



St Brendan's Sixth Form College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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130563

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	St Brendan's Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Derek Bodey
Address of college:	Broomhill Road, Brislington, Bristol, BS4 5RQ
Telephone number:	0117 977 7766
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Chair of governors:	Geoff Barrett
Unique reference number:	130563
Name of lead inspector:	Janet Mercer HMI
Dates of inspection:	16-20 January 2006

Background of the organisation

1. St Brendan's Sixth Form College, based in Brislington, South East Bristol, is the "Catholic college for the community" and primarily exists to provide sixth form education for young people from the Catholic community in and around Bristol and Bath. It also serves the wider community by welcoming all who are happy to be educated within an explicitly Christian environment. While it is intended that all the college's work should be imbued with Gospel values, there are two areas of provision which are central to the college's mission: the chaplaincy and the certificate of theology programme, followed by all full-time learners.
2. Through events arranged by the chaplaincy, all learners have the opportunity to take part in regular acts of worship, including the weekly Mass or ecumenical service, as well as engage in activities that promote social justice. The chapel is a peaceful space at the heart of the college. The twice yearly assemblies involve large numbers of learners.
3. Learner numbers have increased from 1,016 enrolled in 2003/04 to 1,311 in 2005/06. The large majority of learners are aged 16 to 18 and are following advanced level courses. Eighty four percent of enrolments are at level 3. The college offers 42 AS and 40 A level subjects, and 6 advanced level vocational courses.
4. Level 2 provision has been expanded recently to meet the needs of a wider range of learners and includes vocational courses as well as GCSEs. Level 2 enrolments now constitute 14% of the college provision. A small, but increasing, number of learners take level 1 courses.
5. The college recruits from several partner schools in the Collegiate, but also from a wide catchment area extending beyond Bristol. The college has been very active in reaching out to learners from a diverse range of communities and faith groups. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic communities, at 16%, is approximately twice that of the local population. In many of the schools from which the college draws its learners, the proportion of pupils gaining five A*-C grades at GCSE is significantly below the national average.

Scope of the inspection

6. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further

- achievements and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good : grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good : grade 2
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

7. St Brendan's Sixth Form College provides good quality education and support for young people. Its success is built on a strong Catholic ethos and shared values which underpin all its work. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding and equal opportunities are effectively promoted and integrated across the college. Learners recognise and respect the views and beliefs of others and are very well supported in their personal and emotional development.
8. The good leadership of the principal and senior managers has successfully raised standards during a time of considerable change and growth in the college. The governors are committed to the college and its ethos. They know the college well and monitor performance closely. The self-assessment process is largely accurate in identifying the strengths of the college and actions needed to bring about improvements. Financial management is strong and the college provides outstanding value for money. College managers work closely with partner schools on curriculum development. The revised curriculum meets learners' needs well, but links with employers are less well developed.
9. Standards achieved by learners are good and have improved significantly since the last inspection. Most learners make at least the progress expected of them and many achieve higher results than predicted from their GSCE attainment. Pass rates are very high on many AS and A-level courses. Teaching and learning are good and learners' progress towards targets is closely monitored. Attendance and behaviour are good. Communications with parents and carers are good and there are regular opportunities for them to attend college events.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

10. The college demonstrates good capacity for further improvement. Standards have risen steadily over the past few years. Self-assessment is well established and most strengths and weaknesses are identified. In some curriculum areas, evaluation of performance is not always sufficiently rigorous, but the college knows where further work needs to be done.
11. Quality assurance processes are rigorous and ensure that all teachers are observed. The college has recognised that there is still a focus on teaching rather than learning in making judgements on lessons and is taking steps to address this.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

12. The college has made good progress in making improvements since the last inspection. Retention rates on vocational courses have improved and are now above the average for similar colleges, and learners' attendance has improved.
13. Management information systems now provide timely reports which enable managers to monitor retention closely. The revised management structure has provided a clear channel of communications between teachers, middle and senior managers. Curriculum managers now use value-added data to monitor learners' performance at course level. The college has enabled more learners to participate in the enrichment programme by introducing a common lunch time this year.
14. Progress has been slower in ensuring that teaching methods take into account the different abilities and needs of learners and in developing the provision and accreditation of key skills.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- significant improvement in learners' success rates at level 2 and 3
- high pass rates on many AS and A level courses
- much good teaching
- outstanding social and educational inclusion
- widening curriculum offer to meet learners' needs
- positive and caring Catholic ethos
- good tutorial and learning support and monitoring of students' progress
- effective governance and good leadership and management
- productive links with partner schools
- outstanding value for money.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- teaching methods in relation to individual learning needs
- effective identification of individual learning needs
- key skills provision and accreditation
- increasing employer engagement.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

