

# St John's College (Brighton)

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	132016
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Montserrat Pérez-Parent, Her Majesty's Inspector
<b>Visit dates:</b>	25 to 26 November 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Address:</b>	17 Walpole Road Brighton East Sussex BN2 0AF

## Interim visit

### Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

### Information about the provider

St John's College (Brighton) is an independent specialist college of further education in Brighton. It offers residential and day provision to young people aged 19 to 25 and is part of St John's School and College. The majority of learners have complex learning disabilities, including difficulties with learning because of social, emotional and mental-health needs. There are learners with autistic spectrum conditions, Asperger's syndrome and Down's syndrome, pathological demand avoidance and other co-morbid conditions. All learners have an education, health and care plan.

At the time of the visit, there were 65 learners from 28 local authorities studying at the college. The overwhelming majority of students study at or below level 1. Around three quarters of the learners are residential.

### **What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

At the start of the first national restrictions, leaders and managers kept the college open to permanent residential learners. Leaders and managers maintained frequent contact with the learners who were studying at home. Depending on their ability, learners accessed live lessons online or completed printed resources with the support of their parents or carers.

After Easter, leaders and managers opened the college on a part-time basis to those learners they had identified as being more vulnerable without the college routine and resources.

Leaders, managers and teachers worked together to review their curriculum offer and make adaptations to their buildings so that all learners could return to college safely in September. Residential and day learners now attend lessons in separate buildings. A teacher and tutor form a 'bubble' with a small group of learners and teach them all their subjects in the same teaching area.

Leaders and managers had to reduce the number of practical lessons to adapt to the changed circumstances. They had to make decisions about which learners to prioritise for each subject.

Leaders and managers have prioritised final-year learners for the limited work-based learning opportunities available in the community, such as car valeting. Leaders and managers have introduced work-based activities that learners can do within the college grounds, for example gardening or working at the college café. Learners continue to benefit from impartial careers advice from an external provider, albeit now remotely.

Leaders and managers have started informal visits to lessons to see how teachers are adapting to the new way of teaching. Leaders and managers have identified that it is hard to keep learners challenged and interested when the same teacher is teaching them all day for all their subjects. Leaders and managers recognise that teachers would have benefited from training at the start of term on how to adapt to the new approaches.

**What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?**

Leaders, managers and teachers worked with learners' parents and carers to prepare learners for their return to college. They created a large number of different short stories illustrating the changes to the buildings and the new safety measures. The stories contained pictures of the staff who would be working with each learner and the rooms they would be learning in. As a result, learners are now able to understand the need for frequent hand washing and why staff wear face coverings.

At the start of the autumn term, teachers focused on reducing learners' anxiety about returning to college. Teachers focused on supporting learners to manage their emotions and behaviours in response to the new arrangements for studying and, for residential learners, living at college.

Each learner worked with a member of staff to choose the contents of a sensory bag. Learners can use this resource at any time, to calm themselves down when they become agitated or anxious. Managers reported that the extensive preparation they did to prepare learners for their return to college, resulted in very few incidents of challenging behaviour.

Managers talked about the thorough processes they put in place for assessing new learners when they could not meet them in person. They complemented the paper-based information they received from local authorities, parents and schools, with short videos of the learners. Teachers carried out more detailed assessments once learners started on their courses. Managers reported that their revised processes worked well and as a result they needed to make few changes to learners' courses.

Managers told us that returning learners had settled back into college well. Teachers reported that, while some returning learners had made much progress in their social and communication skills during the period of national restrictions, others showed a decline in their social skills.

### **How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?**

Learners reported feeling safe and knowing whom to speak to if they needed support. They spoke about how they learn to stay safe when they are out in the community.

Leaders provided learners, and their parents and carers, with guidance on expected behaviours when attending lessons remotely, such as dress codes and selecting appropriate backgrounds. Teachers created resources to help students safely manage their relationships using social media.

Teachers reported that learners' increased use of social media during the period of national restrictions has affected the views and behaviours of some learners. Teachers discuss in lessons how to scrutinise the information learners see on social media.

Leaders and managers have kept up to date with the new risks that have arisen during the pandemic, such as the increase in disabled people being groomed by county-lines gangs. Teachers help learners identify the intentions of those whom they meet online.

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