

St Mary's College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

27 February–1 March 2019

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors, leaders, managers and staff have created an aspirational culture where staff and students from a range of backgrounds work together with respect and tolerance for one another's differences.
- Leaders and managers ensure that courses meet the needs of local students. They provide a high-quality education which supports students to fulfil their potential.
- Senior leaders and managers have taken effective action which has successfully rectified all of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- Governors and leaders successfully hold managers and teachers to account for their student' progress and outcomes. Consequently, the progress that the majority of current students make is good.
- The proportion of students who achieve their qualifications is high, particularly on level 3 vocational and A-level courses.
- Students develop the knowledge and technical skills they need for further study. Consequently, the vast majority progress to further study or higher education, often to prestigious universities.
- Students have a positive attitude to learning. They take pride in their work. They are well motivated and develop the confidence and skills they need to work independently, particularly when they progress to higher education.
- In a few subjects, a small minority of students drop out before the end of their course. This is particularly the case on two-year A-level courses.
- In a minority of A-level subjects, teachers do not assess accurately the progress that students make. This results in students not achieving the grade of which they are capable.
- Senior leaders do not always set clear and measurable targets in the quality improvement plan. As a result, governors are unable to monitor progress effectively or identify which actions are having the most effect.

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 16 to 19 study programmes, mainly through advanced-level programmes. Of these, around half are A-level and half are vocational subjects. Currently, 714 students are enrolled on 16 to 19 study programmes at the college. There are 51 students on level 2 programmes, mainly GCSE English and mathematics, and nine students on vocational entry level/level 1 programmes.
- 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?

- Managers should ensure that they increase the proportion of students who stay on their course to the end in subjects where retention is low.
- Managers should ensure that teachers receive targeted development to ensure they assess students' progress accurately so that additional support is quickly put into place where needed.
- Senior leaders should ensure that action plans for improvement have precise and measurable targets so that governors can hold them to account.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors have developed an ambitious strategic vision for the college. Leaders and managers ensure that courses meet the needs of local students. They provide a high-quality education which supports students to fulfil their potential.
- Governors, leaders and managers have created an aspirational culture where staff and students from a range of backgrounds work together with respect and tolerance for one another's differences. Senior leaders and managers have taken effective action, which has successfully rectified all of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good. Managers make accurate judgements about the strengths and weaknesses they observe in lessons. Managers use their findings to identify and provide high-quality staff development that leads to improvements in individual teachers' practice. Teachers who are the sole teacher in a subject benefit from links with other teachers in a partner college to develop teaching resources and to share good practice.
- Leaders successfully hold managers and teachers to account for their students' progress and outcomes. Leaders have developed very effective performance management and reporting procedures to ensure that students' progress is rigorously monitored. Managers ensure that teachers are set prompt remedial action where targets are not being met; this results in support and interventions being put in place quickly. The performance management process supports staff who are able and willing to improve, while staff who do not improve leave the college.
- Staff are proud to work at the college and share the senior leaders' aspirations for their students. Leaders have sought an effective solution to ensure the long-term sustainability of the college. The partnership they have established through the 'Federation of Hope' provides financial stability, and supports to staff to develop their teaching, learning and assessment practice.
- Leaders and managers ensure that staff provide effective careers education, information advice and guidance for students who aspire to go to university. As a result, a high proportion of students, many of whom do not have a family history of higher education, progress to university.
- Leaders and managers make good use of the information they have regarding local and regional needs, to inform the courses they offer. The range of A-level, GCSE and vocational qualifications effectively meets the needs of students in Blackburn and the surrounding areas who want to progress to further or higher education.
- Leaders and managers work closely with local schools to provide opportunities for students to improve their educational aspirations and attainment. The partnership with Liverpool Hope University provides good progression to higher education on the college site. However, leaders and managers have not sufficiently developed their links with employers. Employer involvement is often limited to subjects such as business and law and does not provide all students with the opportunity to develop the skills they need for work.

- Leaders and managers have developed a rigorous self-assessment report (SAR) process that accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement, as well as actions for improvement. They use this information to set actions which have improved the quality of teaching and learning across the large majority of subjects. However, actions identified in the quality improvement plan do not always have clear, measurable targets against which senior leaders and governors can monitor progress; nor can they identify the actions that are having the most effect.
- Leaders and managers do not check sufficiently the data sent to the funding body. For example, managers did not identify errors in the college's own data prior to publication. Inspectors confirmed that the college's own data is accurate.

