

St Mary's College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

15–17 March 2017

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Senior leaders, governors and managers have not had sufficient focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; as a result, the quality of students' learning is not of a consistently high standard in too many subjects.
- The management of quality improvement across the college is not rigorous enough to bring about the necessary improvements.
- Performance management is not sufficiently robust and as a result managers and teachers are not given specific enough targets to be able to hold them to account for the performance of their students.
- Self-assessment and improvement planning at departmental level are insufficiently rigorous and do not identify the strengths and weaknesses of specific subjects; consequently, actions to bring about improvements are not swift enough.
- In most subjects, too many students do not make the progress and achieve the grades of which they are capable.

The provider has the following strengths

- The newly formed senior leadership team has started to refocus diligently on improving students' outcomes by prioritising actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders and managers ensure that students from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities work cooperatively in a supportive environment.
- Good advice and guidance enable students to make secure decisions about their future education and other options.
- The large majority of students pass their qualifications and successfully progress to higher education, further learning or apprenticeships.
- Students' awareness and understanding of how to keep themselves safe from a wide range of potential risks are good.

Full report

Information about the provider

- St Mary's College is a Catholic sixth form college located in Blackburn, Lancashire. It attracts an ethnically diverse student cohort from the town and surrounding areas. The college provides predominantly 16 to 19 study programmes, mainly through an A-level programme with a small amount of vocational provision. Currently, 890 students are enrolled on 16 to 19 study programmes at the college. The vast majority of students are following level 3 programmes. Forty-six students are on level 2 programmes and 36 on entry level/level 1 programmes. The college offers a very small adult provision, mainly in the community, which provides functional skills in English and mathematics at entry level, level 1 and level 2 for around 100 students.
- The proportion of students in the area who leave school with five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is lower than the national figure.
- The Blackburn with Darwen borough has a population of 146,800. The unemployment rate for the borough is higher than the national average. The proportion of residents with no qualifications is above regional and national averages. The percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is 5.7% and is above the regional and national averages.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all lessons, so that teachers:
 - have the highest expectations of what each learner can achieve and this is reflected in the pace and level of learning in lessons, including through the tasks that learners complete
 - make good use of information on students' prior attainment to plan lessons that challenge all students sufficiently and help them make the progress of which they are capable
 - improve their questioning techniques to probe and check the depth of students' understanding in order to help students extend their knowledge and improve their higher-level skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation
 - provide sufficiently detailed feedback to help students know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work and increase their progress.
- Senior leaders and governors must continue to focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the progress students make by ensuring that all staff implement rigorously and consistently the new quality improvement processes in order to bring about improvements in students' progress and achievement.
- Senior leaders must ensure that self-assessment and improvement planning are sufficiently rigorous at departmental level to identify accurately strengths and to implement improvement plans to address areas for improvement swiftly.
- Senior leaders and governors need to implement a robust performance management process that clearly articulates to everyone their role and accountability in improving standards.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders, and governors and managers have not taken enough effective action since the previous inspection to ensure that all students achieve to their full potential. Until very recently, leaders and managers had insufficient focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The very newly appointed acting principal and senior leadership team have been swift to recognise this and have implemented a number of initiatives, including improvements to the lesson observation process and staff development programme. Given the short time period, the impact of leaders' actions has not yet led to sustained and consistent improvement across the college.
- Too many targets for curriculum areas lack ambition for staff and students. For example, one target is 'to sustain a requires improvement grade' in their next subject self-assessment and another target is 'to come close to achieving the national average achievement rate'. This lack of high expectations has resulted in declining performance across many curriculum areas.
- Performance management is not robust enough to deliver improvements. For example, most teachers do not have specific targets relating to the quality of their teaching and assessment or the outcomes for their students to achieve. Consequently, teachers are not being held to account for the progress and achievements of their students. Leaders have recognised the need to improve further the performance management process and have introduced a new performance management framework but this has yet to have an impact on teachers' and managers' performance.
- Since the previous inspection, where the self-assessment report was judged to be weak, it is now very detailed, with judgements based on clear evidence. However, too often these judgements overstate strengths and do not recognise areas for improvement sufficiently.
- Senior leaders and managers provide an inclusive, harmonious, multicultural environment in which students of all faiths, and none, feel safe and can flourish. All leaders and managers are proud of the Marist values which underpin college life. They have significantly extended their recruitment of students from neighbouring boroughs to provide for an increasingly diverse group of students. The few instances of bullying that occur are dealt with swiftly and sensitively, and students report high levels of satisfaction in all areas of their study. The care and support that the college provides helps students to feel confident in expressing their views.
- College leaders work closely with local schools to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of school leavers. For example, despite low student numbers, managers are committed to continuing to deliver courses in modern foreign languages and they have increased significantly their vocational science provision in response to the curriculum in local schools.
- In the context of increasing local competition, senior leaders have successfully reversed a very significant decline in enrolments, and applications to the college are now increasing.

