



# St John's College



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published June 2006	Provider reference 50026
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## Basic information about the college

Name of college:	St John's College
Type of college:	Independent, day/residential, specialist
Principal:	Don Kent
Address of college:	Walpole Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 0AF
Telephone number:	01273 244029
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Chair of governors:	Richard Stewart
Unique reference number:	50026
Name of lead inspector:	Charlie Henry, HMI
Dates of inspection:	8-11 May 2006

## Background of the organisation

1. St John's College is an independent specialist college providing further education (FE). The college is part of the St John's School and College, which has charitable status. It aims to provide a transitional phase for learners between the ages of 16 and 22 who have complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they may be enabled to become increasingly independent citizens. This is the first time that the college has been inspected.
2. Currently, there are 68 young people on role at the college, 56 male and 12 female. Twenty four of these are aged 19-22 and are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Education and Learning Wales (ELWa). Learners aged 16-19 years are funded by their local authorities. One learner aged under 19 is funded by the LSC for a residential placement. All of the other LSC funded learners attend on a day basis. Most learners are from white British ethnic backgrounds; four learners have English as a second language.
3. The college is divided into three faculties: LINC (living, interaction and communication) for young adults with more severe autistic spectrum disorders; Life Skills where learners with severe learning difficulties focus more exclusively on independent living skills; and AVOC (academic and vocational studies) where learners have more moderate difficulties.
4. The college's mission states that it is 'committed to providing relevant, challenging, and differentiated opportunities across the waking curriculum whereby the programme is seen as a critical element in increasing knowledge, skills and competence, thus creating a climate for positive behaviour and improved self esteem. Young people leaving St John's will demonstrate increased personal responsibility, social competence and intellectual curiosity'.

## Scope of the inspection

5. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

## Scope of curricular provision

6. Learners funded by the LSC attend the college for up to three years. Each student has an individual learning plan (ILP) containing a number of learning targets to help them increase their skills and independence in preparation for their next step after leaving college. Individualised programmes are then constructed from a wide selection of courses, as a means of achieving their personal targets.
7. Many of the learners spend part of their time at local general FE colleges and also participate in a range of work enterprise activities. They have the opportunity to undertake nationally recognised pre-vocational and vocational awards, including in information and communication technology, general certificates in education (GCSE) and leisure courses. Learners are also able to participate in a range of enrichment activities that take place after the end of the normal college day.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: grade 3
Achievements and standards	Satisfactory: grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: grade 3

*Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.*

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: grade 3

8. Learners make satisfactory progress overall. They make good progress in their personal development, especially in their social skills and their ability to express themselves. Learners make satisfactory progress towards achieving the challenging targets set within their ILPs. These targets are not consistently used in all lessons. Achievement in other areas of learners' individual programmes is satisfactory. There is insufficient baseline assessment and recording of achievements.
9. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Staff plan interesting lessons that motivate learners well. Teamwork by all staff is a particular strength. A detailed and comprehensive initial assessment is used to identify targets within ILPs. The use of these targets and the recording of progress are inconsistent.
10. The range of courses is good. Each learner has an individualised programme that meets their needs and interests well, including vocational and enterprise activities. The approach to social and educational inclusion is satisfactory. There are rigorous procedures to promote the safety and wellbeing of individual learners. Relationships between learners and staff demonstrate an ethos of respect and the college demonstrates a clear wish to meet each learner's needs. However, the requirements of equalities and diversity legislation are not adequately met.
11. The quality of care, support and guidance is good. Behaviour management and social skills development are particularly good. Learners comment on how well staff support them to deal with any difficulties that arise. The induction programme is effective and transition planning is detailed and helpful. There is appropriate specialist therapy and nursing support.
12. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has made steady improvement since being established as a specialist college two years ago. Day-to-day management is good. Quality improvement systems do not yet ensure consistency in important aspects of learners' achievements and teaching and learning. Self-assessment is satisfactory. Governors and trustees support the college well. The college has sound financial planning and provides satisfactory value for money.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: grade 3

13. The college demonstrates satisfactory capacity for further improvement. All managers and staff are committed to improving provision for learners. Since receiving its independent college status in 2004, actions taken by the senior management team have enabled the college to make steady improvement. Key aspects of quality assurance are, however, underdeveloped and have yet to

demonstrate a sufficient effect on learners' achievements and the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report is over generous in its evaluation. Along with strengths, it identifies 20 areas for improvement; this long list has contributed to the focus and priority for action becoming too diluted. The one year strategic plan and three year development plan are monitored regularly but are not fully coherent or clearly linked.