The governance of the provider

- Governors are committed and passionate about the success of the college. They challenge and support senior leaders to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and high expectations. Governors, some newly appointed, use their knowledge and expertise effectively to scrutinise the work of senior leaders in key aspects such as safeguarding, finance and teaching, learning and assessment.
- Governors place a high priority on ensuring the college is responsive to local students' needs in providing high-quality for students from diverse and often disadvantaged backgrounds.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders place a high priority on maintaining a culture of safeguarding. They ensure that effective arrangements are in place to ensure that students are safe and know how to keep themselves safe.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that staff throughout the college receive regular training on safeguarding that provides them with an appropriate level of understanding. They make swift referrals when needed. Designated safeguarding leads have received the appropriate level of training to allow them to execute their role effectively. They receive ongoing support from a designated safeguarding governor.
- Staff have established effective links with external agencies such as the local area designated officer (LADO), police and social services. The designated senior leads and the safeguarding team deal with referrals in a timely manner and, where appropriate, work with external agencies to support students.
- Leaders and governors place a high priority on responding to the challenges they face in the local area they serve through an effective 'Prevent' strategy. Senior managers are part of local groups that provide up-to-date information about pertinent local issues. They use this information effectively to update staff and students on the new and emerging risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. Consequently, staff and students have a good understanding of radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders and managers have implemented appropriate safe recruitment practice to ensure staff are appropriately checked before starting in employment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders and managers plan courses effectively that meet the requirements for study programmes. Courses provide students with good opportunities for progression into further study or higher education. Students develop their skills in English and mathematics, as well as benefiting from work experience and additional qualifications. The vast majority of students study at advanced level on a range of vocational and A-level subjects.
- The vast majority of teachers plan learning activities which meet the needs and interests of students of differing abilities. This enables students to develop their knowledge and understanding and make good progress. For example, students in GCSE English lessons study extracts from a range of sources and different historical periods on the theme of boxing, a topic of interest to the group. In biology lessons, students work well together on different tasks in groups carefully selected by the teacher.
- Staff work well with secondary schools to ensure that appropriate support is in place for students with additional needs when they start their course. Teachers assess students' starting points effectively and use this information to plan sufficiently challenging lessons. This means that students with a learning difficulty and/or disability make the progress they should. Students who have high needs have an appropriate education, care and health plan in place.
- Teachers use their questioning very effectively in lessons to probe and check students' understanding, which helps them consolidate and enhance their knowledge. For example, in A-Level English lessons, teachers question extensively throughout the group activities, to ensure that students' learning is extended. Law students can evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of types of statutory interpretations.
- Teachers assess students' progress throughout their course through frequent 'key assessments'. These provide an overview of individual students' progress against an aspirational target set at the start of their course. Leaders and managers monitor carefully the progress that students make and quickly put actions in place when they are under-achieving. As a result, most current students make good progress.
- Teachers provide detailed feedback to students following assessment, which enables students to improve. In addition, students develop their own action plans to improve their work and achieve their target grade. As a result, most students improve the quality of their work over time. Students' written work is generally of the standard expected for the level and stage of their course.
- Teachers keep parents and carers well informed of each student's attendance and progress, through parents' evenings, access to online systems, and a range of open events. Teachers quickly contact parents or carers if they have any concerns about individual attendance, and as a result, attendance is high.
- Teachers develop students' English skills in lessons very well. For example, teachers encourage students to use key terminology appropriately and routinely correct spelling, punctuation and grammar in written work. Students are confident when explaining specialist terms to the rest of the group. For example, economics students discuss monetary policy and the effect it has on inflation rates. In biology lessons, students can

use key terms correctly such as ventricle, atria and valves when learning about the human heart.

