

St Mary's College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates		17–20 September 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- The Catholic ethos and mission are very evident in everyday college life through the strong focus on mutual respect, tolerance and inclusion within the diverse college community.
- Success rates for most courses are high, and many learners achieve higher grades than would be expected from their starting points.
- Much teaching is good and staff practise the demanding college values well through their interaction with learners; consequently, learners, irrespective of their background, aspire to improve their attitudes and behaviours.
- Learners are well prepared for progression to further or higher education or employment.
- Strong pastoral support and safeguarding arrangements ensure that the college is a safe and secure environment.
- Equality and diversity are promoted well and the college provides a caring, harmonious and purposeful environment for learning.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- A small minority of courses have low success rates, and a few have poor value added.
- The strategic leadership of the college does not have a strong enough focus on improving teaching and learning, especially in areas with weaker outcomes.
- Self-assessment at whole-college level is over generous and does not accurately identify specific weaknesses and areas for development.
- Monitoring and evaluation by senior leaders are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure rapid action is taken to address weaknesses.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- At governing body and senior leadership level develop a clear strategy to drive college improvement. Develop a more rigorous approach to self-assessment at whole-college level. Ensure that college quality improvement planning clearly addresses weaknesses in outcomes and in teaching and learning for specific areas and courses. Monitor and evaluate improvement plans effectively.
- Develop a plan to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that is clear and robust. Ensure that strengths and areas for improvement identified from lesson observations are analysed thoroughly and inform staff development planning at individual, subject and whole-college level.
- Improve the management of courses for those who do not have grades A* to C in GCSE English or mathematics. Ensure that learners are taught by subject specialists and offered courses appropriate to their ability and prior attainment. Ensure that the proportion of learners gaining GCSE mathematics grade A* to C improves to at least the national average by August 2014.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
------------------------------	------

- The overall proportion of learners completing their course successfully is above average. Within this generally positive picture however there are some variations. At A level most learners successfully complete their courses and make progress in line with expectations. Many subjects had 100% pass rates in 2013. Retention rates improved in 2013 especially at AS level and this contributed well to an improvement in AS-level success rates, which are now close to national averages. Learners on many AS-level courses make better progress than would be expected given their prior attainment. A few AS-level subjects have pass rates which are below average. Success rates for vocational courses are high. Most vocational learners make progress in line with expectations.
- In lessons, while most learners make the progress that would be expected, the more-able learners are not always given sufficiently challenging work to enable them to reach their potential. There are examples of good development of English and mathematical skills in subject lessons. For those resitting GCSE English, the A*to C pass rate has declined and is about average. The A* to C pass rate for resit GCSE mathematics, although improving, remains below average.
- The pass rate on the accredited 'Marist values for life' course is high. The Marist Catholic values are witnessed very clearly in all aspects of college life, but in particular through the caring ethos displayed by staff. Learners from different faiths and backgrounds are integrated extremely well into college life. Opportunities are available for collective worship, but participation is low, except for the annual leavers' Mass at Whitsuntide that most learners attend, irrespective of their faith.
- Learners have a good understanding of cultural diversity. Data show few significant differences in achievement between different groups of learners. The development of learners' personal and social skills is good as a result of positive relationships with teachers and other adults that promote confidence and self-esteem. Health and social care and childcare learners benefit from work-experience placements, which offer a valuable insight into the world of work. Few other learners undertake work experience. Learners' mutual respect for adults and learners from different faiths and backgrounds contributes very well to the harmonious college community.

Science learners develop good practical and experimental skills that contribute to their understanding of scientific method.

- Learners are supported well in their progression to higher-level courses with many learners progressing from intermediate to advanced level. A high proportion of advanced-level learners is successful in progressing to higher education, many learners progressing to prestigious courses. The overall standard of learners' work is good. Although some learners develop good independent learning skills many rely too heavily on instruction and direction from teachers. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary.
- Learners enjoy coming to college and this is reflected in their high attendance rates. The broad range of extra-curricular activities encourages learners to broaden their horizons and contributes well to 16 to 19 study programmes. A scheme through which learners mentor other learners is valuable in developing the self-confidence of mentors and mentees alike.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
---	------

