

St John's College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 132016

Name of lead inspector: Joyce Deere HMI

Last day of inspection: 12 November 2009

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Information about the provider

St John's College is an independent specialist college which provides further education for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college is part of St John's School and College, a registered charity. The college is based in Brighton and the learners share land-based facilities with a school in Seaford. It aims to provide a transitional phase for learners to enable them to become as independent as possible when they leave the college. In 2008/09, the college provided for 88 learners, of whom 52 were funded as day placements by the Learning and Skills Council. The college is divided into three faculties: LINC (living, learning and integration) for young adults with autistic spectrum disorders; Life Skills where learners with severe learning difficulties focus particularly on independent living skills, and ACOC (academic and vocational studies) where learners have more moderate learning difficulties. The college's learner profile is changing as a higher percentage of learners have severe or profound learning difficulties.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	52 full-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision		Grade 3
Capacity to improve		Grade 3
		Grade
Outcomes for learners		3
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		3
Safeguarding		3
Equality and diversity		3

Overall effectiveness

The college's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Learners achieve their qualifications and their targets satisfactorily. The staff are skilled at managing challenging behaviour, and learners enjoy their classes. Learners particularly enjoy the practical opportunities provided for them through catering courses. The specialist therapy staff develop effective strategies for supporting learners and share their expertise throughout the college. The college has worked hard to improve its provision since the last inspection and uses a quality improvement plan to track progress. Improvements have been made, but more needs to be done to record all of the progress made by learners during their time at the college. The college does not have a programme of transition that involves learners more effectively in preparing for greater independence in the community when they leave the college. Learners do not have sufficient access to information and communication technology (ICT). The college has made good progress in developing its policies for equality and diversity, and staff have been updated on recent legislation. However, the college has been slow in making some reasonable adjustments to improve the accessibility of its site.

Main findings

- Learners enjoy their time at the college and make satisfactory progress in achieving their targets and external awards. However, the current arrangements for capturing data are not sufficiently reliable, and do not effectively measure the progress made by learners since they started at the college.
- Learners feel safe, and members of staff take very effective action to ensure that they develop good awareness of all aspects of personal safety.

- Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at managing challenging behaviour, and many use effective strategies to help learners become more independent learners.
- Teachers aim to develop learners' literacy skills, but not all do this well. Technology is not sufficiently used, and too few teachers use sessions actively to promote learners' understanding about equality and diversity.
- The college provides a variety of very effective contexts for learners to develop their skills in real catering environments, but the range and extent of work experience opportunities are insufficient to meet the needs of all of the learners.
- The college makes good use of a wide range of specialist therapeutic staff, and they are very effective in sharing their expertise with teaching staff.
- Learners all have transition plans, but the college does not provide a coherent transitions programme to assist learners in making decisions about their future.
- Operational management of the college is sound, with a flexible approach to managing the day-to-day activities. The opportunities for staff development and training are good.
- The college's focus on quality improvement is satisfactory, with close monitoring of the quality improvement plan and clearly identified areas for improvement. Arrangements for the observation of teaching have improved, although the recording has insufficient emphasis on learning. The quality assurance arrangements with partner colleges have not been fully implemented.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory, and the college fosters the notion of a 'safe learner' well.
- Significant progress has been made in developing equality and diversity policies that reflect the college's duties, and staff have opportunities for training in these areas. However, the college has not made sufficient progress in providing accessible learning environments.

What does St John's College need to do to improve further?

- Take action to ensure that learning programmes take place in fit-for-purpose and accessible learning environments.
- Develop the information systems so that managers can use the information to track learners' progression and outcomes, and devise more effective indicators of the college's performance.
- Increase the opportunities for learning in realistic environments, so that learners can develop the skills they need, and plan for the next stage of their lives.
- Develop a transition programme that enables staff and learners to focus more effectively on enabling learners to participate in the local community and lead their lives as independently as possible.
- Improve the criteria for the observation of teaching and learning so that the observers focus more effectively on the learning that has taken place, and on the active promotion of equality and diversity through the sessions.

- Improve the use, availability and accessibility of ICT for staff and learners.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- learning to be more independent
- being allowed to challenge
- the people, students, the staff
- being treated as an adult
- the work experience at the community café
- doing sports.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the break times, which are boring
- too few clubs and opportunities to mix with learners in other groups
- the games resources
- insufficient homework.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

The college is making satisfactory progress in improving outcomes for learners. They make satisfactory progress in achieving external qualifications and in the management of their own behaviour. The college has yet to identify indicators that show progress made by learners from the start of their programme. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with examples of good practice. The range of provision is satisfactory. The specialist interventions by the therapy team are good. The college uses its self-assessment process well to involve the staff, but its grading of the quality of provision is over-optimistic. The college uses its quality improvement plan well to track the progress made since the last inspection. The process for the observation of teaching and learning has been improved, although more emphasis is needed on learning. The college has made slow progress in making reasonable adjustments to improve the accessibility of its premises. The college has building plans, but these are still awaiting planning permission.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

Learners enjoy their time at college and make satisfactory progress in achieving the core targets recorded in their individual learning plans. The achievement of external awards is satisfactory and there has been a rise in learners enrolled on, and successfully achieving, GCSE subjects in mathematics, ICT, science and astronomy. A small number of learners gained awards in literacy and entry level mathematics in 2008/09. No differences have been identified between different groups of learners.

The central system for recording and tracking targets is being developed. Not all members of staff are currently able to access it and the system, introduced last year, did not provide reliable performance measures. Further developments are planned so that data more accurately reflects progress made by learners from the start of their programmes.

Learners' development of economic and social well-being is satisfactory. All learners develop social skills and some develop work skills through campus based work-experience and a community café. Destinations of learners are disappointing. Over the past two years, the majority of learners moved back home or into long-term supported residential placements. A small number also enrolled at their local college to continue their studies. Very few learners progressed into any form of employment.