The governance of the provider

- Governance requires improvement. Governors do not challenge senior leaders sufficiently

to improve outcomes for students. Too often, the reports presented to governors by leaders and managers do not include sufficient information on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to enable governors to hold senior leaders and managers to account. As a result, governors do not have an accurate understanding of students' progress or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Governors and senior leaders have not managed the college's finances skilfully to be confident that the college has a sustainable financial future. They are now taking appropriate steps to secure a sustained future for the college and to resolve and reverse its challenging financial position.
- Governors lead effectively in the promotion of the college's ethos and mission. They show great commitment to the college and to sustaining the role it plays in its community.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff, governors and students have all received effective training on safeguarding so that they are able to identify any concerns quickly and take effective action. Staff within the safeguarding team are suitably trained, have appropriate experience in child protection procedures and ensure that safeguarding matters are resolved rapidly and effectively.
- Strong and effective partnerships exist with the local safeguarding and 'Prevent' teams. Staff work closely with a variety of local external agencies to ensure that they are informed about emerging potential threats of radicalisation and extremism and take appropriate actions where necessary.
- Safe staff recruitment practices are well established, including the completion and recording of disclosure and barring checks. Senior leaders were swift to rectify the few minor reporting errors in the college's single central register.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The vast majority of students are studying academic qualifications at AS or A level. A small number of students are studying for qualifications at entry level, level 1 and level 2, or a mix of academic and vocational qualifications at level 3.
- Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has declined. Too many students do not make the progress of which they are capable. In a small minority of lessons, not all students adhere to the deadlines set for the submission of work and teachers are not consistent in their approach to ensuring that students meet submission requirements.
- Teachers do not make enough use of their knowledge of students' prior attainment when planning their lessons. In many lessons, students complete the same tasks and activities, regardless of their ability or previous progress. Too often this results in a lack of challenge for the most able students, and weaker students struggle to understand key information or concepts. However, in psychology and English language, teachers give very careful consideration to what students need to learn, how they will learn it and how they will be assessed.
- Too many teachers do not use questioning skilfully to extend students' knowledge or to

check the depth and breadth of their understanding. The more confident students dominate and less-confident students do not demonstrate their learning sufficiently.

- Too many students do not take an active role in lessons and develop their independent learning skills. They receive learning materials compliantly and listen to teacher-led explanations that do not include sufficient checks on each student's level of comprehension and understanding. Lessons are not planned carefully enough to develop students' autonomy in their learning or their higher-level skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.
- Teachers' feedback on assessed work in some subjects is not sufficiently detailed to support students to further improve their skills or to help them know what to do to improve the standard of their work. In some subjects, for example sociology, the quality of teachers' feedback is inconsistent across AS- and A-level courses. In media and business subjects, teachers' feedback to help students improve is not evident. Students' targets for improving the quality of their work are too often generic and not subject-specific, such as 'improve attendance' and 'meet deadlines in submitting coursework'.
- The majority of students' work is of a good standard. Students present their ideas with clarity and conviction in their essays and assignments. In a few subjects, for example fine art, students develop very good oracy skills and are able to express themselves competently using high-level technical language with great self-assurance. However, in a small minority of lessons, the standard and level of teaching and the work that students produce are below that of the qualification level.
- Support for students is effective in helping them pass their qualifications. Teachers offer students help outside of lessons, and managers have recently introduced additional drop-in sessions for the majority of subjects. As a result, mock examination resit scores have improved, for example in electronics and biology.
- The small number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and students in receipt of high-needs funding, receive good support from staff, both in and out of lessons. Managers have improved the process for identifying the specific needs of these students prior to enrolment and they work cooperatively with local schools to ensure that their transition into the college is smooth and effective. As a result, students participate fully in learning and make good progress.
- The large majority of students enjoy their learning and work well with each other, their teachers and college staff. As a result, they settle down quickly and develop high levels of confidence and good self-esteem.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students demonstrate high standards of behaviour in lessons and around the college. They show high levels of respect for other members of the diverse college community and learn quickly about different attitudes, cultures and faiths. As a result, they are tolerant of and respectful towards others. They work collaboratively in lessons to complete activities and comply quickly with instructions and requests from staff.
- Students benefit from a wide range of worthwhile and stimulating enrichment activities, trips and visiting speakers that broaden their education and help them to develop good social, personal and work-related skills. For example, students in law, psychology, sport,

