

St Dominic's Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Provider reference 130443
Published date May 2008

Contents

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	6
Main findings	8

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 at 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 achievement 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
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. St Dominic's Sixth Form College is situated in the London Borough of Harrow. It is a Roman Catholic designated college in the Diocese of Westminster. The total population of Harrow is approximately 214,000. Unemployment is currently 1.6% compared to 2.6% for London. The proportion of residents with level 3 qualifications or above is similar to that for London overall. The number of learners achieving five general certificates in secondary education (GCSE) at A*- C grades, including mathematics and English, is 56.1% compared to 46.7% nationally.
2. The college provides sixth form education for two partner Catholic schools in Harrow. It accepts all applicants from these schools, as its priority, followed by other Catholic students. The remaining places are allocated to students of other faith backgrounds. Almost all students at the college are aged 16-18 and are studying level 3 courses full-time. The number of students currently is 903 consisting of approximately 60% Catholic, 20% Hindu and the rest Muslim or other Christian faiths. Students attending courses at St Dominic's come from around 11 local authorities. The curriculum predominantly comprises general certificate of education (GCE) AS and A level courses. The college offers a few vocational programmes and GCSEs in mathematics and English. Most courses at level 1 are taken by students in addition to their main programme of study. The college mission is to be 'committed to the personal and spiritual growth of all its members based on Christian values, academic excellence and high quality pastoral care'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement 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

3. Overall effectiveness of provision is outstanding. St Dominic's College provides learners from a range of backgrounds and faiths with excellent opportunities to develop their personal and academic skills. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Students achieve better grades than those predicted from their prior GCSE attainment. Almost all students progress to higher education. Very high success rates have been maintained for a considerable time. The quality of provision, including teaching and learning and meeting the needs and interests of students, is outstanding. The college is particularly effective at meeting students' individual needs and matching their aspirations and prior attainment. Educational and social inclusion are outstanding. Teachers and managers are highly skilled at monitoring learners' progress. Advice, guidance and support are outstanding. Students benefit from excellent support and guidance. They fully understand the progress they are making and are clear about what they want to do after completing their studies. In line with the college's Catholic ethos, there is excellent support for students' spiritual and moral development. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior managers and governors are vigilant in monitoring the quality of provision and delivery of the college's Catholic mission. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college is particularly effective at enabling students to gain confidence and achieve their potential.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The college's capacity to make further improvements is outstanding. The college has a strong culture of continuous improvement. Quality assurance arrangements are particularly effective and the self-assessment report is accurate. The college has been successful in maintaining very high standards of performance over many years. Governors, managers and staff have a track record of setting, and mostly achieving, very ambitious targets.

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

5. The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection is outstanding. All areas for development have been suitably addressed. Accommodation is now of a higher standard. Key skills achievement and GCSE mathematics have improved. All the key strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained.

Key strengths

- very high success rates
- excellent progress made by students

- outstanding achievement of Catholic ethos and mission within a diverse community
- excellent teaching and learning
- very good identification of individual needs and monitoring of learners' progress
- outstanding contribution from students in support of the spiritual life of the college
- outstanding advice, guidance and support
- outstanding leadership, management and governance.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the strengthening of the Skills for Life provision
- the further improvement of the proportion of high grades for GCSE mathematics.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

- Achievement and standards are outstanding. The college has maintained consistently high pass rates and has an exceptionally high overall college retention rate of around 98%. Very high success rates have been maintained. This is particularly notable in mathematics and sciences, information and communications technology (ICT) and social sciences. Students make excellent progress in relation to their GCSE grades, regardless of their ethnicity, background or faith. The proportion achieving high grades on level 3 courses is above the national average for similar colleges. A small number of students on geography and French courses did not achieve as well as expected in 2006/07. Around 92% of students progress into higher education. The college has improved GCSE mathematics achievement, identified as a weakness at the last inspection, and the proportion of students achieving high grades was around the national average in 2006/07. College managers acknowledge this is an area for further improvement. Success rates at level 2 are good, having significantly improved in 2006/07. Learners enjoy their studies and are motivated to achieve challenging targets. For the small proportion of BTEC programmes, success rates at level 1 and 2 are high. Attendance and punctuality are good. Key skills achievement has improved and is satisfactory. Learners' achievement is celebrated particularly well by governors, senior managers and teachers. The self-assessment report is accurate and evaluates the college's achievement and standards very effectively.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