## Key strengths of the college

### *Strengths*

- personal development
- the management of difficult and challenging behaviour
- relevant and individualised curriculum opportunities.

## Areas for improvement

### *The college should address:*

- the inconsistent use and monitoring of learners' targets
- quality improvement based on careful analysis of learners' achievements and the quality of teaching and learning
- compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA).



## Main findings

### Achievements and standards

Satisfactory: grade 3

14. Learners make satisfactory progress overall. They make good progress in their personal development. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the broad range of learners' achievements. However, it does not sufficiently evaluate the effect of the inconsistent use of learning targets and the recording of these achievements. There are no significant differences in the progress made by different groups of learners.
15. Learners develop well their ability to express themselves. They increase in confidence and in how they deal with situations that they have previously found to be difficult. Many learners recognise the substantial improvements they make in their behaviour, especially in the way they relate to one another. For some learners, these improvements mean that they have been able to sustain a placement at the college whereas previous school and college placements have broken down. Parents and carers also comment very positively on these important aspects of progress.
16. Broader aspects of progress, including vocational and independent living skills, are satisfactory. However, the extent of their achievements is not sufficiently recognised and recorded because there is insufficient baseline assessment of what they can do as they begin an area of work. Learners gain a range of skills in vocational subjects, including horticulture, catering and art and craft. For example, learners help prepare high quality meals within the weekly Scrummies restaurant, to which staff and visitors are invited. They practice valuable skills, including food preparation and other kitchen work and serving at tables. After leaving college, some learners move on to work in the hotel and catering industry. Learners are successful in a range of nationally recognised awards that contribute to their progression to more advanced courses and to raising their self-esteem and feelings of achievement.
17. Learners make satisfactory progress towards achieving the challenging targets that are set in their ILPs. Review reports demonstrate that learners achieve many of these targets. However, there is inconsistent focus on these targets in some lessons and insufficiently rigorous monitoring of all targets and this restricts progress.
18. Learners' motivation and enjoyment increase well through the practical nature of much of what they learn. They make good progress in the skills and understanding needed to live a healthy and safe lifestyle, especially through the health and social studies and independent living skills programmes. Learners make a positive contribution to the work of the college and the wider community. For example, they are involved in making decisions about their learning targets and about their courses and evening activities, and are involved with wider community events, such as the Brighton Festival. Retention, punctuality and attendance are very good.

## Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

19. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The college evaluated the quality to be high. However, it had not sufficiently taken into account the inconsistency in the use of learning targets within this self-evaluation.
20. In the best lessons, teachers use their detailed knowledge of the learners to plan activities that they know are relevant and interesting. This planning enables lessons to move at a good pace, ensuring learners concentrate well and learn effectively. Learning is well monitored throughout by careful questioning and observation of what learners are doing. Further teaching is then provided sensitively to help learners to continue to make progress, for example, providing just enough support to help a learner safely use an electric lawn mower to cut grass in a straight line. The teamwork of staff is a strength. Staff use agreed communication and behaviour management strategies very well.
21. Occasionally, there is too little for learners to do and this results in them waiting for their turn on an activity. As a consequence they become restless, lose concentration and the high standards of behaviour slip.
22. ILPs are detailed and identify important targets based on learners' interests and their current and likely future needs. Staff select from this list for the targets to include in their lessons. However, not all lessons adequately use the targets and important opportunities for learning are missed. Furthermore, there is not sufficient monitoring to ensure all targets are taught adequately.
23. Initial assessment is comprehensive and used to inform programme planning. It draws together a wide range of information from parents and carers, previous schools and colleges, and the learners themselves. This is built upon with the outcomes of visits made by the learners to the college when staff are able to see how they work in this setting. Baseline assessment for use with planning and the tracking and recording of progress in different areas of the curriculum are satisfactory overall; in some areas they are not sufficient. As a result, while records are maintained of each lesson, some only show the activities that learners have undertaken rather than whether learning has taken place.
24. The inspection supports the college's evaluation that these individualised programmes meet needs and interests well and effectively help learners develop skills and understanding that will help them after they have left college. Since the college opened, there has been significant development of the curriculum and it now offers a wide range of courses from which learners can choose their overall programme, including independent living skills, arts and craft, media and leisure activities. A particularly valuable aspect is that although learners are placed in one of the three college faculties this does not exclude them from choosing options from the other faculties. Literacy and numeracy are increasingly and effectively being learned through all aspects of the curriculum.
25. A range of vocational and enterprise activities extends opportunities well, including in horticulture, catering and print work. This gives good opportunities

for learners to develop experience in providing services to members of the local community and, in so doing, enables further development of social and communication skills. There are also good links with other local colleges. These increase the range of courses available, as well as helping prepare learners for progressing to a mainstream college after leaving St John's. There is a good range of enrichment activities available after the end of the formal college day.

26. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is satisfactory. The college takes good care to make sure each learner has an individualised programme and challenging learning targets, although there are sometimes weaknesses in the use of these targets. Relationships between learners and staff demonstrate a clear ethos of respect. Rigorous procedures are in place to promote the safety and wellbeing of individual learners. Part-time attendance at mainstream colleges and experience in meeting the needs of the local community through enterprise activities contribute well to feelings of being part of the wider community. There is appropriate emphasis on developing literacy, including communication skills, and numeracy. However, the college has been too slow in meeting its requirements under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA).
27. The quality of care, support and guidance is good. Staff treat learners with high levels of care and provide effective personal support. This is valued greatly by learners, some of whom reported this as being substantially different to the experiences in other colleges and schools. There is a suitably wide range of specialist support to meet learners' needs, including counselling, speech and language therapy, occupational and physiotherapy and nursing. The social and health education programme is of a high quality. It tackles important aspects of personal relationships in a well planned and sensitive way, for example, in understanding what physical contact and touching is appropriate or otherwise and how to respond if it is not. This contributes well to learners' understanding of staying safe. Behaviour management and support is particularly effective. This is based on careful assessment and planning, regular monitoring, and staff training. Induction of new learners is sensitively and successfully managed. Learners reported how easily they became part of the college. Transition plans are detailed and helpful. They are updated at each annual review and record the clear steps that are necessary for learners to progress to their next placement.

#### Leadership and management

Satisfactory: grade 3

28. The leadership and management of the college are satisfactory. St John's has been designated an independent specialist college since 2004. Managers have built up the provision rapidly over two years and developed a strong learner focused curriculum. A five year business plan has been recently drawn up to provide a clear basis for the future developments. The principal, head of college and senior management team are committed to meeting the needs of all learners. Operational management is good.

29. The college has introduced a range of quality initiatives although it is too early to judge their effectiveness. Overall, quality improvement systems do not have sufficient rigour by which to plan effectively, clearly and drive improvement. Analysis of learners' achievements and progress is underdeveloped. Teaching and learning are formally monitored by senior managers and the college has recently introduced a system of peer monitoring to help teachers share good practice. However, the outcomes gathered from these observations are not yet systematically analysed to provide an ongoing, accurate picture of provision. The self-assessment process actively involves all staff. The report tackles all areas of the college's work. However, it lacks sharp evaluative judgements. Existing action plans are monitored regularly but several lack cohesion or sharp timescales, making it difficult to effectively track progress against all issues.
30. Communication between senior managers and staff is good. The Every Child Matters agenda is well promoted. A whole college drive to effectively manage learners with challenging behaviour has been very successful. Comprehensive arrangements are in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. The promotion of equality and diversity is appropriately integrated into learners' programmes. Links with parents are good and they hold the college in high regard.
31. The college does not meet all its statutory requirements. It is neither fully compliant with the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) or the Special Educational Needs Disability Act 2001. Currently, no action plans are in place and governors, managers and staff have not received training. Insufficient attention has been paid to increasing the accessibility to the site.
32. Teachers and teaching assistants are suitably qualified. Teamwork is well established and staff feel well supported by managers. Appraisal processes are in place, consistently applied and opportunities for staff development are good. Accommodation and resources adequately serve the learners who attend the college. Access for learners with restricted mobility, however, is not adequate. An audit of the site at Walpole Road was conducted in May 2005. However, to date, limited progress has been made against the recommendations. The number of computers has increased and there is now a centralised computer suite. Additional drop-in IT training sessions have been arranged for teaching staff.
33. Governors and trustees bring a broad range of experience and are very supportive of the college. However, their involvement in the self-assessment process is under-developed. Financial management is sound. The college provides satisfactory value for money.