



Department
for Education

FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment Summary Report: Croydon College

June 2023

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Background

Name of College	Croydon College
UKPRN	10001778
Name of College Principal /CEO	Caireen Mitchell
Name of College Chair	Professor Tony Stevenson
Type of provision	General further education with sixth form provision
Date of visit	15/16 June 2023
Type of visit	Intervention
Trigger for intervention	Ofsted – inadequate overall effectiveness
Further Education Commissioner (FEC) Team members	Nigel Duncan FE Adviser (lead) Pauline Hagen FE Adviser Anna Fitch FE Adviser
Location	Croydon and Coulsdon
Apprenticeship training provider	Yes
Latest Ofsted inspection grade	Inadequate
Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Financial Health Grade	Outstanding
Latest annual financial turnover	£30 million (2021/22)

Conclusion/executive summary

During the 4 months since the college’s Ofsted inspection (6 to 9 February 2023), senior leaders have actively responded to the identified weaknesses by implementing a detailed quality improvement plan and process. They have also made changes to strengthen the leadership of curriculum, quality, and student support. Governors are confident that recent changes to the college leadership structure have strengthened the leadership team’s capacity to steer the college through its journey of improvement.

Whilst progress has been made, the pace of corrective action needs to be increased to ensure timely improvements to the 16 to 18 year old learner experience and their outcomes. To support the pace and effectiveness of oversight, further work to highlight and prioritise key areas for improvement within the plan will be essential. This is also the driving characteristic of the Single Improvement Plan (SIP).

Governors work effectively with senior leaders to steer the strategic direction of the college. Senior leaders and governors recognise the importance of establishing a new strategy for the merged organisation that sets out key priorities to be achieved over the next 5 years.

Many staff and students interviewed were not able to identify a consistent set of college values. This will need to be addressed if senior leaders are to successfully establish a corporate culture across both colleges. The CEO must lead on developing a strategy to provide purpose, harmonise cultures, and reinforce values, which needs to be applied to all college processes. This will include contributions from across the college, together with consultation with all the key college partners and stakeholders. If constructed well, the planned development of a new 5 year strategic plan will provide clarity and a common understanding of the direction the college is planning to take.

Organisational progress since the merger between Croydon and Coulsdon colleges in 2019 has been too slow, particularly the formation of a single organisational identity through harmonisation of cultures and purpose. Recent changes to the leadership and management structure must be used to support unification of process and establish a collegiate approach to organisational development. It is evident that there is still work to be done to ensure the colleges strategically align, build on each other's strengths and work as a single organisation to address weaknesses and grow.

Recognising that the 16 to 18 year old achievement at Coulsdon in 2022/21 was extremely poor, in-year data forecasts a significant recovery during the current academic year. However, teaching, learning, and assessment, particularly at the Coulsdon campus, remains an area that requires further improvement. Senior leaders are working with teaching practitioners to create an appropriate whole college teaching and learning framework. This framework must address the need to build cumulative knowledge and skills, particularly for high needs learners.

Progress has been made to marginally improve 16 to 18 year old learner classroom based attendance and punctuality, and students interviewed report a more consistent approach from teachers and staff teams, explaining how they work collaboratively to monitor and act on low attendance. However, 16 to 18 year old attendance, particularly at Coulsdon campus, is still too low for too much of the provision and needs a comprehensive strategy to improve.

Effective practice at Coulsdon to ensure all learners feel safe whilst attending college has been strengthened through an increased visibility of staff (including senior managers), teachers more consistently challenging and confronting poor learner behaviour, and effective consultation with staff and students. Students interviewed at both colleges report that behaviour is respectful, positive, and tolerant between peers and staff. They understand the connections between British values, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and their responsibilities as students.

Links between the curriculum and personal education health care plans (EHCPs) have been reinforced through the assignment of learning support staff to specific curriculum areas. At Coulsdon, leaders have responded to inspection feedback regarding personal development, careers, and the world of work. There remains too much variation across courses in the contribution employers have in curriculum design and delivery. This needs to be improved through effective employer engagement to secure contextualised and industry-related course content, together with well-planned work experience.

