

31 January 2018

Mr Simon Charleton  
C.E.O / Principal  
St John's College  
17 Walpole Road  
Brighton  
East Sussex  
BN2 0AF

Dear Mr Charleton,

### **Support and challenge arrangements**

Our jointly agreed priorities to support improvement are as follows:

1. Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
2. Improve guidance and support for new teaching staff.
3. Better develop students' skills in English and mathematics.
4. Improve target setting for students to challenge them more, and improve the tracking and reporting of students' progress to see more easily what they have learned.
5. Ensure that more students benefit from high-quality work experience placements.

Following my recent visit on 30 January, I set out below my observations.

### **Actions taken to date and their impact:**

1. New, experienced teachers, bringing expertise in teaching and learning and specialisms in English and mathematics, have helped to share good practice and have also improved the range of effective teaching strategies and resources available to staff. Teaching and support staff have engaged well with coaching sessions led by your lead practitioner in teaching, learning and assessment and by other staff. This has resulted in improved teaching, learning and assessment, including staff using resources more effectively in the classroom to improve the pace of learning. Redesigned training sessions

and a focus on role-specific training has increased staff confidence and improved their classroom skills.

You have expanded your lesson observation team, and have introduced more regular learning walks. Managers observe teachers every half term, and give feedback to staff. Managers also carry out weekly informal learning walks. You feel that this has improved the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment. However, you acknowledge the need to communicate the feedback from learning walks more effectively, and to make sure that managers use this feedback to improve teaching and learning. Teachers feel that the formal feedback they gain from the lesson observations is more useful than the more generic feedback from learning walks. They were able to give examples of how they had used feedback to improve their practice. Your governors state that they feel much better informed about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment than previously. They have undertaken a series of paired observations during their visits to the College. They value the more detailed reports they receive which inform them of how well staff are teaching.

You have identified further areas to focus on this term to improve classroom practice. These include developing more effective questioning techniques to extend and check learning, the improved use of information and learning technology (ILT) to give learners more access to learning, and developing more challenge in a minority of sessions. Next month you are introducing new training on behaviour for learning to improve staff skills in promoting positive attitudes to learning. Teachers I spoke with stated that, as a result of training, they had good skills to deal with any examples of challenging behaviour and that they had received effective training in useful topics such as de-escalation skills. Teachers were able to tell me about how other training had informed and improved their classroom practice.

You feel that teaching, learning and assessment is now good in the majority of sessions, but you recognise that you still have more work to do to improve it further. You also acknowledge that you need to consolidate fully, and embed, all the new initiatives after a period of change.

We jointly observed a small number of lessons where students of different abilities were working. We saw that students engaged well with learning and were making progress. The large majority of learning support workers we observed supported students' learning skilfully. We agreed that, in a small number of sessions, the pace of learning was too slow, and that staff did not always check learning fully by using assessment techniques such as questioning. As a result, a few students were not engaged enough in their learning.

2. Since the last inspection, you have enhanced and improved training for new teaching staff. They now complete a comprehensive programme of induction training before they start teaching. This includes sessions on safeguarding and behaviour management, and focused workshops on teaching and learning. The training days also focus on the student's journey in the college, from their initial assessment on entry to achieving their destination. New staff complete online training modules in subjects such as safeguarding before they start teaching at St John's, and are given time before they meet their students to look at student profiles, education, health and care plans (EHCP) and to check resources. New staff have also looked at Ofsted criteria for teaching, learning and assessment. I spoke with two new members of staff who joined the college in September. They felt that this training had prepared them well for teaching at St. John's College.
3. Your appointment of a new coordinator for functional skills, as well as new, well-qualified English and mathematics teachers, has strengthened your functional skills teaching. Your use of a new online resource for entry 2 to level 2 students, and an in-house initial assessment tool for students below entry level 2, has improved the quality of your initial assessment of students' English and mathematics skills. All students are working towards qualifications in English and mathematics. For the very small numbers of students who have already achieved level 2 in these subjects, you make sure that teachers keep challenging them to strengthen their skills. You feel that students are now making much quicker progress in developing and improving these skills.

During your last training day, you gathered evidence of how teachers embed English and mathematics in their teaching. Teachers looked at the strategies that their peers were using and shared best practice. Every teacher now has a resource pack to help them use mathematics in the classroom. They use more individualised strategies to develop students' use of English. You have also arranged a 'financial independence' project after Easter where students will work with a local bank to improve their knowledge of using money.