science and languages have the opportunity to participate in overseas visits. In other subjects, for example mathematics and enterprise, students are very successful in national competitions. Many students have good links with local charities. For example, students in health and social care have worked very successfully with a local charity for women and then delivered tutorial sessions for other students on healthy relationships. The student council plays an active role in the life of the college. Students on the council contribute fully to management meetings, and support the planning and staffing of college events. A significant number of students undertake meaningful external work experience or volunteering aligned to their career aspirations, which are particularly useful in supporting personal statements for university and job applications.

- Students benefit from high-quality impartial careers advice and guidance which help them to make informed choices about their future options. They are supported very effectively in their university applications and participate in a range of activities such as mock interviews and visits to universities to help them prepare for future experiences. The vast majority of level 3 students progress to university. Those students not wishing to progress to higher education, including students who leave the college before completing their programmes, receive appropriate help with researching other options such as training, employment and apprenticeships.
- Students arrive at college fully prepared to study and they are punctual at lessons. In a small minority of lessons, attendance requires improvement.
- Students feel very safe within the college. They have a very good understanding of how to raise their concerns through the college's confidential reporting system if they do not feel safe or are concerned about something. They know that any issues they raise will be taken seriously. Students have a very good knowledge and understanding of potential risks posed by extremism and radicalisation, including the issues which are pertinent to their local area. They know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media.
- Students do not develop their English and mathematics skills sufficiently within their lessons. In a small minority of subjects, teachers' feedback on students' assessed work does not provide sufficient help to improve the quality of their writing, including spelling, punctuation and grammar, and errors are not identified routinely. As a result, a small minority of students continue to make the same mistakes.
- Teachers do not plan sufficiently for the inclusion of topics around British values within their lessons. As a result, they do not explore and develop students' knowledge through real examples within their learning to contextualise and enhance students' understanding.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of students following both academic and vocational programmes who make the expected progress from their starting points has declined. In a few subjects, including English language, psychology, sociology, chemistry, and applied law, students do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Overall achievement for AS-level and A-level qualifications, and vocational diplomas and certificates at level 3, requires improvement. Across these courses, students' achievements still vary too much. For example, in 2015/16, compared with 2013/14 and

2014/15, overall achievement declined in English language, English literature, business studies, sociology and vocational sport. In contrast, for example, achievement is high in dance, theatre, vocational music, mathematics, physics and economics. A high proportion of students on study programmes at levels 1 and 2, including in GCSE English and mathematics, make good progress and successfully achieve their qualifications.

- A third of current students are not on target to achieve their grades at this stage in their course. Leaders and managers have recently implemented support interventions and evidence shows that those who have received additional support are improving their performance.
- Students of different ethnic groups achieve as well as each other, but male students do not achieve as well as female students. Students who need extra help to achieve their qualifications receive effective support.
- The large majority of students progress to positive destinations. Leaders and managers collect data on the destinations and progression of students and know where their students have gone. However, during the inspection, managers were unable to provide a clear analysis of this information and to identify whether students' destinations met their relevant career plans.
- The very small number of students who have high needs make at least or better than expected progress over time. Their targets link clearly to their education, health and care plans and they are supported very effectively to develop their English and mathematics skills. Many progress into external paid employment or volunteering.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130746
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,038
Principal/CEO (acting)	Mr Grant Birchby
Telephone number	01254 586964
Website	www.stmarysblackburn.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	36	68	46	48	808	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	14							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal for liaison, marketing and events, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the college.

Inspection team

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Wood	Ofsted Inspector
Kathy Passant	Ofsted Inspector

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