing is not yet sufficiently developed.
12. The range of programmes is extremely wide. Art, literature, music and drama enrich the programme offer. Students produce beautiful and useful articles in clay and wool. They take part in every stage of production, from preparing the raw material to the final product. Each learner has a uniquely designed programme which can include access to other local education and training provision to ensure their interests are met. The amount of individual attention is very high. Students access an extensive range of work placements. A new living skills curriculum helps students become more independent.
13. The college has developed a diverse range of partnerships. It works with nine local colleges and training providers; this provides opportunities for staff to share good practice and support students' transitions. Links with business and voluntary sectors are excellent. The college is working closely with a local green energy company to reduce energy consumption as part of the college's energy action plan.
14. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The pre-entry three-day assessment is exceptionally thorough and clearly identifies students' learning, health and support needs and strategies for meeting these. Students benefit greatly from the extensive range of therapeutic support. Support from house

parents increases students' sense of safety and independence. Transition planning is highly effective.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

15. The principal and his senior team promote a unified vision that inspires staff and students. Under their highly consultative leadership the college has been transformed into an outstanding learning community. The primary course followed by all students is designed coherently around the principles of therapeutic education and of learning through crafts in a biodynamically managed landscape. Everything that happens has the students' educational progress and holistic development at its core. Around this, academic research underpinning the anthroposophical nature of the work, ecological sustainable practices, a relentless focus on training teachers to become professional practitioners and shrewd financial planning all make their indivisible contribution to the college's current excellent stature.
16. The college has undergone significant structural change in order to realise this vision. Despite this turbulence, morale is very strong and the ambitions and capabilities of staff and students have been raised considerably, as have students' achievements. Middle managers are flourishing in their new roles, but have yet to become fully empowered to contribute more systematically to the changing direction of the college. Information and intelligence are used very effectively to plan and review the provision and to weigh its impact on students.
17. Trustees bring a wealth of expertise and passion to their role. They support, guide and challenge the senior leadership team in equal measure. The trustees fully discharge all their formal statutory duties and responsibilities yet retain a visible human presence in the life of the college.
18. The college operates comprehensive practices to keep students safe. All activities are thoroughly assessed to ascertain their level of risk and, in conjunction with students' behavioural plans, are managed scrupulously. This is done in accordance with the principle of students being exposed to carefully calculated risk, whereby they learn how to identify and minimise a wide variety of risks to their own safety. The college site is spacious and open, welcoming visitors so that students build confidence, practise contextualised communication and gain awareness of how to read the behaviour of strangers. All employed staff and volunteers are cleared to work with children and vulnerable adults through the appropriate channels. Records are meticulously maintained. Excellent and regular training ensures that staff are kept fully apprised of their responsibilities for keeping students safe.
19. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Outcomes for students are comparable for all identifiable groups. The staff population is diverse, and the proportion of minority ethnic students in the college reflects that in the local population. A range of activities give students a sense of diverse cultures. However, the college acknowledges that the promotion of wider aspects of our

multicultural society are less explicitly taught through the curriculum than they might be, and has appointed an equality and diversity adviser to address this. Students rehearse the principles of equality in direct ways: for example, they have taken the initiative to establish an anti-bullying group and are determined to reduce the incidence of bullying behaviour, which a minority feel they suffer.

20. An active student voice is prevalent throughout the working life of the college. Their opinions are sought, heard and acted upon. Students feel empowered to contribute to how their college is run. Surveys of the views of students and parents show high levels of satisfaction. Views are analysed and contribute to the annual review cycle.
21. Self-assessment is highly reflective, evaluative and astute. The entire quality assurance process has been transformed from an executive function to one that is structured but communal, inclusive of all members of the college community. The development plan is clearly focused on achievable and measurable actions to propel improvement. The quality of teaching is very well monitored and inspectors found this system to be thorough and accurate in its evaluations. Further rigour is provided by external and peer review.
22. The college has outstanding resources, both material and human, which it uses in highly imaginative, equitable, efficient and sustainable ways to the best benefit of students. This, together with sound financial management and outstanding outcomes for students, constitutes outstanding value for money.

Information about the inspection

23. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's vice principal as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
24. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires students and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Ruskin Mill College
 Learning types: 16–18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16–18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled students	98	38	60
Full-time students			
Part-time students			
Overall effectiveness	1	1	1
Capacity to improve	1		
Outcomes for students	1	1	1
How well do students achieve and enjoy their learning?	1		
How well do students attain their learning goals?	1		
How well do students progress?	1		
How well do students improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2		
How safe do students feel?	1		
Are students able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	1		
How well do students make a positive contribution to the community?*	1		
Quality of provision	1	1	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	1		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for students?	1		
How effective are the care, guidance and support students receive in helping them to achieve?	1		
Leadership and management	1	1	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1		
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	1		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of students?	1		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for students?	1		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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