

Inspection of Carmel College

Inspection dates:

3 to 6 December 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

Carmel College (Carmel) is a Catholic sixth-form college for the community offering education programmes for young people from a single campus in St Helens, Merseyside. Students attend the college from over 100 schools across the wider Liverpool City Region, including St Helens, Knowsley, Warrington, Halton and Merseyside. They come from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Leaders provide a comprehensive range of A levels and vocational courses at level 3. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,175 students aged 16 to 19 enrolled at the college. The overwhelming majority study at level 3 on A-level programmes, vocational programmes or a blend of both A levels and vocational courses. The college offers A levels in 30 subjects, with some of the most popular being mathematics, chemistry, biology, psychology, law and business studies.

Students on vocational programmes study a variety of subjects, including criminology, engineering, health and social care, information technology, psychology, business, sport and applied science. Fifty students were studying an art foundation course at level 4. There were 49 students, most with high needs, following foundation learning pathways at entry level and level 1. A few of the 45 learners with high needs study courses at level 3.

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

Students, including the most disadvantaged and most students with high needs, achieve exceptionally well and make outstanding progress from their starting points. They aspire, and frequently move on to high-quality destinations, including highly competitive university courses, degree apprenticeships and employment. Nearly all students with high needs on foundation learning courses move to further education or training.

Students at Carmel have very high aspirations. They are consistently challenged by teachers to achieve their highest potential. Students actively and enthusiastically participate in lessons. They answer questions with confidence and contribute well to class discussion. Students work diligently and produce work of a consistently high standard. They demonstrate incredibly positive attitudes to learning. Students routinely use the study areas to complete homework and extra research to improve their knowledge and skills. They develop a highly studious work ethic. Students consistently make rapid progress in their studies. They are an asset to themselves and the college.

Leaders and teachers promote the 'Carmel mindset' in a caring and supportive culture. They develop students' application to study and encourage their perseverance in the face of difficulties. Students take ownership of their own learning and book themselves into additional support sessions where required. They value highly the support they receive at the college. Students feel supported and cared for. They thrive at Carmel.

Attendance rates at college are very high. Students enjoy coming to college and they have very high expectations for what they can achieve. They strive to be the best that they can be. Leaders prioritise attendance and punctuality to prepare students for their next steps. Tutors routinely monitor, track and intervene to improve attendance rates for the very few students who struggle to attend.

Students enjoy an inclusive culture at college. They are courteous and respectful. Students celebrate one another's differences. They are compassionate and empathetic. Students organise 'cultural appreciation days', where they are encouraged to wear traditional clothing based on their background, allowing them to showcase their culture. They organise student groups, including the South Asian society, the African and Caribbean Society and the Latin Society. At these societies, they learn about culture, dance, food and musical traditions. Students have a good understanding of different faiths and beliefs. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Students benefit from taking part in a wide range of high-quality enrichment activities that help them to explore and extend their talents and interests. Activities cover areas of well-being, academic extension and competitive sports. Talented athletes gain academic and sports scholarships to universities in the UK, Europe and the USA. Aspiring medics gain insight into the specialisms of medicine, healthcare and dentistry. There are societies for future architects and engineers as well as

recreational activities, including sign language, gaming, gym and 'Dungeons and Dragons'.

Students feel safe. They learn about local risks. For example, students know about the dangers of ketamine usage, sexual harassment, right wing extremism and county lines. Students are aware of how to keep themselves safe. They know how to report concerns should the need arise and are confident concerns would be dealt with swiftly.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have developed the college skills strategy considering skills priorities locally and nationally. They work closely with stakeholders at Liverpool city region to make sure needs identified in the local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) and those of employer are met. Leaders play an active role in working with the local council on their growth and skills strategy. They continue to extend the curriculum offer in priority areas, such as engineering, digital and healthcare.

Leaders have developed partnerships with higher education institutions that support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve and make progress in priority subject areas, such as health and life sciences, law and digital. Leaders have established foundation year degrees in science, engineering, human and animal health professions with the University of Liverpool. Staff from the University of the Arts London (UAL) provide workshop events to develop and extend the skills that students need to successfully apply to university and to work in the digital sector.

Leaders work collaboratively across the region with other education providers to ensure a comprehensive and bespoke, but not duplicated, offer for students. They continue to focus on their role as a sixth-form college providing a high-quality level 3 curriculum that facilitates a high proportion of students' successful progression to university. Leaders offer additional courses to enhance employability and progression in specific areas, such as the extended project qualification for students to further develop their independent research skills and a pre-med programme for students aspiring to careers as medics, dentists and veterinarians.