- The quality of provision overall is outstanding which reflects the college's own evaluation. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Over 80% of teaching is judged to be good or better by the college and this represents an improvement of around six points since the last inspection. Staff and teachers identify students' needs and monitor their progress thoroughly. Initial assessment is good and information on students' prior attainment is used effectively by teachers to plan lessons and to support learners with different start points. Teachers are methodical in assessment and they provide very good feedback to students. Teachers check students' knowledge and understanding well in lessons. Students feel fully appraised of their progress. The college's team of observers focuses carefully on how teachers work with students of different needs and on the quality of teaching and learning activities. Teachers are highly reflective and keen to continue to improve. The college continues to invest in information learning technology (ILT) and its use in the classroom. The virtual learning environment (VLE) network is now used well by all teaching staff and provides an increasingly useful resource for students outside lessons.
- The college is outstanding at meeting the needs and interests of learners. The contribution students make to the spiritual life of the college is outstanding. The programme of general religious education matches the key areas of spirituality

and morality that impact on the lives of young people. Students take an active part in liturgical events. They contribute particularly well to working within the local community. The college provides a very broad range of subjects. Those students who require more challenge or support are provided with appropriate additional provision.

9. Advice, guidance and support are outstanding. The college provides particularly thorough support. Initial advice and guidance are very good and induction helps to settle students on courses extremely well. Students receive good additional support which is identified early. The Skills for Life team has a productive working relationship with those responsible for managing pastoral and academic support. The current arrangements for Skills for Life are recently established and remain an area for further development. Pastoral support is particularly effective. Attendance and punctuality are monitored systematically and staff support learners who fall behind with their studies very well.

Leadership and management

Outstanding Grade 1

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. Leadership and management are outstanding. In keeping with the college's mission, the focus of leadership is on Christian values, educational excellence and outstanding pastoral support. The management of the religious programme is excellent. Success rates remain very high and almost all students on advanced courses achieve results that are better than those predicted by their prior attainment at GCSE. College managers are acutely aware of the few courses where this is not the case and have provided appropriate support and monitoring.
11. In leading the college to maintain these high standards, the principal has excellent support from governors and college staff. Governors are highly committed and knowledgeable. They attend college masses and have a strong presence in all important liturgical and celebratory events. They take an active part in monitoring the college's performance carefully. In seeking to improve their effectiveness, they have set performance indicators for each committee to enable them to evaluate their contribution.
12. This ethos of continual improvement is evident in the college's strong quality assurance systems. Internal inspections, course reviews and the analysis of data and of students' views are meticulously brought together in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agree with the judgements and grades in this detailed, evaluative and self-critical document. The quality improvement plans, arising from self-assessment, are monitored well to ensure that areas for development are addressed swiftly and effectively.
13. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. Respect for people of all faiths, backgrounds and abilities permeates all aspects of the college's work. One very successful way in which students promote greater understanding of different

faiths is through the peer religious and moral education programme that trains second year students to lead lessons on a wide variety of moral issues. The college fulfils its obligations in relation to race, equality and disability legislation. The college has appropriate arrangements to meet government requirements on safeguarding and child protection.

14. Partnership working, including that with employers, is good. Partnership arrangements with the two feeder Catholic schools are excellent. The college is represented on various local strategic groups and contributes to debates on curriculum development for students aged 14-19. As the demand for A levels remains very high and the college is over-subscribed, governors and the principal have not committed the college to any significant changes to the curriculum offer in the near future. College staff have very productive links with other Catholic sixth form colleges in London, with whom they share good practice.
15. The support and expertise of teachers are valued very highly by students. Teachers benefit from very good professional development and recently much time and energy has been devoted to training staff on the use of the college's VLE for their subject. Resources for learning and accommodation are good. Students do not have access to a sports hall on campus but one is planned as part of the next stage of improvements to the campus. Financial management and value for money are outstanding.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	18	83	64	19
	05/06	70	84	71	13
	*06/07	142	66		
GNVQs	04/05	13	85	71	14
	05/06	8	88	79	9
BTEC Introductory	*06/07	10	90		
Other	04/05	5	80	63	17
	05/06	62	84	71	13
ASSET	*06/07	132	64	n/a	

*college data

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	128	81	73	8
	05/06	112	55	78	-23
	*06/07	88	81		
GCSEs	04/05	84	74	78	-4
	05/06	45	93	82	11
	*06/07	46	100		
GNVQs	04/05	22	95	74	21
	05/-06	18	83	77	6
BTEC First Certificate	*06/07	16	94		
Other	04/05	22	95	62	33
	05/06	49	10	70	-60
	*06/07	26	38		

* college data

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	04/05	2,721	89	82	7
	05/06	3,007	90	83	7
	*06/07	3,470	92		
A/A2 Levels	04/05	1,024	93	92	1
	05/06	1,129	98	93	5
	*06/07	1,196	98		
AS Levels	04/05	1,554	87	78	9
	05/06	1,727	87	79	8
	*06/07	2,124	89		
GNVQs	04/05	143	81	74	7
	05/06	50	98	74	24
Applied AS & A2	*06/07	150	82		
Other	04-05	-	-	-	-
	05-06	101	55	75	-20
	06-07				

* college data