



Carmel College

Inspection Report 3-4 July 2007

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of; the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievements and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management

Description of the provider

1. Carmel College is a Catholic sixth form college situated on a single site in St Helens. It was established in 1987 when Catholic education in St Helens was reorganised. There is a general further education college within a mile and 5 schools with sixth forms in the local area. The vast majority of learners at the college are aged 16 – 18 years and are on full-time level 3 programmes. In 2006/07 there were 1437 full time learners aged 16-18. Most of the learners are white and there are more females than males. The percentage of learners from a minority ethnic background is slightly higher than that for the local population. The overall unemployment rate for St Helens is around the national average. However several of the wards in the area suffer from high deprivation and the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is higher than average at nearly 13%. The college was awarded Beacon status in May 1999 and again in October 2002 for its top class inspection results and outstanding performance.

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
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: contributory grade 1</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

2. Carmel College is outstanding in all aspects of its provision. The college's Christian environment values and respects the wholeness of the individual, and supports all learners in achieving their potential. The progress made by learners is excellent; pass and retention rates are very high. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Good practice is shared effectively. The range of courses available to learners meets their needs very well. The many enrichment activities available enhance learning and students' enjoyment of their time at college. The Chaplain and Chaplaincy team play an active role in promoting the college ethos and values, which includes services for staff and learners and valuable contributions to the enrichment programme.
3. Guidance and support for learners are excellent. Systems to ensure the specific needs of each learner are met work very effectively. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior managers set a clear strategic direction which is communicated well throughout the college. Quality assurance arrangements are rigorous and systematically implemented by staff. Judgements on all aspects of provision are accurate and areas for improvement are tackled quickly and effectively. Accommodation is good overall but in some areas lack of space limits development. A plan for a substantial rebuild is in place.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. High standards are expected and consistently attained. Observers of the quality of teaching and learning are perceptive and rigorous in their judgements. Subject self-assessment is thorough and judgements are secure. The college self-assessment report is accurate. Areas for improvement are identified and improvements implemented systematically, supportively and effectively. Management information is accurate, readily accessible and useful. Professional development is targeted closely at the needs of staff and at college priorities.

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

5. The college has made outstanding progress in tackling the areas for improvement noted at the last inspection, improving performance generally and in maintaining high standards. Consultation with other local providers, the 14 to 19 strategy group and the Learning Skills Council (LSC) has led to the development of a new level 2 programme which better meets the needs of learners and takes account of other provision in the area, and to the cessation of adult evening provision. The arrangements for the promotion and evaluation of the Catholic ethos and for group tutorials, including religious education, have been reviewed rigorously, improvements have been made and the provision is now outstanding. The ethos is strongly promoted, for example, through the outward signs and symbols of the Catholic faith and the increased opportunities for shared community services.

Key strengths

- high levels of achievement
- sustained high quality teaching
- comprehensive and highly effective support
- rigorous quality assurance and self assessment
- highly effective leadership
- very effective actions to improve or maintain high performance
- caring Christian community living out the gospel values

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- restrictions on the curriculum imposed by much of the existing accommodation

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

6. Achievements and standards are outstanding. Overall success rates at level 3, which cover the vast majority of learners, have been above the average for sixth form colleges for the last three years. The progress learners of all abilities make is excellent and has been so for many years. This is illustrated by learners on both GCE AS and A-level courses achieving much better grades than might be predicted from their GCSE results. There are no subjects which have a continuing trend of learners achieving below expected grades. Retention has been high for a number of years and for 2006/07 stands at 98% for A2 learners and 92% for AS learners. The pass rate on GCE A level, with enrichment courses such as general studies excluded, is 99% compared to 95% for similar colleges. The pass rate for GCE AS courses is 93%, compared to 83% nationally.
7. At level 2 in 2005/06 there were significant improvements in retention and success rates, with success rates well above national averages. Marked improvements were also seen in key skills success rates and this positive trend has continued in 2006/07. Across the college attendance is very good and is monitored rigorously. Standards of work are also very high.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

8. Teaching and learning are excellent. A very high proportion of lessons are good or better. Lessons are well planned and the high expectations staff have of learners are apparent in the tasks set and levels of challenge observed. Questioning is used to very good effect and the variety of learning activities utilised ensures individuals stay on task and make very good progress. Learners clearly enjoy their studies and praise the support and encouragement they receive from all staff.
9. The college has a highly effective system of lesson observations, with a thorough process for moderation. It is well integrated into the overall quality framework. Good practice is effectively shared both formally, through training events and curriculum area meetings, and informally through teachers making reciprocal visits to different lessons. The use of information learning technology (ILT) is developing and there are many examples of it being used very productively to improve learning.

