

Inspection of St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College

Inspection dates:

21 to 24 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Information about this provider

St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College (SFX) is based on one campus in Wandsworth, under the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The college has a strong Catholic ethos.

SFX provides a broad range of academic and vocational courses for 1,269 students. There were 1,118 students studying level 3 programmes and 151 studying level 1 or 2 programmes. At the time of the inspection, 570 students were studying vocational programmes and 373 were studying A levels, with a further 175 students studying a mix of A level and vocational programmes. There were 299 students studying mathematics GCSE and 272 studying English GCSE alongside their level 3 study programmes.

The largest subject areas are level 3 business, social sciences, economics, psychology, health and social care, applied law, science and mathematics, creative and performing arts, media, English, history, and modern foreign languages.

At the time of the inspection, 32 students had education, health and care (EHC) plans and received high needs funding.

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

Students and staff hold dearly and respect the college's core values, which are based on a strong religious ethos. Tutors further reinforce these values in weekly religion and philosophy lessons, where they guide students in interesting discussions about ethical and religious issues.

Students benefit from an exceptionally high-quality tutorial programme, where they learn about contemporary issues and current events. For example, students learn about sexual abuse and healthy sexual relationships from well-trained tutors and external speakers. Students enjoy their tutorial sessions and can remember important messages and content from them.

Students, rightly, speak highly of the welcoming nature of the college, where leaders and staff actively respect and celebrate diversity. For example, staff run a well-attended club that provides a friendly environment for LGBTQ+ students and their friends. Students with high needs flourish in a nurturing and inclusive environment.

Students enjoy their lessons and recognise the value of their studies. For example, A-level sociology students say that lessons help them to open their eyes to different views, perspectives and ways of thinking about the world. In a very few cases in GCSE mathematics, students have a less positive attitude to their studies. For example, some students arrive late to lessons. Most students would recommend the college to their friends.

Staff swiftly and robustly challenge students when their behaviour occasionally falls short of the high expectations leaders and staff set. As a result, students' attendance is high and they behave well. For example, students listen and participate well during presentations and lectures from visiting speakers. Classrooms, corridors and communal areas are calm and controlled spaces.

Students make a positive contribution to their local community through the chaplaincy and a well-organised house system. For example, students volunteer with food banks and nursing homes and organise charity bake sales. This enables students to become more active members of their communities.

Students enjoy the wide range of enrichment activities on offer. Most students take part in activities such as football, netball and theatre trips. They make good use of the gym facilities to support their physical and mental well-being. Students, including those with high needs, become more resilient, confident and independent.

Students appreciate the regular safety briefings that staff give them about staying safe in the local area. They are clear on the safeguarding procedures and whom to contact if they need help. When students raise issues about safeguarding or safety around the college, staff respond swiftly and effectively. Students feel safe at college.

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 needs. They work closely with stakeholders such as Business London to identify the priority skills in the region accurately. Leaders use this knowledge to plan their curriculums, so that they meet skills shortages. For example, leaders have designed and are building a new media production studio to provide teaching spaces and equipment for a T level in media and production. As a result, the curriculum reflects the changing skills needs of the London economy well.

Leaders and managers have developed a curriculum that enables a large majority of students to develop the skills required to move on to their chosen destinations. Leaders have a strong focus on the development of students' transferable skills. For example, college careers coaches work with the Investment Association trade body to run skills workshops for students who are interested in a career in the City. The sessions model the recruitment process in the financial sector. As a result, students develop useful work-related presentation, teamwork and analytical skills.

In most curriculum areas, leaders, managers and teachers involve stakeholders in planning the curriculum. For example, geography A-level teachers work well with the Field Studies Council (FSC) to ensure that students have training in the right fieldwork skills to carry out high-quality geographical research. However, in a minority of subjects, stakeholders are not sufficiently involved in the design of the curriculum.

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

Governors and leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for their students and this is reflected in the curriculums they offer. They have designed their curriculums to give students useful level 3 qualifications alongside GCSE retake programmes to provide them with the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need to move on to higher education and other positive destinations.

