

Inspection of St Brendan's Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 March 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Provision for students with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

St Brendan's Sixth Form College (St Brendan's) is a Catholic college located to the south of Bristol. It sits in the Clifton Diocese and is the only Catholic sixth form in the south west and one of 14 in England and Wales. Students from the city and a wide surrounding area, including Bath, south Gloucestershire and north Somerset, attend the college.

St Brendan's is based on one campus and provides education for around 1,800 students aged 16 to 18 years. Around 95% of students study level 3 courses, choosing between three A levels, level 3 vocational qualifications equivalent to three A levels, or a mix of A levels and vocational qualifications. Over half of students study a mixed programme, and the very large majority study at least one A level. Around 90 students study an access to level 3 programme, which consists of level 2 vocational courses and/or GCSEs, including English and mathematics. All students follow a tutorial programme and a compulsory religion, philosophy and ethics programme.

At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 45 students with high needs on academic and vocational study programmes as outlined above, including 22 students with an education, health and care plan.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students enjoy their lessons because teachers have created a positive learning environment. Teachers value students' contributions to class discussions and encourage full participation in learning activities. As a result, students become more confident and proud of their learning over time.

Students learn curriculum content in a sensible order that builds on what they already know and can do. Students revisit knowledge and practise their skills so they can remember and link topics effectively.

Students behave well in lessons and when using communal areas because leaders and managers set high expectations that are upheld by staff. Students develop the foundations of good study habits in their tutorial lessons. Teachers set high expectations for completion of work and for meeting deadlines. When students fall behind, they are supported appropriately to improve their attitudes towards learning.

Students enjoy the non-judgemental, inclusive atmosphere at the college, where they feel that they can be themselves and are respected as individuals. Students from a wide diversity of backgrounds, including those of various faiths, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and students from the LGBTQ+ community, feel welcomed and valued at the college. For example, leaders provide designated prayer rooms for Muslim students to practise their faith.

Students further develop their understanding of what it means to be a good citizen through their learning of the compulsory religion, philosophy and ethics curriculum. They learn about the importance of developing positive relationships in a community and how to resolve conflict through communication. Students use this to good effect in the classroom, for example in respectfully listening to each other when debating the United States' political system in A-level politics lessons.

Students rarely experience bullying, harassment or discrimination, and if they do, they are comfortable to talk to staff, who deal with concerns sensitively and quickly.

Students have a limited knowledge of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. While they are taught this in the tutorial programme, this knowledge is not revisited and is often not remembered.

Most students have limited work experience. Students are not taught how to link the skills they develop to the workplace. In business and psychology, students can take optional activities that do not form a structured part of their curriculum. Students with high needs do not receive careers guidance early enough in their programme and are not always well prepared for their next steps.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a limited contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have developed curriculums that enable most students to move on to their chosen destinations. They have ensured that the curriculum is planned and taught effectively, so that students develop broad, transferable skills such as critical thinking, public speaking and teamwork. Leaders understand how these curriculums contribute to skills needs nationally. However, employers and stakeholders are not sufficiently involved in the design and implementation of the college's curriculums.

Leaders are only at the early stages of considering how to attract more employers and other stakeholders to influence and help design curriculums. For example, in psychology, business, and health and social care, students currently have very limited exposure to employment in the sector or to working professionals in their field. The curriculum for students with high needs is not informed by any stakeholder input. As a result, leaders are not preparing students effectively enough for the future or for the current skills needs of the local and regional economy.

Leaders have developed strong partnerships with local universities that provide practical support for students through visits, careers workshops and advice on applying to university. However, visits to universities do not always involve substantial numbers of students, and these activities and interactions are not considered essential elements of the curriculum.

Overall, the college is not yet playing a key role in advancing the local and regional skills agenda. Leaders have involved the college in only a few, strategic-level initiatives in the region. These are often only recently formed and have yet to have an impact on curriculum design or content.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers have developed inclusive curriculums that support their vision to increase social mobility. They support students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds to achieve their goals. A high proportion progress to their chosen next stages of education, training or employment.

Leaders focus intently on improving the quality of teaching practice. They provide staff with high-quality training and development, including supportive intervention to improve teaching practice. As a result, most students experience high-quality lessons.

Curriculum managers sequence the curriculum effectively. For example, A-level chemistry students build their knowledge of atomic structure and develop their mathematical skills before moving on to more complicated topics in inorganic chemistry. A-level photography students learn technical aspects of aperture and shutter speed early in the course and apply these concepts later to produce motion-blur images.

Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies well to help students to learn the new knowledge and skills they need. For example, teachers of GCSE mathematics use effective questioning techniques by giving students thinking time and guiding them to work out answers for themselves. Teachers of vocational business courses use exercises in class to revisit previous knowledge and link new and previous learning through clear explanations. The large majority of teachers and learning support assistants support students with high needs with appropriate strategies.

Teachers are well qualified, and the large majority apply their expertise well to enliven and enrich learning in the classroom. For example, business teachers use their experiences to enhance class discussions through real-life examples. However, not all teachers stay up to date with the latest developments in their sector. For example, health and social care teachers have not engaged with the sector post-pandemic and do not use current knowledge of the sector well enough to enhance the design of the curriculum.

Students develop their ability to express themselves clearly and fluently in lessons. Teachers pay attention to developing these skills throughout the curriculum. For example, health and social care students discuss factors that affect nutrition confidently, and their peers review their points clearly and supportively. As a result, students develop their confidence, resilience and spoken communication skills.

Teachers use assessment well to check students' understanding and monitor the progress that students make. When gaps in learning are identified, this information is used to inform future teaching. For example, chemistry teachers use practice assessments to identify learning gaps and plan time to reteach these concepts before students sit further assessments. This provides further opportunities for students to learn from their mistakes and make progress.

Teachers provide students with clear and informative feedback. This feedback accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Students act on this feedback to improve the standard of their work. For example, A-level photography students receive frequent, personalised feedback and apply this to improve their portfolios. Health and social care students improve the quality of their written coursework over time by responding well to individual feedback.

Leaders and managers monitor students' progress well. This includes vulnerable students, such as students who are in care or are care leavers. The college mostly uses progress information well to intervene early and plan actions to support students effectively. However, in a small minority of cases, this information is not shared with all relevant staff, including those who support learners with high needs. As a result, a small minority of the students with high needs fall behind and do not make the same progress as their peers.

Students' attendance is generally monitored effectively and absences are followed up with appropriate strategies, including contacting parents and carers and setting useful targets. However, a minority of teachers do not reinforce high expectations

regarding punctuality effectively. Therefore, a minority of students have not yet developed this important employability skill.

Leaders have established useful opportunities to help students make choices about their careers, such as through careers fairs and careers guidance from specialist careers advisers. Most students know what they want to do in the future, and students who apply to university are supported well to complete their applications. Careers advisers signpost a range of opportunities, including available work experience, but only a small minority of students take up these opportunities. Therefore, many students lack knowledge and experience of the sectors in which they plan to have careers.

Students from minority ethnic backgrounds who are eligible for the Bristol Future Talent Partnership develop a better understanding of the world of work through visits to employer sites, presentations on various career options, support with CV writing and interview techniques, and work-related projects. This helps them to make more informed choices and to develop their employability skills.

Students with high needs do not receive effective careers guidance early enough in their courses. Leaders do not ensure that students with high needs currently have sufficient opportunities to widen their employability skills and develop their personal career interests. Leaders have plans to deal with this weakness, but these have yet to be implemented.

Teachers teach students the knowledge and skills they need to be successful, and as a result, the vast majority achieve on their courses. Most students produce work of a consistently good quality.

Governors support senior leaders well to set the strategic direction of the college. Governors work well with senior leaders, who provide them with the information they need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the college. Governors use their knowledge and skills well to provide effective scrutiny to help leaders make improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have created a culture of safeguarding. Staff encourage students to report concerns. As a result, students feel confident to report concerns to trusted adults at the college and know that these will be listened to and followed up. The safeguarding team works with relevant external agencies to support students when needed.

All students, staff and visitors wear lanyards and use cards to gain entry to buildings and classrooms. The safeguarding team records and reports safeguarding trends to leaders and governors, and these inform additional staff training on relevant themes.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the involvement of stakeholders in the design and implementation of the curriculums.
- Ensure that more students, including those with high needs, benefit from work experience or meaningful, work-related activities.
- Provide an effective and timely careers programme for students with high needs and improve communication between teams to ensure that all can achieve their goals.
- Improve students' understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and the threats from extremism locally.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130563
Address	Broomhill Road Brislington Bristol BS4 5RQ
Contact number	0117 977 7766
Website	www.stbrn.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Marian Curran
Provider type	Sixth-form college
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal (curriculum, quality and innovation), as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising students' work, seeking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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