

St John's College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

24–26 January 2017

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too little teaching, learning and assessment are good or better. Not all staff use effective strategies and activities that meet the needs of learners with complex needs.
- Support and monitoring of newly appointed teaching staff are insufficient to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remain good.
- The strategic priority given to English and mathematics across the college has not resulted in a strong focus on improving learners' skills in these areas.
- Target setting for learners is not challenging enough. Learners are not sufficiently stretched to achieve their learning goals.
- Staff do not regularly record learners' progress over time, so that it is difficult to see what learners have learned or whether their destinations are sustainable or appropriate.
- Opportunities for external work experience start too late in learners' programmes. Not enough learners, who could benefit, have access to external work experience and this reduces their choice of activities and opportunities to develop employability skills.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners achieve greater independence; they become calm and more able to learn so that their outcomes improve.
- Well-motivated and enthusiastic staff are very committed and support learners' personal development well.
- The college has a well-developed behaviour management system and culture that promotes positive behaviour well.
- Teachers, therapists and external specialists work together well to deliver a varied curriculum and improve learners' outcomes well.

Full report

Information about the provider

- St John's College is an independent specialist college of further education for young adults aged 19 to 25. It is part of St John's School and College that offers both residential and day provision. Provision is provided on the main site and at E12 Learning Centre in Portslade. The majority of the learners have complex learning disabilities that include autism spectrum conditions, and behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties. Around half of the learners are residential, and half are day learners. The majority of learners work at or below level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework.
- Learners mainly come from across the South East of England with the majority from Brighton, East Sussex and London boroughs. At the time of the inspection, there were 93 learners enrolled on employability programmes. A new principal starts at the college at the end of February 2017. The vice principal is currently acting as principal.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the guidance, support and mentoring of new teaching staff so that all staff use better teaching and learning strategies that raise the quality of teaching and learning and help staff to meet the needs of all learners.
- Develop a stronger and more coordinated approach to the teaching, learning and assessment of English and mathematics across the college provision.
- Improve target setting by:
 - developing subject targets that are sufficiently challenging and are regularly renewed.
 - ensuring that all teachers and residential staff implement the overarching goals.
- Improve the access and range of work experience by introducing external work experience earlier in learners' programmes for those for whom it is appropriate.
- Further improve the reporting of learners' achievements and progress over time in order to clearly identify:
 - the progress made relative to their starting points.
 - the outcomes learners achieve and the destinations they sustain.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Managers have not provided newly appointed or promoted staff with sufficient guidance, support and mentoring to enable them to deliver good-quality teaching, learning and assessment. The numbers of staff have increased significantly to meet the needs of increasing numbers of learners, but the teaching strategies they employ are ineffective in too many cases.
- The strategic priority given to English and mathematics has not yet resulted in a coordinated focus on improving learners' skills in these areas. Staff do not yet have the skills to fully embed these subjects appropriately in sessions.
- Managers are not effectively reporting the progress of learners, so that it is difficult to see what they have learned over time. Insufficient information is currently collected about learners' outcomes. A new system to collect data has brought some improvements, but all staff do not yet use it and it is too soon to see the impact.
- Leaders and managers have worked hard to make the best possible use of the hilly college site. However, the physical layout of the college reduces the opportunity for people with mobility difficulties to access learning. For example, corridors are narrow and ramps have a steep gradient.
- The curriculum is broad and focuses well on the development of employability skills. A wide range of resources, including a professional music studio, a shop, a café, performing arts theatre and outside gym area, are used well to meet learners' interests and develop valuable skills.
- Managers provide staff with good supervision and staff are encouraged to develop new initiatives. All staff are inspired by their work and report they are listened to and valued. New staff complete comprehensive induction training before commencing duties, including safeguarding and management of behaviour.
- Managers develop good partnerships with colleges, employers, voluntary organisations and community groups that benefit learners by providing different activities and good work experiences.
- All staff are aware of the potential vulnerability of learners and all have had training in the 'Prevent' duty. Fundamental British values are discussed regularly in house meetings and within lessons. Racism is actively challenged and learners are encouraged to reflect on what they say.
- Managers, with the help of an experienced consultant, have successfully introduced a very effective behaviour reporting, recording and analysis system. A team of staff collect timely and accurate data that they use well to monitor and design successful plans that result in improvements to learners' behaviour.