The significant volume of data and information produced by the college needs to be managed more effectively to be accessible, inform decisions, report performance, and drive actions for improvement.

The college has outstanding financial health, gained over the last few years through careful management of cash, operating surpluses, and capital expenditure.

The capability and capacity of governors and senior leaders to address the issues that triggered intervention will be monitored through:

- the achievement of targeted improvements to 16-18 year old outcomes in 2023/24
- the successful and timely completion of the Single Improvement Plan actions
- successive, positive (reasonable progress or better) Ofsted re-inspection monitoring visit reports, culminating in an improved inspection grade.

Failure to demonstrate progress will lead to further FEC recommendations, and the Department for Education (DfE) amending and/or increasing the number of additional conditions of funding.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Governors and senior leaders must produce a Single improvement Plan (SIP) that provides the FEC and DfE with confidence that the actions will drive the changes needed to address the areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted Inspection Report, The letter of additional conditions of funding, this report's recommendations, and the college's self-assessment report. **Due by October 2023.**

Recommendation 2: Senior leaders must ensure that the strategic planning process includes a specific harmonisation strategy to foster a single college culture and values. This must involve all staff and governors and include appropriate consultation with stakeholder groups to receive feedback and gauge support. **Due by January 2024.**

Recommendation 3: The chair, governance professional, and CEO need to develop and implement a strategy for ensuring governors understand what it is like to be a student at Croydon College. This should include developing a link governor system and strengthening student representation at board level. **Due by October 2023.**

Recommendation 4: Senior leaders must maintain the momentum in developing and implementing the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Framework grounded on evidence-based practice and linked to a planned teacher development cycle. The implementation of the framework must improve behaviours within teaching and non-teaching environments, attendance, retention, achievement, and student feedback. Governors should monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to curriculum area performance throughout the academic year. **Timeframe: July 2023 to July 2024.**

Recommendation 5: An attendance improvement strategy and allied action plan for young learners is a priority and must be implemented from the start of the next academic year. High levels of attendance must be consistently achieved across all young learners throughout the year. **Due by October 2023.**

Recommendation 6: Senior leaders must strengthen employer involvement in curriculum intent, implementation, and impact, so that it is of consistent quality across all areas. Ensuring employers can influence and inform curriculum content and delivery through the codesign and codelivery of provision will be central to securing their involvement. **Due by December 2023.**

Recommendation 7: To ensure young learners acquire the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to make safe and informed decisions on relationships, to understand the dangers of extremism and radicalisation, and to lead a safe and healthy life, senior leaders must implement an effective and consistent application of a college-wide tutorial and enrichment scheme. The success of the scheme will need to be monitored regularly during the year and evidenced through student feedback and quality assurance processes. **Timeframe: September 2023 to July 2024.**

Recommendation 8: The chair, committee chairs, senior leaders, and the governance professional must undertake a full review of corporate reports and quality documents to improve the content and information available to leaders and governors. These need to be strategic, joined-up and linked to centralised single source data. Their impact will be measured through improved oversight of performance and as part of monitoring and challenging continuous improvement throughout the academic year. **Due by January 2024.**

Recommendation 9: Quality improvement. Governors and senior leaders need to review the college's self-assessment and quality improvement processes and procedures to provide a focus on key areas for improvement – personal behaviours such as attendance, punctuality, and respect. Reports need to be characterised by a sharp focus on the criteria in the inspection framework and the evidence supporting their judgements. **Due by October 2023.**

Recommendation 10: To inform strategic decision making, senior leaders must improve risk management to ensure governors are provided with an executive presentation

relating to key risks, actions to mitigate, the level of residual risk, and direction of travel.
Due by December 2023.