10. Reviews for progress monitoring and the college system of minimum expected grades (MEGs) are used very effectively to support learners in improving their own performance. There are effective strategies in place to support those who are not achieving as well as they should and to praise those who are doing especially well. Assessment is thorough and work is marked and returned promptly. Feedback is helpful to learners and shows them how they can improve.
11. The college has an excellent reputation in the region and its provision meets the needs and interests of learners very well. Recruitment has increased steadily in recent years. At level 3 the range of GCE AS and A-level subjects is extensive. Following a review, level 2 provision now comprises a selection of GCSE subjects and appropriate support arrangements with the aim of promoting progression. The programme recruited successfully in its first year and early indications are that it is meeting its aims. The 'Essential skills' programme for learners with moderate learning difficulties and/or difficulties recruits well and provides good opportunities for progression. Provision at level 4 is substantial and increasing.
12. The enrichment programme covers a wide range of options, including sporting activities, GCE AS and A-level subjects such as general studies, community work, cultural activities, subject specific enrichment and a range of events which promote health living and equality and diversity. The college helps partner schools teach several level 2 courses and provides an extensive enrichment programme for pupils designated as gifted and talented.
13. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Initial advice and guidance are good; induction arrangements allow learners to settle quickly into their courses and few transfer between courses after induction. The college places the needs and interests of the learner at the heart of everything it does. Learners' self esteem and confidence are successfully developed through comprehensive, highly effective support services that foster good relationships, mutual respect and care for the individual.
14. The needs of learners with specific learning difficulties and disabilities are especially well met. The bespoke and well resourced 'Essential skills' programme for learners with moderate learning difficulties and disabilities develops self-confidence, independent living skills and self esteem in keeping with the college's ethos and respect for the dignity and uniqueness of the individual. A revised group tutorial structure links more effectively with the delivery of general religious education (RE) through the Open Forum Programmes. There are now discrete RE programmes for

each cohort tailored to their particular needs. These are delivered by a small team of subject specialists with well thought out materials and topics carefully chosen to match learners' interests and reinforce the college values and ethos.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: grade 1

15. Leadership and management are outstanding. The college's strategic direction is clear and understood by staff. Learners enjoy their studies and appreciate the accessibility of staff. The areas for improvement noted at the last inspection have been dealt with successfully. The college has made significant progress in promoting and evaluating its Catholic ethos and improving the delivery of general religious education. The principal's personal commitment to promoting the Catholic ethos and values sets the tone and direction for managers, staff and learners. Governance is excellent. Governors contribute appropriately to decisions about strategic direction and monitor college performance closely. Management information is accurate and readily accessible.
16. Quality assurance arrangements are outstanding. They provide a rigorous framework for quality assessment and improvement and staff implement them well. Challenging yet realistic targets are set. High standards are expected and attained. Under-performance is tackled meticulously and supportively. Subject self-assessment is thorough, evidence is well marshalled and judgements are secure. Improvement plans are implemented effectively. The college self-assessment report is founded securely on evidence and its judgements are accurate.
17. Resources for learning are good. Computers are plentiful and readily accessible to learners, and most classrooms appropriately equipped. Teachers are well qualified, they are inducted well and their performance is evaluated carefully. The professional development programme supports individual need, improvement plans and college development priorities effectively.
18. The accommodation provides a pleasant learning environment and all areas are accessible to those with restricted mobility. The buildings are of variable quality, some are expensive to run and connecting corridors are

labyrinthine. A few rooms are too small for the groups using them. The learning resource centre provides an inviting learning environment but gets crowded and too hot at busy times. Plans for a substantial rebuild are well-advanced. The college is financially strong, and provides outstanding value for money.

19. Arrangements for the monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity are outstanding. The achievements of different groups are monitored carefully including those with minority ethnic backgrounds. The promotion of equality is effected through, for example, the tutorial programme, subject teaching and special events. The college's response to recent legislation, including race, disability and child protection, has been good. Learners report that they feel safe and free from harassment. The five themes of "Every Child Matters" are integrated well into college life.

Learner's 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	5	100	67	33	35	34	57	-23
	04-05	11	73	64	9	1	100		
	05-06	8	63			1	100		
GNVQs and precursors	03-04								
	04-05								
	05-06								
NVQs	03-04								
	04-05								
	05-06								
Other	03-04	5	100	67	33	35	34	57	-23
	04-05	11	73	64	9	1	100		
	05-06	8	63			1	100		

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	140	88	74	14				
	04-05	114	76	73	3	1	100		
	05-06	143	85						
GCSEs	03-04	98	88	77	11				
	04-05	93	74	78	-4				
	05-06	123	86						
GNVQs and precursors	03-04	21	86	73	13	1	100		
	04-05	21	86	74	12				
	05-06	20	75						
NVQs	03-04								
	04-05								
	05-06								
Other	03-04	21	91	68	23				
	04-05								

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	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03-04	4766	85	80	5				
	04-05	4933	86	82	4	3	100		
	05-06	4994	84			20	59		
A/A2 Levels	03-04	1812	91	91	0				
	04-05	1993	88	92	-4	3	100		
	05-06	2007	88						
AS Levels	03-04	2780	83	76	7				
	04-05	2752	84	78	6				
	05-06	2741	81			10	60		
GNVQs and precursors	03-04	152	65	68	-3				
	04-05	151	83	74	9				
	05-06	142	71						
NVQs	03-04								
	04-05								
	05-06								
Other	03-04	22	95	64	31				
	04-05	37	98	72	26				
	05-06	104	87			10	70		

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