

Holy Cross College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

10–12 December 2018

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 learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors and leaders have rectified successfully most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good in most subject areas.
- Leaders and managers have created successfully a culture of high expectations. Staff and students strive for excellence, which aligns with leaders' and managers' ambition for the college.
- Rigorous assessment and monitoring by leaders and managers of students' progress from their starting points have led to improvements in the proportion of students that achieve their qualifications in most subject areas.
- Governors have a detailed understanding of students' progress and they challenge senior leaders effectively to bring about more rapid improvements.
- Study programmes are skilfully designed to provide students with a range of opportunities to develop their personal, social, ethical and moral understanding of the world in which they live, reflecting the values and ethos of the college.
- Teachers' assessment of students' progress is highly effective. It enables teachers to intervene swiftly so that students make rapid improvements towards reaching their target grades.
- A high proportion of students progress to prestigious universities, dance and drama academies, conservatoires, and higher-education provision in the college.
- A small minority of students do not achieve their qualifications at the grades expected of them.
- In a few subjects, a small minority of students drop out before the end of the course, which results in lower retention rates in these subjects.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Holy Cross College is a Roman Catholic sixth form college located in Bury, Greater Manchester. The college provides 16 to 19 study programmes mainly through A-level programmes with a small but increasing amount of vocational provision. A small minority of students are enrolled on a blended programme of academic and vocational subjects.
- Currently, 2,022 students are enrolled at the college, all of whom are following 16 to 19 study programmes: 1,952 students are on programmes at level 3 and 70 are on programmes at level 2. Twelve students are identified as having high needs.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that students, in particular those on vocational programmes, achieve their qualifications at the grades expected of them.
- Improve retention rates in subject areas where students drop out before the end of the course.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have rectified successfully the vast majority of weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good in most subject areas.
- Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has restructured. Leaders and managers have created a culture of high expectations for both staff and students. Staff are highly motivated. They welcome the challenge and pace of change as leaders strive for excellence. This aligns closely with leaders' and managers' strategic ambition. Improvements since the previous inspection have led to the majority of students in most subjects making at least the expected progress from their starting points.
- Quality-assurance processes are effective. Leaders and managers monitor students' progress closely. Teachers' assessments of students' progress against targets are the focus of frequent review meetings. Managers intervene swiftly with actions to bring about rapid improvements when students are not achieving their targets. However, leaders' and managers' improvement strategies have not brought about rapid enough improvements in a few subjects, such as geography. Here, students' progress remains poor.
- Managers monitor accurately the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through frequent lesson observations and learning walks. Staff who carry out lesson observations provide evaluative feedback to teachers to help them improve their practices. Areas for improvement inform leaders' and managers' professional development programme effectively. Staff benefit from relevant and targeted staff development. This includes working successfully with a high-performing sixth form college to support and share best practice across subjects. However, managers have not yet secured good teaching in all areas of the college, for example in biology.
- Managers use performance-management processes effectively. They monitor staff performance frequently. Where teachers do not meet the required standards, managers provide intensive support and development. As a result, teachers either improve their practices or leave the college.
- The self-assessment report identifies accurately the strengths and weaknesses. The associated action plan provides leaders and managers with clear improvement actions against which to measure performance. Middle managers use data effectively to identify clearly the areas for further improvement at subject level. They review self-assessment reports from other departments, which helps them to evaluate and share the most effective practices across subject departments. As a result, in most subject areas, students make good progress and in a few subject areas very good progress. For example, students studying A-level design and graphics and vocational applied-science qualifications achieve high grades in relation to their starting points.
- Leaders and managers make good use of local and regional information to inform the curriculum offer. The range of A-level, GCSE and vocational qualifications meets the needs of students in Bury and the surrounding areas who want to progress to higher education, apprenticeships or employment. However, leaders and managers have identified correctly the need to collect information to analyse better the impact of the

curriculum on students' destinations.

- Governors and staff have maintained a supportive and caring environment which promotes the college's mission and Roman Catholic ethos. Students develop their understanding of fundamental British values which they demonstrate through their respectful behaviour and tolerance.

