



Holy Cross Sixth Form College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
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Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published April 2007	Provider reference 130499
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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Holy Cross Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Roman Catholic Sixth Form
Principal:	Mr Michael J O'Hare
Address of college:	Manchester Road Bury Lancashire BL9 9BB
Telephone number:	0161 762 4500
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Chair of governors:	Mrs Anne Fox
Unique reference number:	130499
Name of lead inspector:	Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins, HMI
Dates of inspection:	26 February – 2 March 2007

Background of the organisation

1. Holy Cross College is a Roman Catholic sixth form college located in Bury, Greater Manchester. The college's mission is 'to exist to provide a high quality education with a community based on gospel principles. The college provides the opportunity for each person to develop spiritually, morally and intellectually and welcomes learners and staff of all faiths'. It primarily provides provision for learners aged 16-18, the majority of whom enrol to advanced level courses. GCSEs in science, maths and English are offered for learners who have not previously gained a grade C or above. At the time of inspection there were 1,666 full-time and five part-time learners aged 16-18.
2. There are around 182,000 people residing in Bury. Unemployment rates are lower than the national average. The college is in an area with several other post-16 providers, including a large tertiary college and two independent grammar schools, all with extensive provision for learners aged 16-18. In 2005/06, 47.9% of pupils in Bury achieved 5 GCSEs grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, higher than the national average for England. The proportion of learners in Bury who move into further education after school is relatively high. Approximately 13% of the college learners are of minority ethnic heritage, more than double that of the local population.
3. The college offers courses in 10 out of 15 subject sector areas. The largest proportion of full-time enrolments is within science and mathematics; history, philosophy and theology; arts and media; and languages, literature and culture. In conjunction with Edge Hill University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Liverpool Hope University and St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, the college offers a significant portfolio of higher education provision which has seen a rapid increase in enrolment in the last few years. From September 2006, the college took the decision to withdraw its small further education provision for adults. The college was awarded Beacon status in February 2004.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding: grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: grade 1

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

5. Achievements and standards are outstanding. Success rates at all levels have been consistently high over the last three years. Learners make good or better progress and many achieve high grades in their subjects. In a small minority of subjects the proportion of learners achieving high grades or meeting their expected grade is low. Learners produce very high standards of work and the development of their spiritual, moral and cultural understanding is exceptional.
6. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Learners are very well motivated and keen to succeed. Most achieve high standards in lessons both in their subjects and in research, analytical and communication skills. The lesson observation scheme is very effective in promoting and ensuring academic excellence. Learning is well supported by expert teachers whose commitment is valued by both learners and their parents.
7. The range of programmes to meet the need and interests of learners is outstanding. The college offers an extensive range of A level programmes that are responsive to demand. Enrichment opportunities for learners are excellent and participation rates are high. Promotional strategies have met with limited success in attracting learners from all sectors of the community the college seeks to serve. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is good.
8. Guidance and support for learners is outstanding. The college places the needs of the learner at the heart of everything it does. The tutorial system is comprehensive and tutors provide excellent pastoral support within a structure fully integrated with the religious education programme and chaplaincy provision.
9. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal, senior managers, governors and trustees are fully committed to the college's mission and Catholic ethos. They successfully promote a supportive and collaborative culture. The use of the college's information system is successfully supporting the drive for continuous improvement. Governance is effective, although governors do not sufficiently monitor the progress against the college's strategic aims. The college provides excellent value for money.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

10. The college demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve. Performance is regularly reviewed and strategies are clearly focused on improving learners' achievements. Standards have continued to rise steadily. Quality improvement processes include frequent observations of teaching and learning and these

are making an important contribution to sharing good practice and high quality teaching and learning. The self-assessment process is thorough and, though a few strengths are over-stated, the report is an accurate account of the college's strengths and areas where improvement is needed.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

11. The college has taken outstanding steps to promote improvement since the last inspection. Teaching and learning now responds well to the differing needs and abilities of learners. Links with the world of work have been formalised and opportunities for learners' work experience have considerably expanded. Enrichment activities have been significantly extended and tracking shows a large increase in the numbers participating. Governors and senior managers have recognised that the decision to limit the development of the curriculum below level 2 has meant there are some young Catholics from partner high schools for whom the college is not offering an appropriate provision. In the last five years, significant improvements have been made to the college's accommodation, including the construction of new buildings and major refurbishments.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- outstanding commitment to the mission and Catholic ethos at all levels
- very high and improving success rates
- high standards of learners' written and practical work
- strong development of learners' spiritual, moral and cultural understanding
- outstanding teaching and learning
- excellent enrichment opportunities with high levels of participation
- outstanding formal and informal support for learners
- highly supportive leadership and management that promotes a culture of continuous improvement
- excellent use of information systems to monitor performance.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the proportion of high grades and progress made by learners in a small minority of courses
- closer monitoring by governors of strategic issues
- improve strategies to promote the college to all sectors of the community it seeks to serve.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

