

Inspection of Notre Dame Catholic Sixth-Form College

Inspection dates:

8 to 11 March 2022

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

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Information about this provider

Notre Dame Catholic Sixth-Form College is situated in inner Leeds and recruits students from three Catholic partner schools and 110 high schools. Most students are from Leeds postcode areas, with the remainder travelling from other local authority areas in the region, including Wakefield, Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees. At the time of the inspection, 2,378 students were enrolled on full-time study programmes. Nearly all students study three level 3 subjects. Most study A levels, with a significant minority studying advanced vocational courses. A small number of students study GCSEs. There were 181 students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and a small number of students with high needs.

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

Students flourish in the college's positive and harmonious environment. They respect and value the wide range of cultures and views that they experience at the college. For many students, the college's diverse and inclusive nature significantly influenced their decision to study there.

Students are empowered by the trust that staff show in them to take responsibility for their learning journey. Highly skilled and knowledgeable teachers motivate and support students to always try their best. As a result, students are highly motivated and willing to engage in all aspects of their lessons. They listen attentively to their teachers and diligently apply themselves with enthusiasm and little prompting to the tasks that they are set.

Students successfully develop their confidence and resilience through a rich and varied programme of extra-curricular activities. For example, financial studies students attend investment banking programmes. Aspiring medical students join a knitting club to develop their manual dexterity. Psychology students raise funds for their chosen charity, MIND, as a way of enriching their understanding of the issues that they explore through their studies and giving something back to society. Students demonstrate public spirit through, for example, volunteering in a COVID-19 vaccination centre and through distributing sanitary products for young women who need them. Others develop their confidence through taking part in talent shows.

Students feel exceptionally safe at the college and in the surrounding areas as they travel to and from college. They do not experience any harassment, bullying or discrimination and are confident that they could report any instances of these in the full confidence that such behaviours would not be tolerated and would be dealt with promptly.

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

Leaders and managers have exceptionally high expectations in order to ensure that students can 'be the best that they can be', which is reflected in students' highly positive behaviour and conduct. Students behave consistently well in class and around the campus. They are considerate, polite and well-mannered to each other and to staff, which creates a calm and purposeful environment that is conducive to successful learning and in which they thrive.

Leaders and managers have devised a highly ambitious curriculum that develops the theoretical knowledge and technical skills that students need for their next steps into higher education and, increasingly, into apprenticeships. The programmes on offer meet a diverse range of need and interests, from academic A levels to more work-focused vocational programmes that meet changing students' and employers' needs. For example, leaders introduced the level 3 diploma in criminology in response to demand from students, who can now access a rich curriculum by combining criminology with allied subjects such as law and sociology.

Leaders maintain a sharp focus on improving teachers' practice to enhance the teaching of the curriculum and the appropriate use of assessment. Leaders and managers have designed and implemented a focused and comprehensive programme of professional development, internal buddying and sharing of expertise that staff value highly. Leaders ensure the well-being of staff through an equitable distribution of workload, allowing teachers time to reflect on and develop their teaching skills further.

Teachers are accomplished in using a range of methods and approaches to promote learning. Their subject expertise is highly evident during lessons on complex theories, such as the dopamine hypothesis in psychology. Teachers use recall techniques very effectively, to ensure that students embed difficult concepts into long-term memory. For example, they use regular quick-fire quizzes, supplemented by direct questioning of students throughout lessons. As a result, students can remember, recall and apply what they have learned extremely well.

Managers and teachers plan and sequence teaching exceptionally well to ensure that students develop a deep understanding of each subject's foundational principles before moving on to the development of more complex and demanding knowledge and skills. For example, in health and social care, students learn about physiology and anatomy during the first year of their studies, which ensures that they have the secure foundations that they need before progressing to more practical applications of their subject.

Teachers have very high expectations of what their students can achieve. They set students target grades at the start of their programmes that are based on the highest performing students in the country. Students are motivated to reach, and in many cases, surpass these aspirational grades. As a result, their written and practical work is of a very high standard. For example, students' art and design coursework, including large-scale mixed media projects, demonstrates very high levels of skill and ambition for the age and level of the students. A very high proportion of students progress to prestigious universities, into apprenticeships and, in a few cases, into employment. Students with SEND or high needs achieve their qualifications and progress on to positive destinations at the same very high rates as their peers.

Leaders ensure that students explore a stimulating range of social, political and cultural issues through the well-planned philosophy, theology and ethics curriculum. All students benefit from being able to discuss often challenging topics in a safe and respectful environment. Students are very involved in organising and performing at the college's regular multi-faith assemblies, which are attended by all students. Students give presentations on topics such as International Women's Day and perform songs celebrating events such as Lent and Eid.

Leaders and managers organise informative and helpful higher-education fairs where students can meet representatives from different universities to discuss the different degree courses available and how these courses can help them achieve their career aspirations. Achievement tutors and specialist careers staff guide students exceptionally

well in making decisions about their next steps. Leaders work effectively with local universities to enable students to enhance their practice and to prepare them for study at foundation and degree level.

Those responsible for governance know the provider extremely well and understand its strengths and areas to develop. They ably support the provider's leadership and make a valuable contribution to shaping the college's strategic direction. The college has a named governor with significant relevant experience of safeguarding and SEND, which enhances the college's safeguarding arrangements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers maintain clear oversight of safeguarding and ensure that all staff receive professional updating in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSLs have appropriate and remit-specific training for the role.

Leaders use effective links with external agencies to provide support for students, including support for those who may be at risk due to alcohol abuse or mental health issues. Staff identify, monitor and support any students who are vulnerable to the risks of abuse and harm.

Students are safe and feel very safe. Staff ensure that students understand potential risks posed in the local area, including from radicalisation, extremism and criminal exploitation.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130548
Address	St Mark's Avenue Leeds LS2 9BL
Contact number	0113 294 6644
Website	www.notredamecoll.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Justine Barlow
Provider type	Sixth-form college
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 April 2008

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

Cath Jackson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Charles Searle	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joanne Stork	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anne Tyrrell	Ofsted Inspector
Shabana Mahmood	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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