

Inspection of St John Rigby RC Sixth Form College

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 January 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

St John Rigby College is an inclusive Roman Catholic sixth-form college under the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. It is situated on one site in the west of Wigan, Greater Manchester. The college attracts students from its Catholic partner schools and other schools in the surrounding areas. Leaders offer a wide range of education programmes for young people, including students with high needs.

At the time of the inspection, the college provided education and training to 1,351 young people, most of whom study level 3 programmes and a few who follow level 2 vocational programmes. There are 28 A-level subjects on offer, 20 level 3 vocational courses and five level 2 programmes. Currently, 797 students study A-level programmes, 492 students follow level 3 vocational courses and 62 students study level 2 programmes. Just over one quarter of level 3 students study a blend of A-level and vocational courses. There are 22 students for whom the college receives high needs funding, 14 of whom have education, health and care (EHC) plans. All follow A-level or vocational curriculums, with most studying at level 3. Leaders offer four T-level programmes, but they have not yet recruited enough students for them to run.

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

Students thoroughly enjoy coming to college, where they feel part of a supportive, friendly and welcoming community. They particularly appreciate the very helpful teachers, who create an inclusive and worthwhile learning environment. Students with sensory processing difficulties appreciate being able to learn in calm and orderly surroundings. Students have consistently high levels of attendance and arrive at lessons on time.

Students are highly motivated to achieve. They embody the culture of kindness, mutual respect and high expectations that permeates the college. Students contribute keenly and confidently in lessons, where their input is valued and valuable. They appreciate the healthy challenge that they get from teachers or their peers. Students learn from any mistakes and readily make improvements.

Students benefit greatly from bespoke support that helps them to move on to their next steps. They receive highly effective, routinely planned and ad-hoc careers information, advice and guidance. Students receive subject-specific interview support for Oxbridge applications. Prospective apprentices attend mock recruitment and assessment sessions at the college. Students with high needs receive individualised support. They work with external providers, who support them to plan their transition to higher education or into work. Almost all students who plan to progress to higher education secure offers from their first-choice university. The vast majority of students progress on to higher education, employment, apprenticeships or further education.

Students, including those from the LGBTQ+ community, feel that they can be themselves at college. They feel comfortable and safe in an environment where the use of phobic language is not tolerated. Students develop an excellent understanding of maintaining good mental health. They value the support they receive if needed.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work with a wide range of employers and stakeholders, who contribute effectively to meeting the skills needs at the college. They collaborate with stakeholders, such as the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Wigan Council, to identify and meet the key priority growth sector areas. These include health and social care, science, professional services, engineering, and digital. Leaders have introduced level 3 engineering to support these skills needs. They have developed a range of T levels that complement the offer at other local providers.

Leaders and managers ensure that students benefit from meaningful employer and university involvement. Students studying health and social care take part in a breastfeeding awareness session delivered by experts from a specialist breastfeeding

charitable organisation. They learn about feeding choices, breast milk composition, and safe sleeping. Leaders have developed an extensive 'Career Academies' programme in which students attend activities and events with employers and other key stakeholders linked to their career choices. Programmes include 'Future Software Engineers Career Academy' and 'Future Medics, Dentists and Vets Career Academy'. Students who take part in the 'Future Psychologists Career Academy' learn about the various career paths they can follow. They attend mental health first-aid training to develop compassion and understanding.

Leaders partner with a variety of stakeholders across a range of sectors. However, they have yet to ensure a consistent approach to how stakeholders contribute to the design and implementation of the curriculum. Where collaboration takes place and is successful, students and teachers benefit greatly from the development of their knowledge and skills. For example, in A-level chemistry, teachers and technicians worked with university researchers to improve their approach to gram staining methods. Students now learn and use gram staining techniques by using industry methods and industry-grade equipment.

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

Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior leaders and governors are highly ambitious for their students and their staff. They have an unwavering commitment to provide high-quality education across all subject areas and groups of students. Leaders, managers, teachers and staff at all levels have high aspirations for their students. Students who study at St John Rigby College do extremely well.

