

Inspection of St. John's College (Brighton)

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 June 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

St. John's College (St. John's) is an independent specialist further education college in Brighton. In September 2023, the college became part of Ambitious about Autism, a charitable organisation that champions the rights of young people with autism and provides specialist education services. Approximately half of learners live in college accommodation, with the remainder travelling to college each day. Most learners have complex learning disabilities including autism, chromosomal conditions and social, emotional and mental health needs. Nearly all learners are aged 19 to 25 years old, with a very small number aged 16 to 18 years old. All learners are in receipt of high needs funding and have an education, health and care plan.

At the time of the inspection there were 53 learners enrolled on programmes from pre-entry to level 1. Learners study individualised programmes that include qualifications or parts of qualifications. These are typically in subjects such as English; mathematics; vocational areas, such as catering or woodwork; and employability.

The college does not work with subcontractors.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

During their time at St. John's, learners gain useful new knowledge and essential skills and behaviours that prepare them well for the future. They develop their ability to express their own views and opinions and become more independent. They rightly appreciate the inclusive and welcoming environment that staff create. As a result, most learners enjoy their time at St. John's and value the progress they make.

Learners are polite and respectful. They greet people who are unfamiliar to them courteously and appropriately. Nearly all move around the college purposefully and with minimal support from staff. In class they encourage each other to join in with discussions and answer questions. They have a very positive attitude towards their learning, appreciating its purpose and benefit. Most learners work hard in lessons and complete the activities given to them well. On the rare occasion where learners do become distracted, staff use a range of helpful behaviour management strategies that quickly get them back on task successfully.

Learners justly value the extensive range of high-quality opportunities that enable them to explore and develop their interests and talents. Many learners take part in community-based activities such as visiting galleries, playing music at local gigs, exploring their creativity in art workshops and helping re-wild nature reserves. These events enable learners to work with people they do not know and try out new things in environments unfamiliar to them. Consequently, learners' confidence and resilience grow significantly.

Learners feel safe at the college. They talk to staff about any concerns they may have and know that they will be taken seriously. Bullying is rare and where it does occur is dealt with swiftly and effectively.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are ambitious for learners at St. John's. They create a shared culture of collaboration and high aspiration where learners can be their best. They provide highly accessible and personalised learning programmes that are tailored to meet individual learners' needs, interests and future aspirations very well. For example, learners can opt to participate in more work-based learning or certain subjects, such as music. As a result, most learners are motivated and take pride in their achievements.

Staff assess what learners know and can do at the beginning of their programme thoroughly. They then plan learning activities that enable learners to build on these foundations. For example, in catering, learners initially master the basics of food preparation before moving on to more complex dishes. As learners' skills develop, they work with increasing confidence and begin to make their own menu choices. In this way, learners acquire relevant and useful workplace skills and knowledge.

Skilled and knowledgeable teachers explain topics very clearly in lessons. They use a range of appropriate techniques skilfully, including often using demonstration very effectively, to help learners understand new concepts correctly. For example, in 'get active' lessons, teachers demonstrate the importance of having a straight arm when bowling in cricket to achieve accuracy and power. This enables learners to swiftly master the correct technique. In this way, learners acquire substantial new knowledge and skills quickly.

Teachers and learning support workers know learners very well and work closely to provide highly effective support. They use assistive technology skilfully to help learners to communicate and learn. For instance, learners who are nonverbal use voice aids on electronic tablets to help them communicate. Multi-disciplinary teams, including specialist services such as occupational and physiotherapy, ensure that learners with the most complex needs receive very effective help and support. For instance, staff skilfully use widgets, communication books and Makaton to enable learners to communicate their wishes and thoughts clearly. Consequently, learners, including those who face significant barriers to their learning, participate in learning well and contribute fully to the college community.

Staff set learners challenging but realistic targets. These are informed sensibly by teachers' assessments of what learners know and can do and learners' education, health and care plans. Staff break targets down into achievable steps that help learners achieve their goals. Most staff track learners' progress carefully and step in quickly to help learners who fall behind to catch up successfully. As a result, most learners make good progress and those who take accredited qualifications pass their final assessments well.

Leaders track learners' progress carefully but recognise rightly that the current system is complex and does not provide easy access to information across all aspects of the curriculum. They have begun to introduce a new system, but as this is not yet fully in operation it is too early to assess its impact.

Most teachers and learning support workers check learners' understanding and recall of what they have learned thoroughly. They ask searching questions, observe learners completing tasks closely and check their written work carefully. This enables staff to quickly correct any gaps in learners' understanding. For example, in English, teachers use online voting systems to check learners' recall of key words that they previously learned. Most staff provide feedback that helps learners improve their future work. Generally, learners' work is to the standard expected, and in some areas, such as music, it is higher, with learners performing with skill, confidence and enthusiasm.

Leaders recognise correctly that staff do not ensure that all learners understand what they do well and where they need to improve. Leaders have well-developed plans to address this, but the impact cannot be assessed yet.

Staff provide a very broad range of activities that support learners' personal development exceptionally well. Learners take part in high quality, useful work-

related learning activities and work experience placements. Initially, many learners complete a placement in the college in areas such as finance, human resources and reception to develop their skills and confidence. Many then progress to external placements in areas such as horticulture, conservation and information technology. In this way, learners develop useful employability skills and gain a helpful insight into the world of work.

Staff ensure that learners understand important topics that prepare them for adult life well. They help learners recognise the signs of healthy relationships and what to do if a relationship is not appropriate. Staff talk sensitively to learners about the importance of consent and being able to say 'no'. They support learners to appreciate that acceptable behaviour can depend upon the context. Accordingly, they enable learners to apply correctly 'right time, right place, right person' when thinking about their conduct. As a result, learners form positive relationships with their peers and staff and are well prepared to take a full and active role in society.

Staff provide learners with useful advice and guidance on future learning, work and life choices, such as living independently. Learners also access impartial careers advice and guidance that is helpfully adapted to reflect their interests, support needs and stage of development. Consequently, learners are well informed about the options available to them and most move on positively when they leave St. John's. They often achieve greater independence, such as living in supported accommodation, or participating in community projects, and a smaller number continue their learning elsewhere. However, too few move on to meaningful workplace activities, limiting their ability to put into practice the useful employability skills and knowledge they have learned.

Leaders know what works well at St. John's and take prompt and effective action to address the identified areas of weakness. They work closely with the board of governors, who challenge and support them effectively. Governors use their wide-ranging expertise in key areas, such as safeguarding, to support leaders very effectively. As such, leaders and governors ensure that the college continues to develop and improve, providing learners with high-quality teaching and support that is closely aligned to their needs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Make sure that learners understand their strengths and what they need to do to improve further.
- Support more learners to move on to workplace activity when they leave the college.
- Continue to develop tracking systems so that leaders and staff have easy and timely access to learners' progress across all aspects of the curriculum.

Provider details

Unique reference number	132016
Address	17 Walpole Road Brighton East Sussex BN2 0AF
Contact number	012732 44000
Website	http://www.st-johns.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Karen Grist
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	16 to 18 October 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Roland White, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Debbie Collinson-Bolles	Ofsted Inspector
Mike Finn	His Majesty's Inspector

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