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and contribute to the positive outcomes for learners. Most lessons observed during the inspection were good, with a minority requiring improvement; very few were outstanding.
- In the best lessons, teaching and learning are well planned and teachers effectively use a wide range of methods to engage learners and motivate them to achieve. In dance and movement classes, learners demonstrate good skills and are confident to choreograph a motif creatively within tight timescales and to given criteria. Teachers check learners' understanding well to ensure that learning is taking place.
- Learners are encouraged to take an active role in their learning. In some lessons, teachers take risks in their teaching in order to enliven lessons. In one lesson learners were encouraged to email in to college examples of advertisements which demonstrate social marketing, and the teacher used their examples effectively to evaluate and analyse their content.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge well and target questions appropriately. However, in the lessons that require improvement, teachers often talk for too long and do not sufficiently challenge learners to think for themselves. The pace of the lessons is not always matched to learners' needs; sometimes too slow and on occasions too fast to enable them to synthesise what they have learned.
- Teachers are confident and experienced and have good working relationships with their learners. The quality of resources to support learning is good and many teachers prepare engaging and informative learning materials. In most subjects, teachers use the college's virtual learning environment imaginatively to encourage learners to access learning resources from home. In A-level English, teachers use a 'blog' to keep learners up-to-date with current activities and events. Many courses have well designed workbooks that help learners to capture their learning and aid revision.
- Learners receive high levels of personal support and advice. Tutorials help learners develop their understanding of a broad range of personal and social issues. Learners with additional support needs, including dyslexia, receive good levels of support, with one-to-one support and additional mentoring sessions. The college provides sessions which effectively help those who are falling behind with their studies.
- Learners' progress is monitored effectively. All managers, teachers, learners and their parents are able to access the college's online progress monitoring system to view learners' progress and performance reports. Teachers and learners jointly set achievement targets and learners are aware of the progress they make towards them. A wide range of enrichment activities help to enhance learning and develop learners' employability skills. Assessment and feedback arrangements are good. Teachers provide helpful comments and constructive feedback on learners' written work. A range of opportunities to practice questions ensures that learners

understand the requirements of the examination. Most teachers provide learners with constructive oral feedback, which clearly identifies ways in which learners can improve.

- An online screening test takes place during the first week at college and the results are used to identify additional support needs, and preferred learning styles. However, the results from screening are not available early enough in the term to have an immediate impact on teachers' lesson planning to meet individual needs or support the development of individual learning plans.
- Learners without GCSE English or mathematics grade A* to C have opportunities to re-sit these qualifications during their time at college. However, many of the staff teaching English GCSE do not possess specialist skills and qualifications. Most teachers take opportunities to develop learners' English and mathematical skills within lessons but do not always target individual learners sufficiently to enable them to practice the specific English and mathematical skills they need to improve.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. Programmes of study for learners aged 16 to 19 are carefully planned. Induction is thorough and learners receive good information about their courses in order to establish each is on the right programme. Learners' progression to further or higher education is carefully explained and support in making university applications is good.
- Learners work together very effectively and show respect and understanding for one another. Many teachers promote equality and diversity well through the curriculum. The 'Marist values for life' course, part of the tutorial programme, relates closely to topical and often controversial issues. It promotes discussion and debate and develops learners' opinions, morals, ethics, spirituality and citizenship very effectively. Learners are enabled to make their own judgements and are encouraged to consider others' views and to show respect for them even if they strongly disagree. Learners enjoy their 'faith in the curriculum' topics that allow them to explore spiritual, moral and ethical issues related directly to their main studies.

Science

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which is reflected in the above average success rates for almost all courses. Most learners achieve higher AS- and A-level grades than might be expected from their GCSE results. However, success rates for AS-level physics have been low for the last three years. Attendance and punctuality are excellent. The grade A* to C pass rate for GCSE science has improved to above average.
- Teachers have an infectious enthusiasm for their subjects and pass this on to their learners, helping them to enjoy and achieve in science. The frequent practical lessons are interesting and challenging, and focus on improving learners' skills in experimental technique, planning and teamwork. Teachers are good at passing on to learners the 'tricks of the trade' of experimental methodology, for example, by demonstrating a way to check the colour density of several solutions in test tubes simultaneously.
- Teachers place a very strong emphasis on developing the necessary mathematical skills to enable learners to achieve well on their science courses, especially in graph plotting and manipulation of formulae, which shows in the good quality of the work of second year learners. In class, teachers often press learners to answer questions in more depth, encouraging them to explain how and why they have reached a certain conclusion, for example, by explaining the anomalous scattering of alpha particles through gold foil.
- All courses have well-designed workbooks that contain a variety of materials to help the learners capture learning during lessons and which provide the learners with a set of useful revision resources. Teachers often use simple examples from everyday life to help the learners understand complex scientific ideas. In a chemistry lesson, a teacher effectively used an analogy

of hills and tunnels to demonstrate the function of catalysts that are used in many industrial chemical manufacturing processes.