Learners feel safe at the college and well cared for. They develop a good awareness of safety. All learners follow a core programme which is used to raise their awareness of safety, including personal safety, travelling alone, personal relationships and sexual health. Guidelines on the safe use of electronic information are currently being developed. Learners know whom to contact about issues and complaints, and the college responds to any issues appropriately.

Learners develop a satisfactory awareness of healthy lifestyles. They are successfully encouraged to eat healthily through a strong emphasis on planning, shopping and preparation of food, and participate in opportunities for physical activity.

Learners have satisfactory access to the local community and regularly take part in community events such as the local football club, a film-making competition, working with learners from a local sixth form drama department and fundraising activities for charities.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

Most teaching staff are qualified or in the process of becoming so. Teachers and support staff are skilled at managing challenging behaviours. The quality of target setting has improved following staff training. Informal verbal feedback to learners at the end of lessons is positive and motivating. Formal arrangements for assessment and verification are now satisfactory. Most teachers have clear strategies for meeting individuals' differing needs and many plan effectively to develop their independence as learners. Teachers aim to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills wherever possible but are not all equally skilled at doing so. The over-complex use of 'widgeit' symbols often makes the reading of text more difficult. The different methods for formal recording of graded targets are confusing to learners and parents. Teachers express lesson outcomes as given activities, rather than identifying what learners might be able to do by the end of sessions. Technology is not sufficiently used to promote learning outside ICT classes. Too few teachers use sessions effectively to promote learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues.

Learners find the increase in practical opportunities, particularly for catering, motivating and rewarding. A small number of learners attend local GFE colleges on a part-time basis. Work experience arrangements in the college's kitchen and in a neighbourhood community project are particularly effective in developing learners' skills and confidence. The number and range of other work experience placements has increased but is still well below the college's own target. Learners are able to attend courses from a reasonable range of options. However, this is at the cost of the depth of vocational knowledge and expertise needed for later employment. The college organises a good variety of enrichment activities, but does not consistently record and evaluate learners' involvement in these.

Productive partnerships with local groups have resulted in an increase in practical learning environments and work experience placements. They have been essential in developing the range of enrichment activities. The cooperation with local colleges has resulted in increased possibilities for learners.

The college provides a wide range of specialist therapeutic support for learners. Specialist staff work very effectively to share good practice and demonstrate strategies for supporting learners. The ratio of support provided for learners, in those lessons observed during the inspection, satisfactorily met learners' individual needs. The college produces detailed transition plans for learners but there is no structured transition programme to help learners plan for their future, and no clear

link with the work experience programme. Personal tutorial and mentoring arrangements are satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

The college is undergoing a period of significant change. The chief executive has provided effective leadership by putting succession arrangements in place, in preparation for his retirement, and instigating an evaluation and review of the college's provision and staffing. At the time of inspection the college was undergoing a restructuring of its staffing. Operational management is sound. The managers support the staff well and they continue to work with great enthusiasm during the process of restructuring, minimising the impact for learners. The college has yet to identify performance measures that enable them to evaluate progress year on year.

The college's board of governance acts as a 'critical friend' of the college, and does not have oversight of the finances and resources. The board reports to the trustees. The chair makes sound recommendations for improvement to the programme for learners.

The college meets all of the requirements in relation to safeguarding. The college maintains a central record and all staff have enhanced and regularly updated Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. All staff records are updated, and the college has the appropriate number of staff trained to the highest level.

The college has recently developed policies to address its equality and diversity duties and has recently carried out extensive equalities and inclusion audits of its provision. The chief executive has led staff training sessions on the recent legislation. The college has started to monitor learners' applications and outcomes in relation to race and gender. No significant differences in outcomes have been identified. The complaints policies and procedures to combat bullying and harassment are satisfactory. The college recognises that more needs to be done to promote learners' understanding of equality and diversity. It is not included in the learner induction programme, and staff have not received training in promoting equality and diversity in the classroom. The proportion of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds reflects the composition of the local community, although the percentage of staff who declare a disability is very low. Despite the progress made in developing its policies, the college has been slow in making some relatively inexpensive reasonable adjustments in response to its DDA audit in 2005. Insufficient adaptations are in place for people with sensory impairments and restricted mobility, although the college has made specific adaptations for individual learners. Plans to improve accessibility, including lift access, have been submitted for planning permission, but the outcome is not yet clear.

The college has an active student council, and is currently electing a learner to the governing body. Learner surveys have elicited a good response, and have been closely analysed, with areas for improvement identified. However, the requests for feedback from parents have had a disappointingly low level of response.

The staff contribute to the self-assessment process and the quality improvement plan tracks progress well. The scheme for the observation of teaching and learning has improved, although it does not focus sufficiently on what has been learnt or on the meaningful promotion of equality and diversity. The college is in the process of improving its arrangements for staff appraisal and supervision. The college has implemented service level agreements with partner colleges, but the requirements for reporting are not always met.

Value for money is satisfactory. Learners make satisfactory progress and achieve their qualifications and targets. The college has invested significant resources into staff training and this has impacted positively on the capacity of the staff to manage challenging behaviour. Teaching resources are satisfactory overall. The accessibility of the main teaching building remains a challenge, as the number of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties increases.

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's deputy head of college as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires that learners and parents had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions and mentoring reviews and carried out case studies of individual learners. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes across all aspects of the curriculum and at another site.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

St John's College

Learning types: 14–16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16–18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners Full-time learners	67			67	
Overall effectiveness	3			3	
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3			3	
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?	3				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3				
Quality of provision	3			3	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
Leadership and management	3			3	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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