Recommendation 11: Senior leaders must ensure the use of a comprehensive college dashboard is routinely and systematically used for reviewing progress, monitoring performance, and driving organisational improvements at all levels of the organisation.
Due by October 2023.

Recommendation 12: To ensure sufficient emphasis on the progress at Coulsdon College campus is sustained, the support provided by the national leader in further education (NLFE) for the Coulsdon principal will continue for the 2023/24 academic year.
Due by July 2024.

The FEC team will conduct an intervention assessment stocktake visit to review progress in **January 2024.**

Governance and leadership

Governance

Governance structures are inclusive of all areas of the organisation. A current gap for a member with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) experience is being addressed with the support of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) scheme delivered by Peridot.

Governors work effectively with senior leaders to steer the strategic direction of the college and ensure safeguarding arrangements are effective across the college. Minutes and records from governance meetings are appropriate. However, reporting is less well developed with quality, teaching and learning, and performance reports contain too much narrative and an overload of granular data. These would benefit from being sharper, referencing single source centralised data, and being linked to the developing corporate dashboard. Governors acknowledge the need for clearer reporting with which to challenge and hold to account senior leaders. Without effective in year reporting, too much emphasis is placed on end of year reports which offer little opportunity for governors' challenge and scrutiny to have impact in year. This reduces the effectiveness of governance oversight, as governors are not always fully sighted on prevailing performance issues throughout the year. Senior leaders must improve reporting to ensure governors are given appropriately presented information through which to judge the current and future performance of the college.

Understanding the learner experience is critical to good governance and leadership. Governors' line of sight to the learner experience needs to be enhanced to ensure they have the necessary oversight of what it is like to be a learner at Croydon College. This should be done by developing a link governor framework and strengthening the role of the student governor.

The planned development of a new 5 year strategic plan must provide clarity and a common understanding of the direction the college is planning to take.

Leadership

Leadership is visible and approachable at both colleges. This is reinforcing the college-wide development of an open culture and corporate responsibility. However, there is a recognised element of non-compliance across the organisation that needs to be confronted by senior leaders.

Leading from the front needs to be reflected in all the college's strategic approaches and allied documentation, ensuring accountability is recognisably driven from the top and throughout the organisation. Delegated authority can increase ownership in leaders and managers, but this must be supported by an effective and mandated continuous professional development (CPD) programme. Continuing to increase the visibility of leaders across all parts of the college will support further development of a respectful and mature culture, and help eradicate any perceived 'closed areas' across the organisation.

A new management structure has been introduced since inspection, and it is currently too early to judge how effective it is. For the new structure to be successful in addressing organisational weaknesses, and to build on its strengths, all leaders and managers must fully understand their roles and responsibilities together with those of their peers. Leaders must expect their effectiveness to be regularly reviewed through achievement of personal targets and annual appraisal. The overall effectiveness of the structure must be evaluated at the end of the next academic year (2023/24).

Leaders must drive the systematic use of the developing dashboard(s) to increase the pace, confidence in, and focus on data-driven decisions and their ensuing actions. The dashboard(s) will support effective reporting and the provision of accessible in year corporate data, through which governors can measure and challenge progress towards senior leaders' personal and corporate targets.

Leaders' implementation of a programme of regular 3-weekly progress reviews at Coulsdon (6-weekly at Croydon) is strengthening confidence in forecast outcomes. This, combined with the use of Markbook progress reviews, is providing in year evidence that target grades in both colleges will result in improved outcomes this year. Curriculum leaders are working more effectively with teachers to identify personal strengths and areas for improvement, and mechanisms for measuring success.

Curriculum and quality improvement

Croydon College delivers a wide-ranging education and training curriculum from entry to level 6, including provision of standards-based apprenticeships, A levels and discrete high needs. At the time of the intervention visit there were 2,570 16-18 year olds, of whom 926 study A levels and vocational programmes at the Coulsdon campus. Significant numbers of adults study English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

courses at the Croydon campus. Apprenticeships are provided from Level 2 to Level 5, with the highest numbers at Level 3.