15. The college has high expectations of all its learners. Realistic and challenging targets for success are set throughout the college, and progress towards achieving them is closely monitored.
16. Success rates have improved significantly since 2002. On level 2 courses these rose by 29 percentage points between 2002 and 2004 and on level 3 courses by 15 percentage points in the same period. In 2004 success rates at level 2 and 3 were above the average for similar colleges. In 2005 success rates on level 2 courses remained well above average, but on level 3 programmes they dropped by 2% and were in line with the national average. Areas where performance has declined have been identified in the college's self-assessment report and actions are in place to bring about improvement. Retention rates on vocational courses have improved since the last inspection, and are now well above the national average.
17. In 2005 pass rates on level 1 and level 2 courses were well above average and pass rates at level 3 were just above the average for similar colleges. Almost half of AS and A level courses had pass rates above 95% in 2004/05, and approximately one third had pass rates of 100%. The proportions of learners achieving high grades in AS and A level courses are in line with those in similar colleges. GCSE A*-C pass rates were significantly above average in English and close to average in mathematics.
18. The majority of learners make at least the progress expected relative to their prior attainment. Performance data for the last 2 years show that in 11 AS and A level subjects learners made significantly better progress than predicted from their GCSE grades. These include several subjects with relatively high numbers of learners, for example sociology, business studies, law, media studies, geography and critical thinking. There was a small number of subjects where learners did not achieve the grades expected. In most cases these were specialist subjects taken by small numbers of learners, for example, classical civilisation, ancient history and dance.
19. Learners with higher levels of attainment at GCSE extend their work through the honours programme, taking additional qualifications, for example, AS critical thinking. Pass rates in this subject in 2005 were very high at 98% and value-added data show that learners taking AS critical thinking achieved results well above those predicted from their GCSE attainment.
20. Standards of learners' work are good. Inspectors saw a broad range of high quality practical work in art and design. Learners in a GCSE English lesson were developing good use of complex language skills. In class discussions

learners demonstrated good critical and analytical skills. Communication skills are developed through class and course work, but there is little formal accreditation of key skills. Considerable emphasis is placed on the personal and emotional development of learners, through the tutorial programme and the certificate of theology course.

21. Learners are well motivated and speak positively of their experience of the college and enjoy their work. Attendance at lessons is high and has improved by seven percentage points between 2003/04 and 2004/05. Attendance rates between September and December 2005 were 88%.
22. Almost three quarters of level 3 learners progressed to further or higher education or employment, and 40% of learners completing level 2 courses continued their studies at the college. The college does not have complete destination data for all learners. The Connexions services in the locality have not provided comprehensive data for all St Brendan's learners.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

23. Lesson observations carried out by inspectors support the college's own judgement that teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned to meet course requirements and most learners are motivated and work hard during lessons. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work and meeting deadlines so that progress towards their learning targets is maintained. Very good relationships exist between teachers and learners which foster a climate of mutual respect. Teachers are well qualified and demonstrate good subject knowledge.
24. High quality resources and equipment support teaching and learning and information and learning technology (ILT) is used effectively within lessons. In the best lessons, teachers devised a varied range of activities to maintain learners' interest and checked that learners understood key issues. Learners made a positive contribution and extended their knowledge through questioning and discussion.
25. However, learning was less effective when teachers did not adapt approaches or activities to match the needs of a significant number of learners. Although schemes of work identify relevant key skills in some subject areas, there is insufficient attention given to key skills development within lessons.
26. Lesson observations carried out by college staff have identified the need to raise staff awareness of learning strategies and teaching methods to enhance learning. Feedback given to individual teachers clearly identifies some aspects of teaching and learning which need improvement. However, key aspects of teaching and learning across curriculum areas have not been sufficiently analysed to inform staff development priorities and planning.