The governance of the provider

- Since the previous inspection, the governing board has been strengthened with newly appointed members. Governors have a wide range of skills and expertise. They use their skills to ensure that the college remains financially strong, improves the quality of education and promotes the Roman Catholic ethos and experience that students receive while at college.
- Training for governors on how to understand better and interpret data correctly has helped them monitor more rigorously the progress of students and performance by subject areas. Their increased confidence in the information and comprehensive reports they receive enables them to challenge senior leaders effectively where students' progress and performance do not meet the pre-specified targets.
- Governors' increased scrutiny had led to improvements across the majority of subjects. They have a good understanding of the college's strengths and subjects that need to improve further.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors, senior leaders and staff place a high priority on the well-being of students and providing a safe environment. Managers update safeguarding policies and procedures regularly to ensure that staff know how to recognise and report any safeguarding concerns they have for students.
- Managers keep accurate records of all concerns and take swift action to keep students safe. They use their effective partnerships with external agencies to provide students with a range of support. These include mental health and well-being and specialist medical services which help students to stay at college.
- Staff receive up-to-date training on how to keep students safe, including on the 'Prevent' duty. They have a good awareness of local issues which they incorporate into enrichment and tutorial activities for students. Students feel safe. They know how to protect themselves and others from the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Students demonstrate a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Teachers develop their knowledge and skills in their specialist subjects through a well-developed whole-college strategy. Leaders' and managers' strong focus upon improving professional practice impacts positively on the progress that students make.

- Students receive good information, advice and guidance before starting their college programme. They complete a detailed assessment, which includes a subject-specific knowledge and skills assessment, and career plan. This ensures that students join programmes that meet their individual needs and their career aspirations. Consequently, the number of current students leaving in the first term has reduced significantly.
- Teachers use the results of assessment of students' starting points and subject-specific knowledge and skills assessments to establish clear starting points and to plan lessons thoughtfully to meet the needs of students. Effective learning and assessment strategies ensure that most current students make at least the expected progress.
- In most lessons, teachers sequence activities skilfully and effectively to build on students' prior learning. As a result, students develop their understanding of the subject rapidly and make good progress. For example, in psychology, a content analysis of political speeches by Donald Trump and Theresa May enabled students to use research methods to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a quantitative approach. In chemistry, students' treasure-hunt activity helped them to consolidate learning of seven different molecules. In English, students develop good skills in creative writing. They share their ideas confidently and discuss the key features of their work fluently.
- Teachers monitor and assess students' progress frequently and provide them with constructive and detailed feedback on their work. They encourage students to reflect on the feedback they receive. As a result, most students know what they need to do to improve and many amend and improve their work independently. They use feedback and examination criteria competently to help them improve their grades. In sport, students are able to speak confidently about the interplay of energy systems and the part they play in their body's recovery from high-intensity work.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge, expertise and detailed understanding of assessment requirements to prepare students thoroughly for their examinations. Where students' progress is too slow, arrangements to support them are good. In law, psychology, religious studies and sociology, assessment objectives and exam techniques are embedded skilfully into teachers' lesson planning.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to check learning and challenge students. For example, carefully planned, targeted questioning in sociology enables students to make synoptic links between functionalist views of the traditional family and that of other sociological perspectives and themes.
- Students value the excellent group and individual support they receive between lessons from their teachers. They value the opportunity to revisit key assessments and to review where they lost marks. Consequently, students are better able to understand the key elements they need to include in their answers.
- Transition arrangements for students with high needs are good. Students settle quickly into college and develop their knowledge and skills because specialist staff ensure that they develop and tailor support to meet individual students' needs. Teachers monitor students' progress closely. Students' support plans help to identify the specific ongoing support they require. As a result, a large proportion of students with high needs remain on their courses, achieve their qualifications, and progress to meaningful and relevant destinations.
- The quality of teachers' target setting is too varied, particularly in the subject areas that

underperform. Teachers in these areas place insufficient focus on the specific knowledge, skills and understanding that enable students to improve their work and make rapid progress. Examples of weak target setting include 'complete all course work by Christmas', 'look over notes in every lesson' and 'revise all your year 1 subjects'.