The annual curriculum planning process takes account of the needs of the communities served by the college, in particular areas with high levels of deprivation and low educational attainment. College leaders seek to respond flexibly to in year emerging needs such as ESOL for new arrivals into the UK, the need to expand 'first rung' qualifications to enable progression from Entry and Level 1, and the growing number of students with high needs. The curriculum reflects priorities in local and regional skills plans, and the needs of employers.

Key priority skills sector areas are health and social care, digital, and construction. However, curriculum planning does not consistently address the need for work-related activity for learners with high needs. More effective planning to ensure resources are deployed to meet the assessed needs of individual learners, together with a consistent enrichment programme, are a priority.

College leaders and teachers have established productive partnerships with employers, such as the Employer Reference Group. These relationships are helping to strengthen students' experience of the world of work. However, employer and stakeholder involvement in the design and delivery of the curriculum is inconsistent, tending to be driven by individual curriculum areas rather than through the implementation of a whole-college strategy. This inconsistency means that, depending on their course, learners' experience can be different in terms of their preparation for work.

The overall forecast slight decline in 16-18 numbers reflects the impact of a drop at Coulsdon balanced by a forecast increase at Croydon. Both actual and forecast apprenticeship and full-time 19+ numbers show growth.

Overall attendance is improving too slowly for 16-18 year olds. Actual and forecast reported retention rates are at or above national averages across provision types and age groups. Overall achievement rates are forecast to recover to around national averages with a value added forecast of 6. For Coulsdon, where 16-18 year old achievement rates in 2021/22 were extremely poor, senior leaders are confident that the forecast improvement by 23.1% in 2022/23 is achievable.

College leaders recognize that their approach to self-assessment and improvement planning is not effective in supporting or driving the rapid improvement which is needed. The self-assessment report (SAR) lacks a sharp focus on both the criteria in the inspection framework and on the evidence supporting judgements. This means that strengths identified by leaders in areas such as tutorial provision, personal development and a respectful learning environment were subsequently identified as areas for improvement in the inspection report. The quality improvement plan identifies areas where action and improvement at pace are imperative. However, there are too many tasks and actions in the plan which do not cohere into simple and clear overarching

strategies for improvement. This is compounded by the way in which actions are campus specific in many areas, with different approaches and strategies, such as the Coulsdon Big teaching and Learning Project. In some areas the plan does not have sufficient insight into the ways in which aspects of the tasks are significantly connected, such as the section on attendance, which does not take account of the importance of high quality teaching to improve attendance.

Clarity of accountability is imperative if governors are to challenge leaders and hold them to account for progress and achievement.

Systems and processes for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been reviewed, with the quality team moving away from an observation model in favour of a deep dive review model running throughout a revised quality cycle. This will enable swift and proportionate action, and leaders are confident that it will foster a culture of professional learning across the college. Leaders are affirming expectations and standards using performance management and individual improvement plans with clear targets.

The curriculum leaders interviewed were clear on their responsibility for standards and teacher performance, confirming that they work well with learning coaches and members of the quality team to address performance issues. There is a renewed focus on pedagogy and professional practice, with a new learning and quality framework being implemented from September 2023. The impact of this framework will be measured through a range of quality processes, including themed learning walks to assess the impact of teacher continuous professional development (CPD). The learning and quality framework will support the achievement of improvement targets in attendance, retention, achievement, and learner feedback. It will also need to ensure that tutors keep up to date with, and adapt to, changes in assessment requirements.

College performance data indicates improvement in the key areas of attendance and achievement. However, the pace of improvement is slow with marginal increases in attendance. College leaders are confident that the pace of improvement will improve.

Governors are confident that recent changes to the college leadership structure have strengthened the physical capacity within the leadership team to steer the college through its journey of improvement. The recent appointment of a new senior postholder for young people and high needs will bring additional expertise and experience to support key developments identified in the quality improvement plan.