27. The policies and procedures for the assessment and internal verification of learners' work are good. Subject teachers conduct regular formal reviews which assess progress against the learners' minimum target grades. Feedback on written work enables learners to make improvements.
28. Learners of all abilities receive good support through, for example, in-class support, the learning support workshops and subject-specific workshops. All subjects offer additional workshops and the college endeavours to ensure that learners have ready access to these. Take-up is sometimes disappointing. Learning support provision has expanded rapidly and some 164 learners so far this year are receiving support. All learners on level 1 and level 2 courses are receiving appropriate support. A number of level 3 learners are receiving good support with study skills and time-management, and learners with dyslexia speak positively of the assistance they are given. Initial assessment arrangements are not always effective in accurately identifying additional learning needs or appropriate key skills levels for learners. The college is not yet able to say how many of the level 3 learners identified as potentially in need of support have actually taken it up.
29. The curriculum is good overall with some outstanding features, such as the wide range of largely academic level 3 courses. Productive links with schools in the Collegiate have led to significant improvements in the curriculum offer. A wider range of level 2 courses, with an appropriate vocational bias, has been introduced alongside a small, relevant set of level 1 courses. Learners are able to progress from one course to another within the college. The college is working actively with its partners to establish greater coherence in the 14-19 curriculum pathways. The subject-based links forged within the Collegiate provide a good foundation for this work. There is scope to enhance links with employers, building on the pockets of good practice in subjects such as business studies, arts and media.
30. A core curriculum ensures that all learners follow a tutorial programme and study theology. Key skills provision has been viewed as a low priority by both staff and learners and remains underdeveloped. A key skills week has been organised for February to raise awareness amongst staff and learners. While feedback from learners has led to a few curriculum modifications, steps are being taken to improve the extent and consistency with which their views are sought across the curriculum.
31. The most able level 3 learners follow a demanding honours programme, which develops their critical and analytical skills. Gifted and talented learners are well catered for in some curriculum areas.
32. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. Managers have been very active in reaching out to the wider community and recruiting more learners from denominations and faiths other than Catholicism. Sixteen percent of learners are from minority ethnic groups, which is twice the rate of the local community.

33. Around half of the learners participate in a broad ranging enrichment programme, including sports and arts activities. A similar proportion contributes to various aspects of the college's work and support for the community; for example through organising community events and charitable fundraising.
34. Guidance and support at St Brendan's takes place within a community which "supports each individual as a unique creation of God". The respectful and friendly relationships between staff and young people have created a safe and harmonious atmosphere within which learning and personal development flourish.
35. Learners receive very good information, advice and guidance at every stage in their journey to and through St. Brendan's. Good links with partner schools ensure that many learners are well acquainted with the college before they enrol and induction arrangements help them to settle in quickly. Exceptional care is taken to ensure that learners make good internal progression from year one to year two courses. An effective careers education programme is well tailored to the differing needs of learners progressing to higher education and employment.
36. Following a recent re-organisation, tutorials are now delivered by a team of experienced and skilled specialist tutors. They are developing good systems for supporting learners though it is too early to judge the full impact of these. Staff follow up poor attendance and under-achievement and work in partnership with parents in supporting individual learners. The tutorial programme covers a wide range of topics and enables learners to develop very good levels of awareness of issues relating to their physical and emotional health and personal safety.
37. Teachers and tutors review academic progress closely. Personal tutors skilfully build up learners' confidence during one-to-one tutorials by drawing out strengths and agreeing and recording with the learner action points for further improvement. Learners value these sessions though the timing of individual tutorials does not always make productive use of the time of those not being interviewed and this affects attendance.
38. Young people have a good range of people to turn to for personal support including the lay chaplain, the Lassalian team and a counsellor. Good support for personal, moral and spiritual development is also provided by the certificate in theology course taken by all learners. The course is carefully planned to take account of differences in ability, culture and faith. Teachers skilfully create an atmosphere within which learners engage in reflection and discussion on ethical and spiritual issues.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

