

# Inspection of Aquinas College

Inspection dates: 25 to 28 April 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Good</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Aquinas College is a Catholic sixth-form college situated in Stockport, Cheshire. The college offers education programmes for young people, courses for adults, and programmes for students with high needs.

At the time of the inspection, 2,311 students aged 16 to 19 were following a full-time study programme. Most students study A levels across 36 subjects. There were 872 students studying a mix of A-level and vocational qualifications, 265 students studying a vocational programme at level 3, and 18 at level 2. There were 70 adult learners studying vocational programmes and 34 students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) studying on the Aquinas pathways programme.

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

Students enjoy their learning and are happy at the college. They benefit from the friendly culture and the opportunity to make friends and become more independent. Students appreciate that teachers care about their education and help them to boost their confidence.

Attendance is high for young people and students with high needs. Most students attend their lessons punctually. However, the attendance for a minority of adult learners is too low. Students are ambitious and motivated to learn. They take pride and produce work of a high standard.

Students' behaviour is excellent. This creates a calm and positive environment. Students demonstrate respect for their teachers and their peers. However, although leaders have taken steps to increase inclusivity in the college, a few students who are part of the LGBTQ+ community do not experience the same levels of respect from other students outside of the classroom.

Most students on the Aquinas pathways programme have access to both internal and external work placement opportunities, such as at the college library or the local football club. However, students studying A-level and vocational programmes do not routinely participate in work experience.

Most students develop a good understanding of life in modern Britain. They participate in extra-curricular activities and volunteering. Students who are part of the St Vincent de Paul charity for the community raise funds to support both local and worldwide issues. For example, they support the homeless in Stockport and the Turkish-Syria earthquake. This broadens students' knowledge and supports them to develop strong moral values based on the college's gospel values of freedom, justice and love. However, there is not a systematic uptake of enrichment activities by all students.

Students benefit from guest speakers in most curriculum areas. For example, A-level geography students learn about volcanoes and tectonic plates from university professors. This enables students to build their wider knowledge effectively to support their curriculum.

Students feel safe and know whom they should contact should they have any concerns. They value the safe and supportive environment in which they learn. Students are aware of current issues, such as knife crime, domestic violence and mental health. A-level psychology students learn about cognitive behavioural therapy to support mental health and identify methods to reduce examination stress. However, a minority of young people and most adult learners are unable to recall the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs. Leaders have a clear understanding of the local and regional skills need sectors. They work closely with stakeholders to identify accurately the priority skills in the local area. These include healthcare, business and financial, creative and digital, and advanced manufacturing. Leaders have introduced new programmes to support the local and regional skills needs, such as the level 3 diplomas in health and social care and applied law.

In most curriculum areas, teachers involve stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the curriculum. In A-level biology, teachers work with local NHS trusts to develop students' reflective practice and access volunteering opportunities. This ensures that students develop the technical, vocational and employability skills they need to progress to their next steps. Leaders have identified that they need to work with higher education institutions to align their curriculum with the first year of higher education programmes.

Leaders work with education partners effectively to support the 'widening participation in higher education' agenda. They provide events for both students and parents about accessing higher education. Leaders provide information about financial support and the life skills that students will need to develop, such as budgeting and independent study. Leaders work effectively with community stakeholders as part of the 'social value strategy' to support people with autism spectrum disorder who are progressing on to apprenticeships.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for the curriculums they provide. They are ambitious for their students. Leaders have set a clear vision for the college, which is built on strategic priorities and a culture in which students, including those with high needs and SEND, can thrive.

Leaders use effective quality improvement processes to monitor the quality of education. This ensures that the quality of education that young people receive is good. For example, they carry out reviews of learning to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They use the information they gather from these reviews to put in place targeted interventions for curriculum areas that require further improvement, such as A-level further mathematics and A-level English literature. However, this process is not yet fully embedded in adult programmes to ensure that all adult learners receive the same high-quality education.

Teachers plan highly effective curriculums for young people, which are sequenced logically to consolidate and build upon earlier learning. A-level geography students learn about water-flow through different rocks and landscapes before progressing to water management and flood control. However, teachers' planning of curriculums is less effective for adults and students with high needs. Teachers do not always use

the detailed information on support needs for students with high needs to consistently inform curriculum planning.

The vast majority of teachers provide constructive and highly effective feedback to students to support them to improve their work. Students know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Students use this feedback to improve the quality of their work. For example, A-level psychology students make links to biological factors when exploring schizophrenia, such as biological predispositions due to traumatic births. Adult learners do not receive the same timely, high-quality feedback from teachers. Consequently, a minority of adult learners are not sufficiently prepared for their assessments.

Teachers have the appropriate experience and teaching qualifications to teach students. Most teachers maintain competence in their specialisms through membership of professional bodies and by becoming examiners of awarding organisations. Teachers value the cross-departmental learning communities, where they share good practice and benefit from training to improve their teaching skills. Most teachers use their new skills, such as effective recall and questioning techniques, successfully in the classroom. Level 3 criminology students recall key concepts, such as the due process model and how the model focuses on a just and fair criminal justice system for all.

Students benefit from effective, high-quality careers advice and guidance from college careers advisors and personal tutors. All young people have a personal career plan. Students attend the 'after Aquinas' careers fair and university open days. A-level criminology students use the college's online apprenticeship club to source apprenticeship opportunities, and performing arts students are supported to apply to conservatoires as an alternative to university. Students on the Aquinas pathways programme access work skills sessions, attend external trips to other colleges and receive talks from external guest speakers, such as paramedics, museum curators and local supported internships providers. This enables students to make informed decisions about their next steps.

Leaders and managers are considerate of staff well-being and workload. They ensure that teachers have dedicated departmental time every week for training and development. Staff can access chaplaincy support, mental health support and have access to a well-being app. Staff feel valued and supported in their roles.

Governors are suitably knowledgeable and experienced to carry out their roles. They have a clear understanding of their statutory responsibilities, such as equality, diversity, and safeguarding. Governors do not receive sufficiently detailed, high-quality reports from leaders on the current in-year performance of the college. Consequently, this hinders governors' ability to provide the scrutiny and challenge to leaders to improve the quality of education for all students and learners.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers place a high priority on safeguarding. They promote a supportive culture throughout the college. Staff provide a personal development curriculum through tutorial sessions, student assemblies and religious education. Students learn about, for example, peer-on-peer abuse, sexual harassment, coercive control and healthy relationships.

Safeguarding staff are appropriately trained to carry out their roles. Staff receive regular safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty updates. The designated safeguarded leads and safeguarding team deal with and record safeguarding referrals and well-being concerns swiftly and effectively. Leaders and managers carry out appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff to work at the college.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders and managers should ensure that tutors provide adult learners with effective feedback on their written work so that they know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all students have an improved understanding and awareness of all the protected characteristics, including those for LGBTQ+ students, so they can promote these at college and in their personal lives.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all students develop a good understanding of radicalisation and extremism and how it applies to them while at college, work and in their personal lives.
- Leaders and managers should provide governors with high-quality, detailed information so that board members can challenge and hold leaders and managers to account for the quality of education that all students receive.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130514
<b>Address</b>	Nangreave Road Stockport Cheshire SK2 6TH
<b>Contact number</b>	01614833237
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.aquinas.ac.uk">www.aquinas.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Danny Pearson
<b>Provider type</b>	Sixth-form college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24 September 2013
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant 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.

### Inspection team

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