Other areas where support will strengthen the pace of improvement are in pedagogical knowledge and understanding, both in leadership and teaching roles. The learning and quality framework must be based on pedagogical teaching methods which are evidence-based and align to the education inspection framework. This will help harmonize standards and expectations around the quality of teaching across the college and will help with the development of a culture and language of learning.

Student and staff views

Students

The students who were interviewed confirmed that behaviour, attendance, and punctuality had improved since the Ofsted inspection and that teachers were more consistent in holding students to account for lateness, non-attendance, and poor behaviour. They agreed that college staff, including leaders, were visible around the college, setting the standards for students in positive ways.

The students identified the weekly tutorial as helpful in delivering some key messages and information and that it is centred on relevant themes of personal safety, wellbeing, progression, and values around diversity and respect. However, they also acknowledged that the delivery of the tutorial curriculum is not consistent and that tutors deliver the content in different ways, using the session flexibly and allowing students to get on with work when the content has been delivered. Coulsdon students identified the effect of delineation of work and social space, and high staff visibility, which together have helped to address their confidence and sense of feeling comfortable in all areas of the college. Further development in this core value will need to be ongoing if there is to be a permanent change in student behaviour and organisational culture.

Staff

The staff who were interviewed confirmed that recent actions have materialised in improved attendance and student behaviour. They acknowledged that this had been an outcome of the inspection and included the helpful establishment of post-inspection student focus groups.

They identified further work since inspection to improve the achievement of targets and goals by high needs students through closer curriculum liaison and the allocation of specific support to curriculum areas. Task and finish groups involved cross-college staff in addressing aspects of the issues raised in the inspection report, and as a result collaborative, inter-campus work is evolving in several areas. Staff are confident that consistency in progress monitoring, aligned to the supporting positive behaviour strategy, will contribute to an improvement in student outcomes.

Trade unions reported that they work closely with the senior leadership team and the head of human resources on a variety of matters, and feel that communication is clear, open, and transparent. Senior leaders are visible to staff and students. Their main complaint on behalf of their members is workload, which they acknowledge as a sector issue. They credit the principal/CEO and the recently appointed principal of Coulsdon campus for improving staff morale following the Ofsted inspection outcome.

Finance and audit

Recent financial history and forecasts for coming years

The college currently has outstanding financial health. It usually makes operating surpluses, has a very good level of cash, and achieves enough earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) to service its debt and invest in capital.

Staff costs as a percentage of income are reasonable given that one third of the college's income is earned by Coulsdon College (a sixth form college).

Financial performance 2021/22

In 2021/22, the college delivered financial performance which resulted in a financial health grade of outstanding.

Financial forecast 2022/23 to 2023/24

The forecast outturn for 2022/23 is currently better than budget. This is due to higher than budgeted income, some of which is insurance proceeds relating to the April 2022 flood. Other notable variances are high needs income, adult provision and catering income. Pay costs are forecast to outturn lower than budgeted, although within that category of cost. Non-pay costs are higher than budgeted. Flood-related costs make up two thirds of this, with the remainder being the impact of inflation on energy costs, insurance, and other costs.

Senior leaders are concentrating efforts on maximising funding income; for example, ensuring that 16 to 19 students are on the correct bands by making sure that all delivery is included correctly in their study programme hours. In addition to this, the college could more forensically record and investigate its conversion rates. If senior leaders record numbers at each of the following stages and investigate where losses are occurring, student numbers may be able to be boosted.

- Application to interview
- Interview to offer
- Offer to acceptance
- Acceptance to enrolment
- Enrolment to first attendance
- First attendance to day 42.

Audit and risk

Buzzacott are the college's external auditors and RSM fulfil the function of the college's internal auditors. In addition to this, the annual subcontracting audit is undertaken by Scrutton Bland. Governors and senior leaders are happy with their audit arrangements.