The governance of the provider

- The governors and trustees know the college well, but during the recent period when the numbers of learners and staff have increased significantly, they have not monitored the provision effectively and, as a result, the overall effectiveness has declined.
- Governors hold high aspirations for learners, staff and the college. The governors have appointed a new principal and promoted continuity well by appointing the vice principal as acting principal in the interim period.
- The acting principal ensures that governors are well informed by providing the board with comprehensive reports prior to the meetings. Learners, parents and staff are well represented on the board. Meetings are well chaired and recorded, and actions are taken swiftly.

Safeguarding

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Governors and staff give safeguarding a high priority. Safe recruitment procedures are followed and all staff have annual safeguarding training. They are very confident in managing safeguarding incidents and the number of incidents is reducing.
- Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out on individual learners, on work placements and on each activity or visit that is undertaken. Monthly health and safety risk assessments are undertaken on the building, but daily checks on whether security procedures are followed fail to identify minor breaches in compliance such as staff failing to check security doors are firmly shut behind them.
- E-safety is taken seriously and residential and teaching staff have frequent discussions with learners. A new and more robust 'firewall' is in the process of being installed to further protect learners.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- In a minority of lessons, teaching and learning does not meet the needs of all learners. Too many teachers do not take sufficient account in their planning of the individual needs of learners. They do not allow the learners time to absorb and respond to tasks, and do not make good use of age-appropriate visual symbols and communication aids to help learners to understand and respond.
- A minority of learners make slow progress with understanding practical tasks as too often the emphasis is on task completion rather than learning. Where subjects are offered as work-related through internal work experience such as work in the café, the difference between a taught session and commercial/industrial practice is not always fully established so that learners are not clear about the purpose of the session.
- The large majority of teachers and support staff are well qualified, and receive significant amounts of mandatory training and updating in key areas such as autism, safeguarding and managing behaviour. However, many staff are new to the college or to teaching, and do not always demonstrate the specialist skills and understanding required when working

with learners with the most complex needs.

- Most learners have English and mathematics lessons, but the links between the outcomes of the initial assessments, the taught lessons and the other subject areas are tenuous, so learners do not benefit from further opportunities for practice and consolidation in other settings.
- Teachers do not always set sufficiently challenging targets and they are not reviewed frequently enough. Learners are not sufficiently stretched in their academic studies. All teachers assess learners' starting points in relation to their subject area, but not all combine these effectively with long-term goals.
- Teachers do not include the long-term goals for learners in the planning and implementation of sessions. The arrangements for establishing a base from which to measure learners' progress have recently been refreshed in relation to five core areas, that appropriately reflect a focus on preparation for adulthood, but not all teachers include these goals or regularly record learners' progress.
- The guidance staff and multi-disciplinary team carry out detailed initial assessments of learners' support needs, drawing on a range of information from schools, parents/carers and therapists. Their induction programme includes parents, establishing from the start the importance the staff place on their involvement in learners' programmes.
- In the better lessons, experienced teachers are skilful at engaging learners by working productively with learning support workers (LSWs). They provide challenging tasks and expect learners to rise to the challenge. In mathematics lessons learners, ably supported by LSWs, use teaching aids very effectively to consolidate and reinforce the connection between counting and coins.
- LSWs manage the behaviour of learners very well in classroom settings, often enabling them to remain in lessons and participate in a meaningful way. They provide constructive, helpful feedback that builds learners' confidence and resilience.
- The approach used by the most effective teachers reflects the values of equality and fundamental British values in their work. Learners learn how to take turns, listen to each other and value the contributions of others. At the end of an art class, learners were encouraged to talk about their own work and appreciate that of others in the group.
- Learners follow individualised programmes and have good opportunities to participate in a range of subjects which they find motivating, and which enable the development of a variety of skills. These include vocational options such as construction and horticulture, as well as arts-based subjects, employability skills and social development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners improve their self-confidence and they become confident to speak at the student council and at 'learner voice' events. Learners take pride in their work that is often displayed around the college. They become aware of their potential, and take satisfaction in their success in achieving accredited units of study.
- Learners develop relevant and commercially viable workplace skills. Most learners are involved in an enterprise activity with a successful example being the preparation and