Leaders and managers rigorously monitor the quality of the education they provide. They communicate areas of strength and weakness to experienced governors who consequently have a sound understanding of the provision. Leaders accurately identify low achievement in a few subjects and put in suitable measures to tackle the causes. For example, they provide effective staff development for teachers who need to improve their practice. This has resulted in continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and achievement across most subject areas.

The large majority of students achieve the qualifications that they need to move on to positive destinations, including universities and employment. However, leaders recognise that student achievement of higher grades in a small number of A-level subjects and mathematics GCSE remains too low.

Teachers identify and build on students' prior learning using a range of stimulating activities in lessons that make students think hard. They test what students already know and adapt their teaching to make sure that all students benefit from the lessons. For example, in Spanish lessons, teachers make sure that students who speak Spanish at home are provided with additional writing tasks to stretch them. Students in modern languages often exceed their target grades. However, in a few cases, teachers do not use initial testing early enough to identify where students have gaps in learning or need further support. For example, in GCSE mathematics, teachers do not accurately assess students' starting points at the beginning of the course and this hinders the ability of teachers to focus on students' particular areas for development in time for their formal examinations.

Well-qualified teachers with strong subject knowledge use effective teaching methods to help students understand and apply what they learn. For example, in applied general business lessons, teachers use demanding questions to challenge students on their analysis of product pricing and market intelligence. Students have to critically evaluate their work in their responses. Over time, they become adept at applying their knowledge and using specialist language to talk about their subjects.

Teachers use peer and formative assessment effectively to check learning. For example, in A-level economics lessons, teachers use quick tests and quizzes effectively to test students' understanding of basic economic concepts, such as supply and demand curves. Consequently, teachers know that students remember and securely understand foundational concepts before they move on to more complex content.

Teachers have high expectations of students' work. They give students useful written and verbal feedback that helps them to improve their work over time. For example, teachers give level 3 art and design students detailed written and verbal feedback on project proposals, contributing useful advice about how to improve work to a distinction level in their finished project. Across the vast majority of subject areas, students respond well to feedback. As a result, they produce high-quality practical and written work.

Leaders and managers are ambitious for students with high needs. Leaders work exceptionally well with students, parents and carers, local authorities and secondary schools to create curriculums and support plans that are tailored to meet individual students' needs. Students with high needs experience a very smooth transition from school to college and settle into college life quickly.

Leaders and managers make certain that students with high needs are very successfully integrated into academic and vocational programmes. Teachers and support staff jointly and very effectively adapt and tailor their teaching based on the subject-specific targets on students' EHC plans. For example, A-level sociology teachers adapt their lessons for students with high needs. They share complex lesson content in manageable pieces, with repetition built into the teaching to support the students. As a result, students with high needs participate fully in

lessons. Students with high needs achieve as well or better than their peers and move on to their chosen destinations when they leave college.

Students receive comprehensive careers guidance. Through weekly tutorials and high-quality advice from impartial careers staff, students are clear on their progression routes from an early stage in their studies. Staff continue to give excellent guidance about university, employment and apprenticeship choices and applications throughout students' time at college. This means that students know what they need to do to achieve their ambitions.

Leaders are considerate of staff workload when planning changes. For example, leaders allocate teachers well-being time on Friday afternoons and teachers have protected time for training and to mark internal assessments. Teachers appreciate that opportunities for professional development do not come at the cost of increased workload. Staff feel well cared for and support leaders in the promotion of a culture of continuous improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Use initial assessment more effectively in GCSE mathematics to identify individual students' starting points and the gaps in their skills and knowledge, so they tailor teaching accordingly.
- Increase the proportion of students achieving high grades in GCSE mathematics and a small number of A level subjects.
- Make sure that leaders and managers involve employers and relevant stakeholders in planning the curriculum in all subject areas.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130422
Address	Malwood Road London SW12 8EN
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Principal, CEO or equivalent	Graham Thompson
Provider type	Sixth form college
Date of previous inspection	23 to 26 January 2018

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the associate principal curriculum 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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