The college's risk register is 70 pages long. While it is reported to work well as an operational document, it is too long for governors and senior leaders to be able to identify the top risks to the organisation and they are unable to see progress against mitigating those risks. Senior leaders and governors need to agree a format that provides governors with key risks, actions to be taken to mitigate, and the direction of travel.

Long-term sustainability

The college's finances are in a particularly good state, and the FEC team has no concerns over its long-term sustainability prospects. Even if the Ofsted result causes a dip in student recruitment over the short term, the college is well positioned to absorb any associated reduction in income.

Estates and capital plans

Use and maximisation of college estates and assets

The college operates from 2 distinct sites, one in the centre of Croydon and the other in Coulsdon. Both are freehold.

The Croydon site is around 3 acres, with limited outside space. Indoor space is 35,800m², of which around half is category C. The remainder is a mixture of categories A and B. At Coulsdon there is a large amount of outdoor space over the 11-acre site. The main building is 7,588m², all of which is category A, and the sports and performance centre (category C) is 1,434m². There are 2 smaller buildings on the site, one of which houses The Pathway Centre which delivers special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision.

The college's updated property strategy states that the Croydon campus is significantly over spaced, based on an appraisal in 2021. As the strategy identifies, this presents an opportunity for a radical reappraisal of how much accommodation the college operates from in the future.

Property management and investment

The college is currently working on several capital projects. Most are partly or fully funded by capital grants, or in one case by the insurance proceeds following the flood. Over the period 2022/23 to 2024/25, senior leaders plan to spend on capital (both estates and IT), with just under half of the budget for this funded by grants or insurance proceeds.

The property strategy details how much should be spent on each of the campuses over the next 25 years, split into 5-year periods. Underpinning this is the college's ambition to become carbon net zero by 2030.

Appendix A – Interviewees

GOVERNANCE	LEADERSHIP
Chair of Governors	Group CEO/Principal
Director of Governance	Principal Coulsdon College
Chairs of Learning and Quality x 2	VP Quality and Student Services
Chair of Finance and Resources	VP Adult, Vocational and Skills
Chair of Audit	VP Finance and Resources
	VP Young People and High Needs
	Senior leaders for Learning and Quality
	Director of MIS
	Director of IT and Estates

CROYDON CAMPUS	COULSDON CAMPUS
Heads of School	Assistant Principals x 2
Head of Additional Learning Support	Heads of Pathway x 4
Student Group x 16	Student Group x 7
Staff Group x 13	Staff Group x 7
	Head of Safeguarding and Wellbeing
Union representatives x 2	Union representatives x 2

Appendix B – Documents reviewed

Reference number	BOARD DOCUMENTS
B1	Access to last 12 months minutes and papers from board and committee meetings
	GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP
GL1	Update on progress made toward previous recommendations
GL2	Corporation membership details including governance structure and committee membership
GL3	Updated college risk register
GL4	Last whole college KPI report to governors
GL5	Corporation (and committee structure) membership with CVs and latest skills audit
GL6	Board self-assessment and quality improvement plan
GL7	Organisational chart/s
GL8	Any whistleblowing issues (to be notified during the FEC team's visit)
	CURRICULUM AND QUALITY
CQ1	Provider Quality Performance Table for each campus and combined
CQ2	Updated College Self-Assessment Report or position statement
CQ4	Combined College Quality improvement plan and Post Inspection Action Plan
CQ5	Staff and student surveys and allied action plans
CQ8	Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy
CQ9	CPD Strategy
CQ10	Any other quality improvement and assurance reports, including attendance improvement strategy.
	FINANCE AND ESTATES:
F1	Financial information
F2	FT Application data for next academic year
F3	Costed curriculum plan including contribution analysis by department/curriculum area where available
F4	Latest management accounts, including cashflow forecast for at least the following 12 months
F5	Brief details of bank loans and covenant compliance (if applicable)
F7	Estates strategy
F8	Details of recent and planned asset disposals (if applicable)
F9	Indicative budget for 23/24 if available
	Allocation statement
	Finance record 2022 and financial statements 2021/22



Department
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