

# St John's College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 132016

**Name of lead inspector:** Diane Stacey HMI

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**Type of provider:** Independent specialist college

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## **Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

St John's College is an independent specialist college based in Brighton, East Sussex. The college offers both day and residential provision for learners with a wide range of learning disabilities. Since the last inspection, the college has changed its curriculum and offers programmes that focus on the development of social, emotional and communication skills, functional skills, personal and independent living skills and employability skills. The college, led by a new chief executive officer, has re-structured its management team.

At the last inspection, St John's College was satisfactory overall as well as in all other aspects. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**What progress has St John's College made in improving observations of teaching and learning and what impact is there on improving the quality of provision and students' experience?**

**Reasonable progress**

The college has made reasonable progress in improving its observation of teaching and learning. Much collaborative work with other similar colleges and with external consultants has resulted in the college making improvements to its formal observation scheme. Three new posts, leaders of learning, as well as other senior staff have introduced and piloted new and improved observation practices. Detailed evaluations and moderations of initial observations have led to further adjustments to improve the process. Teaching staff and observers are fully aware of the new criteria for grading lesson observations. Very useful guidance is available for making judgements about how well equality and diversity is promoted in lessons. The college has recently started observations of teaching assistants. Overall, the scheme is much improved, although the process is still new and its impact on improving the quality of provision and students' experience has yet to become fully evident.

#### **Outcomes for learners**

**What progress has been made to ensure that there are effective measures to capture progress made by students?**

**Insufficient progress**

At the start of this academic year, managers judged the electronic system used to capture learners' progress as not fit for purpose. Apart from senior management, staff did not have direct access to enter and maintain appropriate recording of learners' progress. Managers decided to abandon the system. Over this past year, a new data administrator, managers and staff have worked hard to research a more appropriate solution. New electronic individual learning plans are in use, with clear

objectives against four main areas: functional skills; social/emotional and communication skills; independent living skills and employability skills. The college undertakes satisfactory manual analysis of progress recorded on students' individual learning plans. A more effective electronic tracking system is now in place and the college is currently introducing it gradually, piloting sections and evaluating its effectiveness. The aim is to have it fully operational by next year.

## **Quality of provision**

### **What progress has been made in developing an effective transition programme?**

### **Significant Progress**

At the last inspection, the college did not have a structured transition programme to help learners plan for their future. Transition arrangements have improved significantly since then and the whole process is now part of the college's integrated service. Transition activities now take place at the very start of the learners' programme when they have their initial core assessment. Parents and carers are formally introduced to the concept of transition arrangements at the start of learners' programmes. The college has recently appointed three transition coordinators who work closely with both therapeutic and education teams and particularly with personal tutors. They are also the key staff linking with external organisations such as Connexions. A clear transition programme, backed up with an action plan, details future developments. Sample workbooks assist personal tutors in what to include in transition topics. Work experience is an integral part of the employability skills faculty and is now firmly part of the transition programme. Expansion of the links with local employers now provides more external work placements for learners. The college has plans to develop business enterprises, such as a printing retail outlet, to assist learners further in gaining employability skills.

## **Leadership and management**

### **What progress has been made to ensure that learning programmes take place in fit-for-purpose and accessible learning environments?**

### **Significant progress**

At the time of the last inspection, learning environments were poorly furnished and equipped, and accessibility around the site both internally and externally was an area for improvement. The college has, in a very short time, planned, secured the necessary funding and implemented significant improvements to the learning environment. The refurbishment of most of the teaching and leisure environments is of a high standard. Teaching rooms are larger and open plan suites are now in use for particular subject areas. Rooms and corridors are well decorated and inviting. All learning and leisure areas are equipped with a wide range of technologies, such as interactive screens and a good number of computers. A new music technology suite and teaching kitchen are operational. The college has also made significant progress in planning and implementing physical changes to its site to make it more accessible for learners. A new internal lift has been installed and a new external lift will soon be completed to complement the ramps and provide access to a new reception area.

**What progress has the re-structured management team made in enhancing its effectiveness?**

**Significant progress**

Many changes have taken place over the past year since the re-structuring of the management team. The college implemented an effective integrated service where all departments work collaboratively to benefit and improve the learners' experience. New middle management curriculum leaders oversee the fully revised curriculum. A transition team was strengthened by the appointment of three new transition coordinators. Communications across the college have improved enormously. The greatest visual change in the college is the work undertaken to plan and secure funding to make the site more accessible for learners, the refurbishment of teaching and leisure environments and the purchasing and use of a good range of technology resources. Managers have a clear understanding of what the college needs to do to improve its provision further.

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