In the majority of lessons that we observed there was a much stronger focus on the development of mathematical skills than during my previous visit. Teachers I talked to were able to give me examples of how they develop English and mathematics skills in their vocational teaching. We discussed making sure that teachers and learning support workers use every possible practical opportunity to develop further English and mathematics skills in the classroom. Although managers do not yet have a clear overall picture of the range of literacy and numeracy skills that students are developing in vocational subjects, you are working on developing a system to track this effectively.

4. Your revised process of initial assessment has improved your identification of students' starting points. As a result, all students have personalised targets

that are relevant to their aspirations and destinations. Most of these link directly to students' goals and challenge them well. You check students' targets at least every 6 weeks, and teachers and students gather evidence to show the successful completion of these targets. Teachers and tutors check targets to make sure that they challenge students sufficiently. Most students achieve their targets. Learning support workers have benefited from focused training to improve their target setting with students.

You are enhancing your progress tracking system in April 2018. This has the potential to improve the way that you capture small steps of progress and enable you to log incidental learning more systematically. You are introducing 'progress over time' folders for each student, and all students will have these by Easter 2018. This folder shows individual targets as well as progress towards achieving these targets. It also contains a record of the skills that students develop during work experience, and employer comments. You are very positive about this new development. You feel that it is manageable and sustainable, and will be effective in capturing the progress that individuals make during their time at college.

Governors receive better information about student progress than at the time of the previous inspection. They recognise the improvements you have made to internal monitoring systems. They also recognise that improvements in your initial assessment processes enable them to receive better information about the progress that students are making.

5. Your development of a new post of employability manager, as well as the appointment of a new full time work experience coordinator, has enabled you to increase substantially the number of students who have already been on work experience placements so far this year. You now work with over 40 different businesses who provide effective placements for students. You have heightened the importance of work experience and it is now at the centre of students' study programmes. You have made substantial progress developing a supported internship programme with the Royal Sussex County hospital, and you hope to introduce this in September 2018.

The students that I met talked to me with great enthusiasm about their work experience, and were very positive about it. They were able to tell me about what they did during their placement and the skills that they were developing. Governors are well informed about the work experience that students complete and are aspirational about making sure that all students complete placements. You acknowledge the need to record more effectively the progress that students make whilst on work experience placements, and have plans in place to enable you to achieve this.

### **Agreed next steps:**

- We agreed that it is very important for you to continue with the substantial progress that you have made, particularly with improving teaching, learning and assessment. We discussed the difficulties of making sure that your staff have the necessary skills to teach students with very different needs and abilities. It will be important that you continue to develop these skills with all your teachers and learning support workers, and emphasise the need for staff to challenge all students, and particularly students that are more able.
- We discussed the importance of making sure that all teachers and learning support workers take every possible opportunity to develop English and mathematics skills with students.
- I talked with your governors about making sure that they were providing sufficient support for and challenge of leaders and managers at the college. We discussed the need for them to have clear evidence from yourselves that all students were making good progress. We also talked about how governors can make sure that they know that all students are learning how to keep themselves safe, and particularly protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

As discussed, I hope that I can arrange one more visit, probably in June or July 2018, and I will be in touch with you in the next few weeks to plan this. I would like to thank yourself and Karen for arranging my visit and I would be grateful if you could pass my thanks to all the staff and students I met during the visit, for their time.

This letter will not appear on the Ofsted website but will be shared with the Education and Skills Funding Agency and, where relevant, the FE Commissioner.

Thank you again for your hospitality during my visit.

Yours sincerely

Andy Fitt

Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Dr. Len Parkyn, Chair of Governors  
Stewart Jackson, Senior HMI  
[Inspection.MAILBOX@education.gov.uk](mailto:Inspection.MAILBOX@education.gov.uk), Education and Skills Funding Agency  
[ProvStandint.MAILBOX@education.gov.uk](mailto:ProvStandint.MAILBOX@education.gov.uk), Education and Skills Funding Agency  
[FE.COMMISSIONER@education.gov.uk](mailto:FE.COMMISSIONER@education.gov.uk), FE Commissioner  
[fes@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:fes@ofsted.gov.uk)