

# Inspection of Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College

Inspection dates:

24 to 27 September 2024

**Overall effectiveness****Outstanding**

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

**Information about this provider**

Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College is situated in the centre of Leeds. It recruits students from three Catholic partner schools and over 100 high schools. The college is predominantly a provider of A levels, with a smaller number of students studying towards applied general qualifications and T levels. Around a quarter of students are on a mixed programme of A levels and applied general qualifications. Nearly all students study three level 3 subjects. A small proportion of students are enrolled onto a level 2 pathway, which leads to an applied general qualification with English language and mathematics GCSEs. There are currently 2,744 students enrolled, of whom around 300 have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and a small number have high needs.

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

Students thrive in a culture of high expectation and ambition. Staff create an ethos in which every student is supported to reach their academic and personal potential, regardless of their starting points. This ethos is firmly rooted in the college's Catholic values and a commitment that every student becomes the 'best they can be'. Students appreciate their place at the college and are proud to study in a welcoming, inclusive and diverse community.

Students demonstrate exceptional behaviour both in classrooms and around the college. Teachers firmly establish the expectations of students' behaviours and conduct at the start of programmes, which students strive to meet. Students' attendance is exemplary. Students have highly positive and mature attitudes to their studies. For example, those on the T level health course discuss sensitive medical issues with respect for the dignity of patients.

Staff prepare students very effectively for their futures and for life in modern Britain. All students participate in the innovative Stella Maris Leadership Award, which has been developed by college leaders. Through the award, students develop their character and develop attributes such as respect, perseverance, responsibility and capacity to make effective decisions. Students value the award, both for the development of their full potential as a member of society and for their future career prospects.

Highly skilled teachers and specialist careers staff provide very effective support for students to help them make decisions about their next steps into university, employment or apprenticeships. Students have access to relevant and high-quality work-related experiences alongside their courses. For example, students in A-level physics build electric cars under supervision of staff from an engineering employer and review how they can make the vehicles more efficient.

Students feel safe. They wear their lanyards with pride and appreciate the measures that leaders take to ensure their safety, such as controlled access. They value their tutorial sessions that raise awareness of the risks that they may face in the local area, including knife crime, gang culture and phone theft. Staff expose students to a wide range of current social, cultural and political issues through the philosophy, theology and ethics curriculum.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders engage very effectively with a wide range of stakeholders to understand the skills needs of the local, regional and national economy. They gather information from employers, universities and community organisations and plan their provision precisely to meet the needs that these agencies identify. For example, leaders work with the local NHS trust, universities, local college leaders and community groups as part of a city-wide initiative to develop a skilled healthcare workforce. The

partnership ensures that students on the T level health course gain exposure to clinical settings, so they develop the skills that they need for work. Early in their placements, students have a range of experiences, including sterilising equipment and observing surgery.

Leaders involve employers and other stakeholders highly effectively in the design and implementation of the curriculum. Teachers modify the content and sequence of their curriculum to develop the skills that employers say they need. Teachers of the T Level digital course work with employers to plan high-quality industry placements so that students are exposed to a wide range of technology and services. They review students' skills and aspirations and use this to ensure that placements are aligned to their chosen specialisms in, for example, software development or cyber security.

Leaders have responded to calls from employers and community organisations to develop students' character so that they are well prepared to meet the challenges of the current social and economic landscape. As a result, students develop the skills, habits and virtues that they need to thrive in life and work, becoming well-rounded individuals with a strong sense of citizenship.

Leaders ensure that teachers blend the development of relevant skills seamlessly through their planning and their approach to teaching. Teachers of A-level psychology and biology work closely with universities to develop students' skills through live research projects. In criminology, students work with universities and legal firms to apply and practise their skills in simulated environments, such as court room settings and crime scenes. Students grow in confidence in readiness for higher education.

Leaders have a high level of understanding of emerging and future skills needs because of the rich and wide-ranging network of partnerships that they have developed. They are agile in responding to skills needs and demonstrate unwavering commitment to strengthening current projects and pioneering new initiatives to meet these needs.

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

Leaders and managers have developed a broad and coherent curriculum. This includes courses leading to academic, applied general and technical qualifications, as well as the very successful introduction of T levels. Students combine different types of qualifications to meet their specific needs and interests, and this provides them with the best possible chance of achieving their career ambitions. For those students not ready for level 3 study, the college has developed a carefully thought-out level 2 pathway, which enables students to progress successfully to the next level.