12. The very high achievements and standards identified at the last inspection have improved further. In 2005/06, the overall A level success rate was 92%, placing the college in the top 10% of similar colleges nationally. Success rates on long courses are very high and show an improving trend. Success rates on AS courses have continued to improve and remain well above the national average. This positive trend is reflected at A2, with success rates remaining consistently above the high national average. For the small number of learners studying vocational courses there is an upward trend and a 100% success rate at level 2 in 2005/06. The trend at advanced level however, has been more variable with success rates in line with the national average in 2006.
13. Pass and retention rates at all levels are generally very high. The A*-C pass rates of learners who are retaking GCSEs are broadly in line with the national average. In 2005/06, all GCSE results improved on the previous year with a high proportion of learners gaining A*-C in English. However, in maths, although improved, the percentage of A*-C grades remained below the national average. Early maths results for 2006/07 are looking positive and suggest strategies in place to address this issue are beginning to impact. Learners' achievements in a range of non-accredited provision, such as sports and drama activities, are outstanding.
14. The college's analysis of performance by different groups of learners correctly identifies that all groups achieve well. Pakistani learners, the largest minority ethnic group of learners at the college, consistently achieve very well.
15. Over the last three years there has been a strong improving trend of value added scores. The majority of learners make good progress, meeting or exceeding their expected grades. The majority of level 3 learners achieve high grades in their subjects and a significant proportion of learners taking A level subjects achieve grades A or B. The college's self-assessment report accurately identifies that in a small minority of subjects the proportion of learners achieving high grades or meeting their expected grade is too low.
16. Learners' spiritual, moral and cultural development is outstanding. They recognise and respect the differing beliefs of others and display a striking capacity for mature spiritual reflection. Success rates are high on the nationally accredited general religious education (RE) course, which all learners follow. Learners are enthused about their study. The standards of learners' written and practical work are exceptionally high. Learners develop excellent skills to support their future social and economic well-being, such as how to clearly articulate their views, manage their time effectively and conduct themselves maturely around their peers and teachers. Attendance

and punctuality in lessons are very good. Rates of progression to further education, higher education or employment are consistently high.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

17. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Learners are very well motivated and reach high standards in lessons. They acquire considerable subject knowledge and understanding. The importance of key skills is clearly identified in lesson plans and learners develop excellent communication, analytical skills and confidence. Teachers use a wide range of activities to meet learners' needs and successfully challenge the most able.
18. A high proportion of teaching is good and it is often outstanding. Teachers give freely of their time to ensure every learner can easily access support. Information and learning technology (ILT) is used effectively to motivate learners. Library resources are well managed and there is a strong emphasis on enabling learners to make the best use of independent study time. For example, there has been a campaign to extend boys' enthusiasm for reading.
19. The quality of marking and assessment is high. The monitoring of academic performance is meticulous and accurate, enabling learners and their parents to be clear about the progress being made.
20. A thorough system of lesson observation is in place. It has recently been refined to include a system of peer observations that enable teachers to develop new ideas and share good practice. Teachers meet frequently to discuss learning and this has led to a culture of continuous improvement. An innovation bursary given to teachers is particularly effective in encouraging them to develop their creativity.
21. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgment that the range of programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college offers an extensive range of A level programmes that are responsive to demand, although there is more limited vocational and level 2 provision. The links with local schools are strong and close partnership arrangements have resulted in some shared provision, for example GCSE German and support for AS mathematics delivery in some schools. Marketing strategies to promote itself to all sectors of the community it seeks to serve have been met with limited success. The colleges approach to social and educational inclusion is good.
22. Enrichment opportunities for learners are excellent; activities are wide-ranging, bringing learners and teachers together as a community, learning with and from one another. The general religious education programme is well planned and valued by learners, generating genuine exploration of faith in an atmosphere of trust and respect. High quality liturgical celebrations and assemblies enhance personal and spiritual development and promote positive relationships amongst learners and teachers. There are informal opportunities for prayer and worship across the college; however, formal opportunities for

learners are less frequent. Chaplaincy activities are effective in raising awareness of the local and global community and there is an extensive range of fundraising and charitable work during the college year.