- In a few lessons, teachers do not plan or structure learning activities appropriately. Often, students are passive, the pace of learning is slow and opportunities to develop understanding of technical terminology is limited. Questioning techniques are superficial and do not challenge and extend students' knowledge, skills and understanding. Consequently, students are not able to recall information taught previously.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students have good attitudes to learning. Attendance is good and students arrive punctually to lessons. They arrive prepared with well-ordered folders. Students settle to work quickly. Their behaviour is good in lessons and around the communal areas of the college. They are courteous and respectful, for example holding doors open for staff and their peers. As a result, a calm and harmonious atmosphere pervades the college.
- Students develop high levels of confidence and self-worth as they explore a range of health and well-being topics and themes during tutorials. Students feel safe and are kept safe in the secure and caring environment created by leaders and managers. For example, security staff are vigilant and challenge students routinely who do not wear their lanyards. Students' understanding and application of fundamental British values are good. Threats relating to radicalisation and extremism are carefully considered by students who talk fluently about what they would do if they had a concern about a friend or peer.
- Work experience arrangements are improving. The proportion of students that benefit from well-planned external work experience placements aligned with their career aspirations has increased significantly. Leaders and managers acknowledge correctly that the planning of external work experience placements requires further improvement.
- Students develop significant new knowledge, skills and understanding from work-related learning. They develop good employability skills from cross-college activities. For example, students develop good entrepreneurial and team-working skills as different subject areas work together on the 'Collective', which is a creative enterprise that is led by art and design students and supported by business studies students.
- Students benefit from thorough and impartial careers information, advice and guidance. Specialist careers advisers work with students skilfully, ensuring that students choose programmes closely aligned with their career aspirations. Managers place high priority on the careers education, information, advice and guidance that are available to students through tutorials, one-to-one interviews and a good range of online resources. As a result, students make informed choices about their future career options.
- Students participate enthusiastically in a wide range of valuable enrichment activities. For example, first aid courses provide students with knowledge, skills and understanding that can potentially save lives. The college's mission, values and ethos are embodied in enrichment activities such as volunteering. For example, students support older people and people who are ill to make pilgrimages to Lourdes. They also fundraise for causes such as 'toilet twinning' to build toilets in Asia and Africa.

- Students receive highly effective support to help them overcome barriers such as financial difficulties, bereavement and mental ill-health. Students remain on their programme and achieve their qualifications as a result of the swift referrals to external agencies and skilful support from specialist staff.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- According to leaders' and managers' internal data, the proportion of students who achieve their qualifications has improved since the previous inspection. The proportion of students who achieve vocational qualifications at levels 2 and 3 is high and above that of similar colleges. Achievement rates for GCSE English and mathematics at levels 4 to 9 are high and significantly higher than the national rates. Achievement rates for A-level programmes have improved in most subjects. However, in a few subject areas, for example geography and history, a small minority of students withdrew from these subjects before sitting their examinations, which had an adverse effect on achievement rates.
- In 2017/18, students did not achieve the grades expected in relation to their starting points in several A-level subjects. These included geography, combined English language and literature, and drama and theatre studies. Too many students studying for vocational qualifications at level 3, for example in business studies and information and communication technology, failed to achieve the grades expected of them. Conversely, students on A-level programmes in film studies, art and design, and physics and vocational programmes at level 3, for example law, achieved and often exceeded their expected grades.
- Most current students are making at least the progress expected of them. Students produce work of a high standard and meet or exceed the requirements of their programme. Students' course work is ordered systematically, enabling them to develop skilfully their knowledge, skills and understanding of topics and themes. This is particularly evident in students' improved grades in 'key assessments'.
- Achievement gaps between different groups of students, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and males and females, have reduced. All groups of students are now equally successful.
- Most students who achieve their A levels and vocational qualifications at level 3 progress to university. Many students accept offers from their first choice of university. A high proportion of students go to prestigious universities, specialist colleges, such as dance and drama academies, and conservatoires, or progress to degree-level programmes in the college. A small proportion of students progress to apprenticeships, further study or employment.
- A high proportion of students on programmes at level 2 progress successfully to higher-level courses at the college or at the local further education college. Others gain employment or enrol on apprenticeship programmes.
- Leaders and managers analyse students' destination data rigorously. They acknowledge correctly that the destinations of a small minority of students are unknown. They have actions in place to address this but the impact of these actions is not yet evident.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130499
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,171
Principal/CEO	Daveth Frost
Telephone number	0161 762 4500
Website	www.holycross.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)	-	-	70	-	1,951	1	-	-
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	12							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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 learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and tutorials. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Elaine Price	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Crilly	Ofsted Inspector
Alex Fau-Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector

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