- Students develop their mathematical skills effectively in lessons. For example, chemistry students work out accurately the equilibrium experiences for a reaction. Business, psychology and geography students analyse problems that require a good understanding of statistical calculations. In tutorials, students develop an appreciation of how to manage personal finances while at university.
- Teachers provide online resources of a high quality, which supports students' independent learning well. For example, sociology students work well outside of the classroom on tasks set in preparation for their next lesson.
- While teachers identify students who need additional support to help them achieve their target grades, the interventions they put in place are not fully effective. For example, in a few instances, students do not attend the additional support sessions arranged and, consequently, they do not improve their grade.
- A small minority of teachers do not set sufficiently specific targets for students to ensure that they improve their work over time. For example, targets set are too vague, such as 'revise more'.
- In a very small minority of lessons, teachers' strategies to plan lessons and manage behaviour are not effective. This results in low-level disruption to the lesson and students become distracted and disengaged.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Attendance rates are high overall. Teachers ensure that any non-attendance is followed up quickly and support provided to help students catch up. However, in a few subjects, such as vocational law, attendance rates are too low.
- Students enjoy their learning; they work hard in lessons and most students maintain their effort consistently throughout the lesson.
- Teachers promote respect and tolerance well through lessons, the tutorial programme and assemblies. As a result, students from diverse backgrounds are polite, tolerant and respectful of each other. They work cooperatively in lessons together.
- Students benefit from good advice and guidance to make informed choices about progression into further or higher education. Teachers support students well in their university applications; consequently, the vast majority of level 3 students progress to university. Of these, around a quarter progress to prestigious universities.
- Students who choose not to progress to university are provided with good information, advice and guidance through tutorials and by attending progression fairs. For example, at a recent fair, 30 employers and degree apprentice providers offered advice and information about the opportunities for progression and for employment.
- Most vocational students benefit from undertaking work experience that helps them to develop the skills required in the workplace. For example, students on science courses develop the skills they need when working in a laboratory. Business students benefit from external speakers from banks and national accountancy firms. A-level students undertake

activities that develop skills that are useful in the workplace, such as team work and presentation skills.

- Students benefit from an extensive range of enrichment activities, which means they develop good social, personal and work-related skills. Students work with local charities and volunteering organisations. For example, sports students planned a sponsored mountain climb to help a local charity. On a few vocational courses, students benefit from working on live briefs or assignments in collaboration with employers.
- Students feel safe at college and know who to contact if they have any concerns. Students know how to keep safe online and are clear about how to set personal security settings when using social media. Students have a good understanding of the dangers and risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Outcomes for students

Good

- In 2017/18 the proportion of students who achieved their qualifications at entry level, level 2 and level 3 was high. The proportion of students who achieved their qualification was high in the vast majority of subjects. They were particularly high in health and social care, sport, arts and media and in business. They were low in two subjects, history and religious studies.
- In 2017/18 a high proportion of students studying for vocational qualifications at level 3 achieved the grades expected of them.
- While pass rates were high, not all students taking A-level subjects in 2017/18 achieved the grades expected in relation to their starting points. These included students taking A-level biology, business studies, chemistry, English language and literature, mathematics and psychology. However, the proportion of students who achieved their expected grade was high in fine art, English language, English literature, law and sociology.
- The number of students who stayed on their course to the end declined in 2017/18 when compared to the previous year. This was particularly the case for two-year A-level subjects and for students on level 1 courses. In the current year, the proportion of students who remain on their course is high at all levels.
- In 2017/18, pass rates for GCSE English and mathematics at standard and strong pass grades increased, and they were higher than at similar colleges.
- In 2017/18, the proportion of adults who successfully achieved their qualifications was low. These courses are no longer offered.
- Current college data indicates that the proportion of current students on level 3 courses who are on track to achieve their target grade has increased since the previous inspection and is high.
- Students produce work of a good standard and meet or exceed the requirements of their programme. For example, A-level media students produce high-quality designs.
- Achievement gaps between different groups of students, such as those between males and females, have reduced. Achievement rates for males are now similar to those for females. Indian, Bangladeshi and Black African students achieve particularly well.

However, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve slightly less well than their peers.

- The vast majority of students who achieve their A-levels and vocational qualifications at level 3 progress to university. Around a quarter of these go to prestigious universities.
- A high proportion of students on programmes at entry level, level 1 and level 2 progress successfully to higher-level courses at the college or at the local further education college. Others successfully gain employment or enrol on apprenticeship programmes.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130746
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of students	16–18/19
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	817
Principal/CEO	Jenny Singleton
Telephone number	01254580464
Website	www.stmaryscollegeblackburn.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 students (excluding apprenticeships)	8	1	51	0	640	5	0	0
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 students aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of students for which the provider receives high-needs funding	9							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and staff; 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 provider.

Inspection team

Andrea Machell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Clare Russell	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector

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