39. Leadership and management are good. The governors, principal and senior management have set a clear strategic direction for the college. The college's ethos and shared values are clearly expressed in the mission statement, other documentation, publicity material and at open evenings. Governors are supportive of the ethos and monitor its implementation effectively. Strategic decisions take account of the distinctive mission. There is a strong emphasis on valuing the individual throughout the work of the college. Governors discharge their responsibilities effectively. They are well informed about achievement and standards, and receive regular and timely reports on progress made towards priorities in the college development plan.
40. The senior management team has successfully brought about improvements during a period of significant change in the college. Success rates at level 2 and 3 have improved from below average in 2002 to meet or exceed this figure. Attendance has also improved since the introduction of an electronic registration system.
41. Communications are effective and most curriculum areas are well managed. An appropriate cross-college quality assurance framework is in place and this has led to improvement. However, there is some inconsistency in its implementation across the college. The evaluations of leadership and management and success rates are generally accurate but college teams are not yet evaluating their contribution to the college mission. Procedures are now in place to allow senior managers to monitor curriculum area self-assessment reports and action plans more systematically but the result of these processes is not yet evident. The college has largely recognised accurately areas for improvement as well as its strengths.
42. The accuracy of MIS data has improved since the last inspection and the improved presentation of internal data has allowed the college to monitor performance against national benchmarks.
43. The college complies with child protection, race relations and disability and discrimination legislation. Monitoring of the achievements of learners from minority ethnic groups is in its early stages and findings have not yet had an impact on teaching and learning.
44. All teachers have teaching qualifications or are undertaking teacher training. Learning resources are good and effectively utilised. In the past two years there has been significant investment in ILT resources and training. Refurbishment of accommodation and the opening of a new building have improved the learning environment. Financial planning, management and control are good. The college has exceeded its target for recruiting learners but has educated them within the budget and provides outstanding value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, for courses completed between 2002 to 2004, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

College Cohort Performance (2001/02-2003/04) - Success Rate - Level 1 long

Table S-1: College success rate for level 1 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	01/02	480	1	60	-59	0		51	
	02/03	1,320	26	60	-34	3	33	55	
	03/04	0		67		0		57	
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	0		69		0			
	02/03	0		66		0			
	03/04	0		70		0			
NVQs	01/02	0				0			
	02/03	0				0			
	03/04	0				0			
Other	01/02	480	1	58	-58	0		52	
	02/03	1,320	26	59	-33	3	33	55	
	03/04	0		66		0		58	

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, for courses completed between 2002 to 2004, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Table S-2: College success rate for level 2 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	01/02	627	54	67	-14	1	0	50	
	02/03	556	65	70	-5	0		52	
	03/04	1,526	83	74	9	7	100	55	45
GCSEs	01/02	560	60	72	-12	0		56	
	02/03	417	71	74	-3	0		58	
	03/04	364	79	77	2	3	100	62	
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	0		67		0			
	02/03	5	80	68		0			
	03/04	12	92	73	19	0			
NVQs	01/02	0		53		0		50	
	02/03	0		61		0		54	
	03/04	0		61		0		58	
Other	01/02	67	0	49	-49	1	0	48	
	02/03	134	45	58	-13	0		49	
	03/04	1,150	85	68	17	4	100	52	

Chart S-2: College success rate for level 2 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, for courses completed between 2002 to 2004, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

College Cohort Performance (2001/02 - 2003/04) - Success Rate - Level 3 long

Table S-3: College success rate for level 3 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	01/02	3,445	67	78	-11	19	37	52	-15
	02/03	3,154	79	79	-1	5	0	57	
	03/04	3,290	82	80	2	10	50	58	-6
A/A2 levels	01/02	901	91	88	3	9	67	70	-4
	02/03	992	94	89	4	2	0	73	
	03/04	1,023	93	91	2	6	67	75	-8
AS levels	01/02	2,524	59	74	-16	4	25	50	
	02/03	2,088	73	75	-3	1	0	55	
	03/04	2,115	79	76	3	3	0	52	
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	20	35	54	-19	0			
	02/03	76	45	63	-18	0			
	03/04	142	42	68	-26	1	100		
NVQs	01/02	0				0		48	
	02-03	0				0		46	
	03/04	0				0		48	
Other	01/02	0		44		6	0	49	-49
	02/03	0		63		2	0	55	
	03/04	10	90	63	27	0		52	