However, while teachers in a few subjects make effective use of their work with stakeholders to influence the design and teaching of the curriculums, this is not yet consistent across all subjects.

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

Leaders design an inclusive, broad and highly ambitious curriculum that affords students, including those with high needs, the opportunity to maximise their potential and to support their progression to aspirational destinations. They make sure that the curriculum offer widens participation and promotes social mobility for

students without compromising on their high expectations.

Leaders ensure that teachers are well qualified and experienced subject experts. Teachers have subject related degrees, master's degrees and doctorates as well as teaching qualifications. Most A-level teachers are examiners. Curriculum leaders are highly skilled in ensuring that expertise within the team is shared to improve teaching for the benefit of all students.

Teachers on education programmes for young people teach skilfully crafted lessons, which ensure that students, including those with high needs, rapidly acquire substantial new knowledge and skills. They collect and expertly analyse what students already know and can do. Teachers use this information to identify gaps in students' knowledge, plan highly effective teaching and ensure that students make exceptional progress. In geography, teachers start with tectonics, as most learners have studied this at school, before progressing to complex topics, such as future uncertainties in climate change and regeneration. In mathematics, teachers teach the fundamental elements of pure mathematics, the key algebraic functions, such as linear equations and inequalities, prior to moving on to differentiation and integration.

Teachers plan and teach the foundation learning curriculum coherently and sequentially so that students with high needs learn and master skills, which they can recall and use to support new learning. Leaders and teachers know students on the foundation learning programme well. They use this knowledge to support, engage and challenge students effectively. However, they do not routinely provide timely learning opportunities for real life experience of work. This slows a few students' development in transferring the soft skills, such as effective listening taught in the classroom, to the working environment.

The quality of teaching is consistently very high. Teachers give clear explanations and accurately model correct solutions. They select interesting and challenging learning resources and produce comprehensive booklets to support learning. Teachers develop students' fluency in technical language swiftly. They expertly link topics and provide students with opportunities to revisit and recall their learning. The consistency in the quality of education within and across subjects means that students remember and understand what they have been taught. Students in psychology can recall prior knowledge on psychological theories and compare them to recently learned theories. In criminology, teachers ensure that students quickly develop the vocabulary expected of a criminologist, while sports students swiftly and accurately use correct terminology, such as 'secrete' rather than 'release' when discussing body systems.

Teachers use of assessment to check students' understanding is exceptional. They are methodical and thorough in choosing appropriate types of assessment, from verbal questioning to formal tests. Teachers frequently check on students understanding in lessons, using peer assessment, through homework and in formal assessments. Teachers provide prompt, precise and developmental feedback to students on their performance and are swift to identify key areas for improvement.

Students use teachers' feedback carefully to continuously improve the standard of their work. They grow in confidence and competence across subjects. Students are exceptionally well prepared for assignments, assessments and examinations.

Leaders provide students with high-quality careers advice and guidance. This helps them to gain access to higher education, apprenticeships and employment. Leaders work with stakeholders and employers to provide a comprehensive range of workshops and guest lectures as part of the 'Inspire Me' programme. Students gain invaluable insight into their potential next steps. They are well informed about their options and very well prepared for progression to university, training and work.

Leaders use a range of information to ensure an accurate oversight of the quality of education that students receive. They use highly effective practices including information from lesson visits to identify the many strengths and very few areas of underperformance. Leaders focus staff training and development on key college priorities as part of their approach to continuous improvement. Teachers benefit from a structured training programme that focuses relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders are considerate of staff workload, welfare and well-being. They plan workload carefully so that staff focus on their areas of expertise. Teachers do not have pastoral commitments. They use their time to focus on their subject expertise and providing high-quality teaching and learning. Specialist tutors (PATs) provide the pastoral support that students need. Leaders plan training into the timetable to ensure that teachers and PATs have time to focus on improving teaching, learning and pastoral support. Staff feel a valued part of the Carmel community. They are proud to work at the college.

Governors have extensive expertise in educational and industry settings. They use this knowledge incisively to hold senior leaders to account for the quality of provision. Leaders and governors are highly ambitious for all students. They are relentless in their pursuit of the college mission and values to provide a centre of educational excellence, opportunity, challenge and support within a caring Christian environment. Leaders and governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the college's strengths and the few areas that would benefit from further improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130489
Address	Prescot Road St Helens Merseyside WA10 3AG
Contact number	01744452200
Website	www.carmel.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Janet Gater
Provider type	Sixth Form College
Date of previous inspection	30 April to 3 May 2019
Main subcontractors	n/a

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice 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

Alastair Mollon, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Lisa Duncalf	Ofsted Inspector
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