delivery of vegan sushi to a local vegan supermarket.

- Learners have good awareness of how to develop healthy lifestyles and effective behaviour management skills. However, areas of the college space are too cramped with too many learners using the space and learners report they would like to be 'out and about' more.
- Staff provide good information, advice and guidance and start transition planning from the beginning of learners' programmes, so that learners are well prepared for their next steps.
- Attendance in classes is good. Learners are supported to be punctual, taking verbal cues from their teachers and support assistants.
- All learners benefit from the work of the behaviour support team which includes the college counsellor. A minority of learners have a valuable 'Positive Behavioural Support Plan'. For these learners, the plans have made a difference in enabling them to take greater responsibility for their own behaviour leading to better conduct and a reduction in the number of incidents that cause concern recorded throughout the year.
- Learners improve their behaviour, calm down and become ready to learn. Learners appreciate the weekly yoga and relaxation classes. Personal and social skills and understanding are well developed through a 'Pay it Forward' club where learners learn the value of undertaking acts of kindness.
- Learners report feeling safe and they know who to go to for help. Learners also know that there are potential dangers online and can articulate where they would go to for help in avoiding or managing this.
- Learners' development of English and mathematics is limited. Teaching staff do not embed these across all curriculum areas of non-accredited programmes of learning.
- Too few learners working below level 2 have access to work experience. However, there are good work experience opportunities for a very small number of learners working on the college pathway 3, level 2 qualification. In their final year, a very small number of learners working at level 2 study in a unit in an industrial site. This enables them to experience a realistic working environment.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners make good progress from their starting points and gain independence through undertaking visits to local venues such as shopping and leisure centres, dry ski slope, swimming pool, golf courses, restaurants and churches. Learners with complex needs make good progress in engaging in learning. For some this may take many months of patience and determination on the part of the multi-disciplinary teams and teachers, as learners gradually reduce their anxiety and gain the confidence and self-esteem to attend and remain in lessons.
- Learners achieve well and attain units and qualification awards as appropriate. These include vocational subjects such as construction, business administration and ICT, as well as skills for working life. Learners who attend the E12 teaching and learning space in an industrial unit experience a realistic work setting and improve their outcomes well.

- Most learners achieve English and mathematics qualifications over time, and all achieve themed entry level awards. Learners acquire good vocational and practical skills by working in departments of the college such as maintenance, grounds and administration. Level 3 learners achieve very high standards of artwork, using a range of media.
- Learners become more independent in everyday life, particularly in their ability to travel independently where appropriate. Many learners achieve beyond the expectations of themselves or their parents. One parent reported that the college had been 'the last chance saloon' but that the progress had been 'amazing'. Learners improve their decision-making skills, money management, and their sense of who they are and what they can do.
- Learners have good opportunities for internal work experience and, as a result, they learn how to prepare food, pack items and develop good customer care skills that prepare them well for employment.
- The small number of learners who left in 2015/16 mainly progressed into positive destinations. Staff collect destination data, but do not check on whether learners sustain their destinations.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132016
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	81
Principal/CEO	Karen Grist (acting principal)
Telephone number	01273 244000
Website	www.st-johns.co.uk/

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	3	87	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	N/A							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	91							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency 32 local authorities							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	City College Brighton and Hove Sussex Downs College Plumpton College							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of quality assurance, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Penny Mathers, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Joyce Deere	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Brennan	Ofsted Inspector

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