- Teachers mark and return homework to learners very quickly, with useful comments on what they need to do to improve. Misspelt technical terms are usually corrected but sometimes general spelling mistakes are not. Some learners' presentation is poor, with writing that is untidy and hard to read.
- Learners' progress throughout their course is closely assessed by teachers recording the scores of frequent and regular class tests and homework marks. Science teachers give excellent targeted support outside of normal class time to the learners identified as needing additional help with their studies. Learners are encouraged to assess their own achievements by filling in progress sheets and set targets based on what they feel they need to do to improve, although sometimes the actions they decide are too vague and do not have completion dates.
- Learners make good use of a well-stocked virtual learning environment which contains useful learning resources, for example, teachers' classroom presentations, links to animations and videos, and past examination papers. Teachers encourage learners to aim for higher A-level grades than their GCSE results have predicted. The vast majority of learners studying two or more A-level science courses go on to study a science-based course at university.
- In a few lessons teachers do not take into account the needs of higher-ability learners and sometimes teach lessons at the level and pace of the slower learners. Some of the classroom learning activities are not sufficiently well planned to encourage full learner participation and sometimes learners are overloaded with too much new scientific terminology in too short a time. Occasionally teachers do not properly explain what they want learners to do on a particular task and time is wasted re-explaining it to individual learners throughout the lesson. Sometimes teachers do not check that all learners have fully understood a point and move on to the next topic too soon. Teachers do not use the classroom interactive whiteboard enough to display interesting and relevant resources from the internet, for example, animations and videos.
- Lesson activities that aim to foster an understanding of equality and diversity are written into schemes of work and are used well in lessons. In one lesson, learners each gave a short autobiographical presentation which was followed by a meaningful discussion on the wide-ranging diversity of all their backgrounds.
- Learners value the wide range of careers and university advice that is available to them and there is a well-attended programme of visits and guest speakers throughout the year to help them make their choices for the future.

Social sciences

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. The quality of teaching and learning, and the achievement and progress made by learners is too variable. Although success rates overall are around the national average, in the majority of courses the proportion of learners achieving higher grades at A level is low. Learners' progress from their starting point is better than expected in AS-level psychology and economics but it is poor in AS-level sociology and A-level geography.
- In recent years, too many learners have not successfully completed their courses in AS-level sociology, geography and government and politics. The college has taken some effective actions to address the underlying issues in teaching and learning, which are now beginning to improve.
- Teachers make frequent use of questions and answers to check learners' understanding although this technique is rarely used to challenge the more-able learners. Too often teachers are prepared to accept and give praise for learners' initial responses to questions without getting them to think more deeply. In some lessons, where the group size is large, opportunities for

learners to work in pairs or small groups to discuss and explore topics together are restricted by the lack of space.

- In the less successful lessons, teacher talk restricts opportunities for learners to develop a deeper understanding of the topics being considered. A high proportion of learners taking AS-level sociology are accepted with low GCSE grades and teachers do not always meet the individual learning needs of the wide ability range of learners.
- Teachers do not always make enough use of interactive whiteboards to enhance learning opportunities. In many of the lessons observed, teachers used presentation software or whiteboard pens to present information but there was little use of video clips or other audio-visual material to stimulate learning.
- In the better lessons, teachers enable learners to take an active part in their learning by devising carefully managed group work. They allow learners to make decisions for themselves about how to proceed with the tasks set without overly intervening. For example, in an A-level geography lesson, learners worked well in small groups to investigate different methods of monitoring volcanoes and challenged each other about the advantages and disadvantages of each method.
- Feedback on assessed work is accurate, although not always sufficiently detailed. Teachers pay appropriate attention to correcting learners' grammar and punctuation. Learners' personal targets for improvement on their individual learning plans are sometimes too vague.
- Learners have access to good resources. Attractive and carefully designed workbooks are used extensively in lessons and provide good opportunities for self-study. The best examples include advice and guidance on the development of study skills. For example, economics workbooks contain exercises designed to support the development of numerical skills. Workbooks used in psychology help to direct learners towards deeper investigation of topic areas.
- Classrooms contain interesting and relevant contextual displays, often of learners' own work, and this helps to promote a strong subject identity.
- The college's virtual learning environment includes a wide range of source material that learners can use for independent research. For example, in an AS-level psychology lesson, learners were given case studies to investigate different theoretical assumptions psychologists make about behaviour. They searched the internet for additional information and presented their findings to the class using the interactive whiteboard.
- Teachers are very sensitive to learners' differing backgrounds and experiences and this is reflected in lesson planning and content as well as in classroom displays. The theme of equality and diversity is often tackled directly in lessons. For example, AS-level sociology learners looked at family life in different cultures and compared it to their own.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement. Managers and staff have agreed that 'excellence in learning' should be the focus for all staff and there is a supportive culture. Although teaching, learning and assessment are good there is insufficient focus and direction on improving them. The college has a framework to improve teaching and learning, but it is not effectively implemented. The lesson-observation process is overly generous. Many sector norms are judged as strengths and currently a very high percentage of lessons are graded as good or better. Inspectors' findings do not agree with this.
- Managers have not identified key themes from recent lesson observations to inform the staff-development programme and help staff to develop new techniques and approaches, for example, to assist them to better differentiate their teaching in lessons to ensure that all learners reach their full potential. Most improvement activities are informal and supportive and involve teachers sharing good practice and observing colleagues teach. In some cases the best practice identified is only satisfactory.