Leaders and managers are ambitious for what their students can achieve, supporting them to progress academically and to develop as individuals with good character. They are passionate about their commitment to ensuring that all students

experience a high-quality and well-rounded education. Staff understand the challenging personal circumstances of many of their students and strive to ensure that all students meet their full potential. They take effective action to reduce the barriers to learning that many students face, such as providing electronic devices to those experiencing digital poverty.

Staff have designed an inclusive curriculum that very effectively meets the needs of students with high needs and students with SEND. They provide a culture in which students feel secure and comfortable, while being appropriately challenged to achieve their full potential and gain key attributes. Students value the individualised support that they receive and appreciate the contribution that they are able to make in determining the most appropriate support. Learning support mentors use their knowledge and experience well to provide students with the required levels of support, which enables them to fully participate in all aspects of their learning. Students progressively develop their knowledge and skills while increasing their independence and autonomy. As a result, they make excellent progress, achieve their qualifications and, where applicable, the targets in their education, health and care plans.

Teachers sequence the curriculum thoughtfully. They build knowledge skilfully so that students are secure in foundation concepts before learning more complicated topics and theories. In criminology, teachers cover external influences on perceptions of crime, such as the media, before moving on to criminological theories and exploring the different laws in other parts of the world.

Experienced and well-qualified teachers use a range of highly effective teaching methods. Teachers revisit past content frequently throughout courses and use effective recall strategies to enable students to remember the information that they need to complete more complex tasks. In biology, teachers explain cyclic and non-cyclic photophosphorylation in detail by taking students through each stage of the process, using clear diagrams, texts, short quizzes and tasks. As a result, students are very well prepared for assessments and examinations.

Teachers skilfully use a range of effective assessment methods, including quizzes, presentations, case studies, professional discussions and research-based projects. They use questioning to help students recall and remember information from previous learning. Teachers use the outcomes of assessment well to identify gaps in knowledge and misconceptions, which they carefully fill and correct.

Students take pride in their work. They produce high-quality work that demonstrates the rapid development of their knowledge and skills. In A-level English, students' essays are increasingly rich in content and linguistic terminology, with in-depth critical analysis and evaluation. Teachers provide helpful feedback on students' work that supports students to improve. They annotate work and provide guidance on what students need to explore further. Students receive verbal clarification from their teachers, which they find useful. As a result, they are able to make amendments and corrections independently and use this to inform future pieces of work.

Teachers develop students' English, mathematics and digital skills well. Students develop a rapid understanding of new specialist terminology, which they apply fluently. On the T level health course, students use key terms such as inclusion, prejudice, beneficence and nonmaleficence correctly and apply the terms to real situations. In criminology, students analyse crime statistics and other statistical data, such as the frequency of 'stop and search' procedures, to increase their understanding of how the perception of crime can change over time.

Students make significant progress in developing their understanding and skills and achieve very well. Students who need to resit GCSE English and mathematics are very successful, with more than half achieving a grade 4 or above. Almost all students progress to positive destinations, with a high proportion progressing to higher education, including prestigious universities, and most others progressing into employment or an apprenticeship.

Students benefit from high-quality resources and facilities. Staff provide an enriching environment where wall displays immerse students into the subject area. Leaders have invested significantly in new facilities, such as a mock courtroom, a hospital ward and science laboratories, as well as improving access to study space and information technology facilities. Alongside governors, leaders carefully consider how they can further increase the capacity of the college to accommodate the growing demand in the city for post-16 places, while ensuring that the college maintains its ethos.

Leaders and managers have designed and implemented a high-quality evidence-based professional development programme to develop teachers' skills. The 'Notre Dame Essentials' provides a template for effective teaching and learning, developing teachers' expertise in practices such as chunking new materials, impactful starter activities and spaced retrieval. As a result, teachers' practice is of a consistently high standard.

Leaders place a very strong focus on the quality of education. Committed and experienced governors work very closely with senior leaders and managers, ensuring appropriate oversight and challenge. Managers implement a comprehensive quality assurance process, using key performance indicators that include attendance, punctuality and progress. They use the information that they gather from this process to make demonstrable improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130548
<b>Address</b>	St Mark's Avenue Leeds LS2 9BL
<b>Contact number</b>	0113 294 6644
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.notredamecoll.ac.uk">www.notredamecoll.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Justine Barlow
<b>Provider type</b>	Sixth-form college
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	8 to 11 March 2022

## 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

Mark Keen, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Seaman	His Majesty's Inspector
Anne Tyrrell	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel Angus	His Majesty's Inspector
Alison Dennis	His Majesty's Inspector

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