23. The tutorial programme successfully covers a comprehensive range of topics, including promoting healthy lifestyles, and offers good support to those applying for higher education. A diverse range of employer links with the local community has recently been expanded and there has been a substantial increase in the number of learners accessing work experience through the college systems.
24. There is outstanding guidance and support for learners. The college, as a 'distinctive community', places the needs of the learner at the heart of everything it does. Staff and learners can articulate clearly how the mission and Catholic ethos of the college is lived out in practice, and the care and respect for individuals characterise these core values. An experienced team of senior tutors delivers excellent pastoral support within a structure fully integrated with the religious education programme and chaplaincy provision.
25. Learners' self esteem and confidence is successfully developed by comprehensive support systems that encourage independence and foster positive relationships at all levels. The college's innovative electronic information systems facilitate excellent communication between teachers and learners so that measures for monitoring and tracking attendance are highly effective. There are wide-ranging opportunities for learners to make a positive contribution; for example, a substantial number of learners are trained each year in peer mentoring and support, offered both at induction and on-programme.
26. The college's learning support systems are effective in raising achievement. All learners are screened to identify additional support needs. This is complemented by a process in which teachers pinpoint needs or through a process of self-referral. There has been a change of culture regarding the promotion of additional learning support, and increasing numbers of learners are accessing specialist help delivered by skilled and experienced tutors.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

27. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal, senior managers, governors and trustees are fully committed to the college's mission and Catholic ethos and work together to ensure that all activities and relationships reflect Gospel principles. There is an effective strategic planning process and there is good ownership of the strategic aims by staff.
28. The college management team's strategies to raise achievement and improve teaching and learning have been very successful. Success rates are consistently very high and most learners achieve at least the grade expected. Managers have developed systems and structures which very effectively

underpin and support the college's ambition for year-on-year improvement. They recognise that the decision to predominantly develop and promote provision at level 3 does not always enable some learners, from the community it seeks to serve, to apply to the college.

29. The main vehicle for quality assurance is the revised self-assessment process. This has been pivotal in driving up standards. College teams analyse their provision thoroughly, including their contribution to the college's mission and ethos, and use a range of appropriate indicators to measure their performance. Challenging targets are set and college teams are mostly very successful in meeting these. There are many examples of robust action planning to build on strengths and tackle areas that need improvement. The self-assessment report is internally and externally validated but a few examples of lack of coherence and precision were not picked up by this process.
30. Staff value the supportive and collaborative culture and there is effective teamwork at every level. Course planning is closely focused on raising achievement and ensuring the best fit between the syllabus and the needs of the learners. The meeting schedule and lesson observation process facilitates professional discussion of teaching and learning. Teaching and support staff are well qualified and they receive very good professional development.
31. The college information system is making an outstanding contribution to the drive for continuous improvement. Its responsive service provides managers and teachers with excellent tools to evaluate the quality of their provision and to monitor and review the progress of learners.
32. The college complies with race relations and disability discrimination legislation and with the recent procedures for safeguarding children. It vigorously promotes a culture of equality within college where individual differences are valued and all are treated with respect.
33. The college's campus has been transformed in recent years and accommodation is now good. Care has been taken to create a safe physical environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Specialist resources are of a high standard.
34. Governors have effectively overseen the major building projects, ensuring they have been completed within budget and to time. They play a full part in developing the college's strategic aims but do not monitor closely enough progress against these aims. Financial management is strong and the college provides outstanding value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03/04	1	100	67	33	31	68	57	11
	04/05	0	0	0	0	10	60	56	4
	05/06	0	0	0	0	2	50	*	*
Other	03/04	1	100	67	33	31	68	57	11
	04/05	0	0	0	0	10	60	56	4
	05/06	0	0	0	0	2	50	*	*

* The 2005/06 national rates were not released at the time of this inspection

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03/04	93	85	74	11	13	46	55	9
	04/05	127	95	73	22	22	96	55	41
	05/06	128	94	*	*	8	100	*	*
GCSEs	03/04	63	94	77	17	10	60	63	-3
	04/05	108	94	78	16	0	0	0	0
	05/06	109	93	*	*	0	0	0	0
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	16	94	73	21	0	0	0	0
	04/05	15	93	74	19	0	0	0	0
	05/06	17	100	*	*	0	0	0	0
Other	03/04	14	36	68	-32	3	0	52	-52
	04/05	4	100	62	38	22	96	51	44
	05/06	1	100	*	*	8	100	*	*

* The 2005/06 national rates were not released at the time of this inspection

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	03/04	6,084	87	80	7	3	100	57	43
	04/05	6,558	88	82	6	0	0	0	0
	05/06	6725	91	*	*	0	0	0	0
A/A2 Levels	03/04	2,349	93	91	2	0	0	0	0
	04/05	2,498	94	92	2	0	0	0	0
	05/06	2571	97	*	*	4	100	*	*
AS Levels	03/04	3,701	84	76	8	0	0	0	0
	04/05	4,031	84	78	6	0	0	0	0
	05/06	4072	88	*	*	4	100	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	34	65	68	-3	0	0	0	0
	04/05	29	90	75	15	0	0	0	0
	05/06	33	76	*	*	0	0	0	0
Other	03/04	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	04/05	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	05/06	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

* The 2005/06 national rates were not released at the time of this inspection