

# Inspection of Holy Cross College

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 March 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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

## Information about this provider

Holy Cross College is a Roman Catholic sixth-form college located in Bury, Greater Manchester. It was founded in 1878 by the Daughters of the Cross of Liège. The college attracts a range of learners, over a third of whom are from different religions or have no religious beliefs.

The college predominantly provides a broad range of A levels and a small number of level 3 vocational courses in applied science, business, criminology, health and social care, information technology (IT) and sound engineering. The A-level subjects with the largest number of students are art and design, biology, business, chemistry, English, history, law, mathematics and psychology. Students who have not yet achieved GCSE English and/or mathematics follow a GCSE resit programme that includes English and mathematics, psychology and sociology and a range of level 2 vocational subjects, such as applied science, business and IT.

At the time of the inspection, there were 2,287 students enrolled at the college. Of these, 2,184 students were on programmes at level 3 and 103 were on programmes at level 2. There were 11 students who were in receipt of high-needs funding.

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

Students enjoy going to college and attendance is very high. They find the environment welcoming, caring and friendly. Students say that everyone supports and respects each other and that they feel safe. Students value highly the way that teachers help them to learn. For example, teachers do not accept that students with lower GCSE grades on entry to the college cannot achieve the highest grades at A level or on their vocational courses. This approach inspires students and motivates them to be successful in life.

Leaders provide a very broad and varied range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. These include clubs and societies as well as external competitions, competitive and recreational sports, and charity fundraising events. These activities and events support students to develop their character, resilience and curiosity about the world around them. Participation is high with over three quarters of students attending additional activities regularly. Students work with a variety of charities, including through their own '4C' charities group and the chaplaincy. For example, they support the elderly and volunteer to help people experiencing poverty, disadvantage, discrimination and homelessness. Students understand how to be responsible, caring and active citizens. They make a positive difference in their communities.

The tutorial curriculum helps students to set goals and to understand the importance of physical, mental and sexual health and relationships. Through tutorial sessions, students develop a detailed understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. They know how to spot the signs of extremism and how to report any safeguarding concerns. Students benefit from useful advice on keeping safe online, such as making social media profiles private and protecting financial information when using online banking.

Staff promote fundamental British values very effectively through all teaching and learning activities, tutorial sessions and assemblies, as well as in their expectations for behaviour in lessons and around the college. Students gain confidence in challenging inappropriate attitudes, such as misogyny. Bullying and harassment, while extremely rare, are not tolerated.

Students show high levels of respect and value people from different backgrounds and groups. LGBTQ+ students feel that staff go 'above and beyond' to ensure inclusivity and support. Students with high needs describe a transformational journey that they experience through attending the college.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work effectively with a range of employers and other stakeholders. They understand local and regional skills needs and use this information to plan their future provision and curriculum offer strategically. Leaders

work closely with the local authority to support the borough's wider recruitment needs by ensuring that students develop transferrable skills that will support them into higher education (HE) or employment. Leaders work with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, when relevant, to support the delivery of the local skills improvement plan.

Managers respond quickly to feedback from employers and stakeholders in relation to the design, sequencing and, occasionally, the content of their curriculums. This is evident in subjects such as accountancy, biology, business, dance, English and geology. However, this approach is not yet consistent across all curriculum areas.

Students benefit from up-to-date knowledge through listening to guest speakers and attending masterclasses. They improve their practical skills through workshops delivered by university lecturers, such as in biology, geology, health and social care, history and mathematics. In mathematics, students learn how probability concepts are applied in online betting and gambling fraud, and why gambling is a national issue. Alumni and external visitors support students' understanding of future careers in skills shortage areas, such as in the nuclear industry.

Teaching and careers staff attend university professional development days regularly where they update their knowledge on career pathways in HE. They increase their understanding of how to develop students' decision-making, independence, study and research skills to help them to be successful at university.

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

Leaders provide their students with a high standard of education and support to enable them to achieve their full potential. They ensure that social disadvantage is not a barrier to students' success. Most students access ambitious curriculums that focus on the college's values and aspirations. However, the level 2 curriculum is not yet ambitious enough for the high proportion of students who achieve their GCSE English and mathematics resit qualifications early in the academic year.

Leaders and managers provide tailored and often specialist support to ensure that students with high needs can access the same ambitious curriculums as their peers. They support students to acquire the personal skills they need for adult life, alongside a high standard of academic skills required to achieve their future ambitions.

Teachers are ambitious for what students can achieve. They use students' initial and ongoing assessments of what they know and can do to guide students to go beyond the syllabus and to deepen their knowledge and skills. For example, in A-level drama, students contemporise set texts, such as 'Antigone', to relate the play to modern-day events, such as the two World Wars and current American presidential campaigns. Where appropriate, teachers work in conjunction with employers to embed industry requirements into curriculums, such as the much needed skills in the local healthcare sector. For example, A-level psychology students learn about

biopsychology, cognitive neuroscience, clinical psychology and mental health. This links to Bury's local needs, such as mental health awareness around schizophrenia and depression. Students develop substantial new knowledge, skills, and behaviours over time. They develop independent study skills from the start of their time at the college. These help them to prepare for the requirements of HE.

