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10 February 2017

Mr Michael Jaffrain  
Principal  
St Brendan's College  
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Dear Mr Jaffrain

### **Short inspection of St Brendan's College**

Following the short inspection on 17–18 January 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since St Brendan's College was judged to be good in October 2012.

### **St Brendan's College continues to be good.**

You and your leadership team have successfully carried out the recommendations made at the previous inspection. Additionally, you have overseen the building of a new teaching block, maintained the financial health of the college and undertaken a successful staffing restructure.

Leaders and managers conducted a curriculum review and then successfully introduced study programmes. You have embraced the principles of study programmes through a demonstrable commitment to ensuring that each student has a broad and balanced programme that prepares them well for life in modern Britain. The advanced graduate programme (AGP) and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programme each provide highly appropriate teaching and enrichment opportunities for the students.

Students continue to experience good teaching and effective assessment of their work. They receive good advice and guidance before they enter the college and during their study programmes. The vast majority enjoy their courses, make good progress and gain their qualifications. The swift and well-considered actions you took following your previous inspection have led to a greater proportion of students achieving higher grades. You recognise that further work is needed to increase this proportion still further.

Inspectors and your observers jointly observed and assessed the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and agreed that teachers have good classroom

management skills. They motivate students, manage group work effectively and give constructive feedback to students. Observers also agreed with inspectors that students could be given further or more opportunities in lessons to undertake activities that suited their differing levels or capabilities.

Students benefit from excellent care and support which help their emotional and mental well-being. For example, students receive good support from the chaplain and specially qualified staff such as the college psychotherapist. The tutorial programme provides well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural welfare of students.

In the course of their teaching and learning, teachers and students make effective use of the good resources and facilities; they produce thoughtful, up-to-date work which demonstrates a good appreciation of the expectations and standards of the course. Teachers relate specific topics in their courses appropriately to situations of modern life such as encouraging students to reflect carefully and with understanding about immigration or climate change.

Students enjoy their learning in bright, welcoming classrooms that display current, professional and educational messages that are motivating and engaging for the students; teachers use this information well in lessons to help students understand how they can improve their knowledge and understanding of their subjects.

Teachers assess students' work thoughtfully and provide constructive and helpful comments with clear actions which assist students to improve. As a result, students make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers plan lessons well using details of each student's levels of learning in their class. However, in some lessons teachers do not use the details as effectively as they might in enabling the most capable students to make faster progress.

Students enjoy lively teaching and make good use of the opportunities to learn on their own outside the classroom. The proportion of students on level 2 courses who gain English and mathematics GCSE qualifications at A\* to C is significantly above the national rate. Teachers develop students' communication skills well on advanced level courses.

Governors provide effective support to your leadership team. They have a good knowledge of how well students perform in examinations and their wider social and cultural development. They focus energetically in ensuring that the college maintains its ethos as a Catholic college for the community.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Students feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They receive clear information through tutorials about how to stay safe; distinctive signage throughout the college reinforces this message and reminds them about the wide range of support that is available from tutors and support services.

Governors and staff have received regular training on different aspects of safeguarding, especially those aspects particularly pertinent to young people, such as online safety. Staff know what their responsibilities are, and act upon them.

College managers have made sure that the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty are appropriately met. Measures include a detailed 'Prevent' risk assessment and action plan that identifies key risks and actions taken to mitigate risks. Students are made aware of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation during induction but their awareness is not developed sufficiently.

## **Inspection findings**

- Teachers and managers now have ready access to up-to-date information on students' performance using a new college management information system implemented since the previous inspection. Managers and teachers understand and use this information well to monitor students' progress, set improvement targets and plan lessons. They also make good use of this information when evaluating the progress of different groups of learners and the performance of their courses.
- Children looked after receive good support and the majority make good progress. Tutors and managers carefully monitor the rate of their progress. The small number who left their courses before achieving their qualifications went into employment or training.
- Students have individual programmes of study which provide clear pathways for their studies, and they understand the next steps they can take on completing their course. The first four weeks of the study programme are designed well to enable each student to develop and improve their skills for academic study and for employment.
- Students benefit from curriculum staff's good leadership and management of English and mathematics. Academic mentors provide effective tutorials and the learning development team provides well-managed online support that builds students' confidence and helps them to achieve their qualifications.
- Students on intermediate-level courses gain their basic mathematics qualification and move successfully onto GCSE-level courses. Students on advanced-level study programmes further improve their English and mathematical skills by undertaking research, surveys and audits. Their participation in extended projects, which requires them to analyse data quickly and carefully, develops their skills for work and higher-level study.
- Students' attendance at lessons has improved this year, although this is still slightly below the college's target. The improvement is due to new initiatives to improve attendance that include a system of penalties and incentives; students are pleased to receive letters of commendation and vouchers for good or improved attendance.
- Students develop their knowledge of fundamental British values well, such as tolerance, respect and understanding of differences, and of stereotyping in society through the religion, philosophy and ethics tutorial programme. The

majority of students enjoy the challenging discussions which are part of this programme, but a few students are less interested and do not engage.

- The college organises, and students benefit from, a wide range of learning events and workshops involving industry practitioners. For example, performing arts students receive insightful feedback on how they can improve their audition technique following mock auditions with a tutor at a local theatre school.
- Good links with employers enable students to gain appropriate work experience and employability skills. Students develop their practical skills and theoretical knowledge well through being mentored by the employers, volunteering with local charities or becoming sports coaches with local clubs. However, work experience for students on level 3 vocational courses requires further development. Currently, managers do not formally evaluate the effectiveness of the work experience as part of self-assessment.
- The governing body and its various committees are provided with useful reports and data and know the performance of the college well. A lead governor has been appointed whose role is to assess the effectiveness of governance. Governors' scrutiny of performance measures is robust.
- Teachers are well supported to improve their teaching following lesson observations through a well-planned programme of professional development, individual coaching and appraisal system.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers and tutors improve students' understanding of how to protect themselves from the risks associated with extremist behaviour
- teachers provide appropriate opportunities and activities in lessons for the most able students to make faster progress
- managers continue to develop relevant experience opportunities more widely and evaluate the quality of work experience.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Green  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by the college's vice principal as nominee. We met with you,

governors, members of your leadership team, managers, teachers and students. We carried out observations of students and teachers while they were working. We scrutinised key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to quality assurance, safeguarding, and the college's performance. We also analysed data on students' achievements and students' progress relative to their starting points. We also analysed feedback from students, gathered during the inspection, and from Ofsted's online questionnaires.