- Governance requires improvement. The governing body has considerable experience and an impressive range of relevant expertise but it is not sufficiently well informed by self-assessment and the lesson observation process to make astute decisions about teaching and learning strategies. The college has had an Acting Principal for most of the past 18 months. Staff appreciate his good communication and open management style, and he has been well supported by governors. The governing body and senior managers ensure a very strong focus on the Catholic ethos and mission and general religious education and these are key aspects of the strategic plan and the self-assessment report. Their monitoring of the implementation of these aspects, however, lacks rigour and relies too much on their own observation of college activity. New governors, staff and learners have a good awareness of the Catholic ethos and mission and are mindful of the needs of each other. Staff induction provides an appropriate focus on spirituality and the Marist values that pervade the college.
- Managers and staff have maintained high success rates in most curriculum areas. They have taken effective action to improve retention, particularly on AS-level courses where retention improved significantly in 2013, focusing on improved monitoring of attendance and very prompt action to chase up learners and involve parents. However, weaknesses identified at the previous inspection relating to lower success rates and poor value added on a small minority of courses persist.
- Heads of departments take responsibility for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their departments and take effective action in the few instances where they identify improvement is necessary. Many have developed productive links at subject level with outstanding colleges and schools. Performance management is supportive and sensitively managed in line with the college's Marist culture. However, the process lacks rigour.
- The whole-college self-assessment report is weak. Strengths and areas for improvement are not adequately linked to evidence. Strengths are over-emphasised and identifiable weaknesses overlooked. Areas for improvement are not always linked sufficiently to specific actions. Course level self-assessment is thorough. The detailed reports evaluate achievements and contain actions to improve courses and teaching. Progress on self-assessment actions is carefully monitored by senior leaders at robust termly curriculum review meetings. There are also detailed discussions about individual learners' progress and staffing issues. Heads of department work closely with their staff to improve provision. However, inconsistencies remain in the quality of departmental management and a few departments have not improved learners' achievements. The management of resit GCSE English and mathematics courses requires improvement.
- Study programmes for 16 to 19-year-olds are carefully matched to individual needs and relevant to supporting learners' progression to further and higher education. The college offers a broad range of AS-level and A-level courses and an appropriate range of vocational programmes, mainly at intermediate and advanced level. There are insufficient appropriate alternative mathematics qualifications to support the transition to GCSE over time.
- The college is inclusive and the promotion of equality and diversity is good. This is mainly because the Marist values course, which almost all learners take as part of their tutorial programme, promotes mature discussion about many difficult equality and diversity topics. It helps learners to develop tolerance and understanding of different beliefs, including the atheist view. There are good examples in curriculum areas of actions to promote equality and diversity, for example, the 'equality day' in health and social care. The college has an active committee, appropriate policies and adequate training. Data are used appropriately to analyse the performance of different groups.
- Safeguarding is outstanding. The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners; it has strong policies and guidance documents and comprehensive staff training is in place. An effective safeguarding team responds immediately to reported incidents. Sound judgements are made about what action to take and when to involve external agencies and parents. The college is a safe and welcoming environment.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

St Mary's College

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	Overall	16-19 study programmes	19+ Learning programmes
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	2
Social Sciences	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Sixth form college							
Age range of learners	16–18							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1,127							
	Part-time: 130							
Acting Principal	Mr F Dixon							
Date of previous inspection	April 2008							
Website address	www.stmarysblackburn.ac.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 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	14	N/A	65	N/A	955	6	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of traineeships	16-18		19+		Total			
	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 learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	10							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							

Contextual information

St Mary's College is a Catholic sixth form college situated in Blackburn. It recruits from the seven local Catholic schools in the area, and other schools in Blackburn with Darwen and East Lancashire. Unemployment in Blackburn with Darwen is above the North West and the UK averages. The proportion of the working-age population of Blackburn with Darwen with a higher education qualification is significantly lower than the national average. The proportion with no qualifications is above the national average. The Borough experiences high levels of deprivation, being the 17th most deprived Borough based on the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation. The proportion of young people in Blackburn with Darwen gaining five GCSEs at A* to C in 2012, including English and mathematics, was slightly lower than the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Ruth James HMI

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Acting Assistant Principal as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



Learner View is a new website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and provider inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013