Managers, teachers and support staff plan curriculums logically and effectively. They support students to develop foundation knowledge before moving on to other topics. For example, in A-level biology, students learn about proteins before moving on to enzymes to help them to understand later topics, such as photosynthesis. In A-level psychology, teachers recognise that students often find the research methods topic challenging. They now teach research methods as the first lesson of each week to build students' understanding and confidence incrementally over time. This has helped students to be very successful in their final assessments.

Teachers use effective questioning frequently to check students' understanding of what they have learned. Teachers develop students' curiosity about their learning by facilitating discussion on topics, such as the cause and diagnosis of Down's syndrome in health and social care. Teachers identify and correct misunderstandings and misconceptions swiftly. In a few subjects, such as A-level history, teachers prepare additional resources that identify common mistakes and how students can avoid them.

Most teachers test what students can remember regularly. This is effective in helping students to retain ideas and to prepare them for their summer examinations. In level 2 business, teachers use mnemonics to help students to remember what they learn, such as how to work out the break-even point on a graph. Students take pride in their work and organise their class notes and assignments methodically. This helps them to reinforce their learning and to develop their study skills.

Students receive regular, individual support to prevent them from falling behind. Teachers break learning down into smaller tasks or provide consolidation booklets, such as in A-level history, to help students to understand more complex topics. Students receive direct support after each key assessment to help them to understand where they have made mistakes and how to rectify them. They learn how to extend their responses to practice examination questions to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills and to achieve higher grades.

Leaders ensure that students who have high needs have updated education, health and care plans. From these, learning support staff create highly detailed and effective support plans that help teachers and teaching assistants to apply specific strategies to help students to succeed.

Most teachers provide students with effective feedback that helps them to improve their work and understanding. For example, in A-level art, teachers encourage students to use typography more expressively when researching and emulating the work of neo-conceptual artists. In A-level psychology, teachers promote the use of the 'point, evidence, explanation, link' approach to help students to structure an

effective academic essay. Students are very clear about the strengths of their work, what they need to do to improve and the progress they make towards their goals.

Most students, including students with high needs and disadvantaged students, achieve successfully and progress to positive destinations. These include universities, drama schools and degree apprenticeships. Most curriculum managers work extensively with alumni to help students to aspire to careers that they may not have considered previously. The majority of students achieve higher than expected grades. However, in a few subjects, leaders recognise that students could make better progress and achieve higher grades. Leaders monitor the progress of the most disadvantaged students carefully and provide extensive support. Students with high needs and those who are care-experienced achieve as well as, if not better than, their peers.

Students receive regular, high-quality and impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance throughout their time at the college. Students with high needs receive effective support from external careers advisers, who are skilled in supporting their social and emotional needs. They learn how to become independent in preparation for university and their next steps. Students who intend to apply for university courses in medicine, dentistry or veterinary science benefit from a subject-specific group to support their applications.

Teachers are highly qualified and subject experts. Around a third of them work as awarding organisation examiners. Leaders provide teachers with effective professional development. Teachers benefit from subject-specific training and peer support. For example, in science, teachers receive science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM training) to maintain their subject currency and industry-related skills. In art, teachers work on a peer project that links art subjects to industry skills. This supports teachers to deliver highly relevant curriculums for their students.

Leaders support teachers to manage their workload effectively. They provide teachers with additional time to mark coursework and help them to deal with busier times of the year, such as organising art exhibitions and writing students' university references. Teachers appreciate the care that leaders show towards them and their well-being. Leaders take a supportive approach to improve teachers' performance. This has a positive impact on the quality of teaching that students receive.

Leaders have put in place a comprehensive range of effective quality assurance processes to monitor and improve the quality of education. This has led to significant improvements across most subject areas. For example, since the previous inspection, the number of students who are retained on their courses, particularly in vocational areas, has increased. Leaders have improved the quality of learning, teaching and assessment on many A-level courses that they identified as subjects of concern. They know what they need to do to improve student achievement in the few remaining subjects that do not yet meet the high standards of performance that leaders expect.

Governors are from a range of professional backgrounds, including education and training. They are proud to serve the college and its students. Governors challenge senior leaders robustly about the impact of the actions they take to improve the quality of education. They enjoy productive links with curriculum leaders. Governors use these to consider the impact of new initiatives and strategies on different curriculum areas, particularly those areas that need to improve.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Create a challenging and broad level 2 curriculum for the high proportion of students who achieve their GCSE English and mathematics resit qualifications in the academic year.
- Ensure that all subjects perform at the same consistently high standard across the college and increase the number of students who achieve the highest grades.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Carina Vitti
<b>Provider type</b>	Sixth-form college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	10–12 December 2018
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## 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. 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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