Teachers teach their subjects to a very high standard. They are very well qualified and have up-to-date industry experience. Teachers are experienced in their subject, and many work as examiners. They use their knowledge to prepare students very effectively for external examinations. Teachers benefit from a range of strategies to enhance and improve their teaching and learning practice. During 'Think, Pair, Share' activities, teachers share their practice. They try out new methods in the classroom while receiving supportive feedback from colleagues.

Curriculum leaders and teachers plan the curriculum extremely successfully so that students build their knowledge and skills over the duration of their course. They teach topics in a well-considered, logical order that helps students to remember what they are taught over time. Teachers routinely interlink subject content that students have already learned to new topics. Teachers in A-level biology develop students' understanding of the control of gene expression before they move on to studying the gene technology topic to manipulate genes. Students with additional support needs and EHC plans benefit from very effective support arrangements. This enables them to achieve alongside their fellow students.

Students with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from highly effective individualised support arrangements. Staff gather extensive information from a wide range of sources to inform the individual

support plans they devise for students with high needs. They accurately identify starting points using intelligence from students' previous schools, as well as parents and professionals involved in their lives. Managers, learning mentors and teachers quickly determine the level of resource needed to support students to achieve as high a standard as their peers. They work cohesively together to remove barriers to learning. Students who need it are allocated a scribe to support them to take notes in lessons. Students with high needs feel that staff really believe in them and help them to become the best version of themselves.

Teachers help students understand complex subject content expertly. They use a range of high-quality activities to develop students' understanding of often complex subject matters. Teachers structure learning activities and tasks for students exceedingly well so that students gain a deeper understanding of the topics they study. In A-level psychology, teachers sensitively and ethically manage discussions about domestic violence while teaching students about the evolutionary explanations of aggression. Following the discussions, students clearly and knowledgeably describe how evolutionary theory is reductionist and too simplistic in the modern world.

Teachers use a range of activities regularly and consistently, such as quizzes, competitions and end-of-unit assessments, to check what students know and can do. They take time to correct misconceptions and challenge students to deepen their understanding and fluency. In GCSE English, learning mentors adapt subject questions so that students with high needs can participate in the lesson and answer questions independently.

Teachers provide useful feedback to students. Students know the gaps that they have in their knowledge, and they understand what they need to do to improve. Teachers in A-level geography critique students' use of language and terminology in their homework and essays. Students improve their writing over time as a result.

Students, including those with high needs, make exceptional progress on their programmes. They produce work of a very high standard. In level 3 art and design, teachers work with students to refine their skills through repeated work using a wide range of media, including watercolours, ceramics, gouache, lino print and textiles. Students develop expertise in their use of different products and techniques.

Leaders and managers monitor and track students' progress thoroughly and effectively. Managers meet with their teams frequently to identify gaps in individual student's learning and/or where they are underperforming or falling behind in their learning. They put in place highly effective strategies, such as additional revision classes, mandatory and voluntary study skills workshops and knowledge sessions, to help students to catch up with their learning and improve their in-year grades. Students make significant progress on their courses. A high proportion of students achieve high grades.

Students benefit greatly from the extensive range of enrichment activities that develop their character. They take part in a wide range of course- and interest-

related trips, visits, clubs and activities. Students enjoy attending climate change conferences, visiting parliament and the law courts in London, and participating in regeneration projects in Wigan. They play a popular fantasy role-play game with their peers, take part in European Youth Parliament debates and play sport for the college. Students enjoy the multiple opportunities they have to raise funds for charity, including for a local hospice, CAFOD, and Red Nose Day. Students expand their horizons and develop confidence, resilience, self-esteem and independence through participation in these activities.

Governors are passionate and committed to making continuous improvement to the quality of education at the college. Leaders provide governors with clear and highly detailed reports, which they use to challenge and hold leaders to account for their actions. Governors have a very accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the college and individual programme areas. They set clear and precise targets for leaders and managers to help rectify any weaknesses and to maintain the high quality of education. Governors have an excellent understanding of their statutory responsibilities. They ensure that equality and the college values, vision and ethos are promoted throughout the college.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130523
Address	Gathurst Road Orrell Wigan Lancashire WN5 0LJ
Contact number	01942 214797
Website	www.sjr.ac.uk
Principal	Peter McGhee, CBE
Provider type	Sixth-form college
Date of previous inspection	14 to 17 February 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, curriculum and quality, 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 learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

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