

St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Address: St Charles Square
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College was inspected in December 2017. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College is on a single site in North Kensington within the borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This area of London is characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty. The college recruits students from across London and has a Catholic ethos at the centre of college life. It has a diverse range of students, of whom around a third are Roman Catholic. A very high proportion of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the 2017/18 academic year, just under half of the students enrolled on A-level programmes, and the remainder on vocational programmes. In the current year, the proportion of vocational learners is higher, and only a third of students are on A-level programmes.

Themes

What impact have leaders' and managers' actions had on increasing the proportion of students who achieve their qualifications and the grades expected of them? Insufficient progress

Leaders' and managers' actions have not stemmed the decline in the proportion of students achieving A-level qualifications. On almost all A-level subject courses, too few students achieve their qualification and, of those who do, not enough achieve the grade expected based on their starting points. The proportion of students who stay to the end of their A-level courses is too low.

The proportion of students who achieve GCSE and functional skills qualifications in mathematics has improved and is on an upward trend. However, this is not the same for qualifications in English, in which achievement rates continue to decline.

Leaders and managers were successful in ensuring that the proportion of students who achieved their vocational qualifications increased in 2018. For example, students studying level 3 vocational courses in business achieved well, as did students on level 2 and 3 vocational courses in sport. Across most subjects and levels of learning for the past three years, the proportion of students studying vocational subjects and achieving their qualification has improved.

How effective have governors been in using the information they receive to support and challenge leaders? Reasonable progress

Governors have a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have expanded the membership of the governing body to include individuals who have extensive experience of education. As a result, governors are better able to challenge leaders and managers on the improvements that need to be made.

Governors have taken positive steps to support leaders and managers to improve the quality of provision. They have established a quality and standards committee to oversee the impact of improvement actions. Governors have supported leaders and managers in their decision to increase the grades that students need to achieve to gain a place on courses at the college, which they believe will improve the proportion of students achieving their qualification. Governors, leaders and managers have also linked with a neighbouring sixth-form college in order to support the college to improve.

Governors have recently started to raise their profile within the college and now accompany staff on visits to lessons and to meet with students. This has resulted in governors being much more aware of the impact of leaders' and managers' actions on improving the quality of provision.

Governors have worked with leaders to revise the data they receive. Governors have provided support to leaders and managers in ensuring that the data they receive enables them to support improvements in the quality of the provision. They now receive data about the performance of courses in a way that enables them to challenge leaders and managers more effectively.

What impact have leaders' and managers' actions had on supporting teachers to improve their practice? Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers have been too slow to implement improvement actions to raise the standard of teaching and learning. They have instigated a wide range of training for teachers to improve their classroom practice. However, on A-level programmes, this has not had enough impact to improve the proportion of students who achieve their qualification.

Leaders' and managers' previous approach to observing teaching, learning and assessment was overly focused on compliance with college systems, students' attendance and students working on tasks. Leaders and managers have recently implemented a new approach to observing teaching, learning and assessment that is linked to staff performance, but it is too early to determine the impact of this new system.

Teachers place insufficient focus on ensuring that students learn new skills and knowledge and produce work of an appropriate standard. They place too much emphasis on students completing easy tasks that do not demand sufficient effort. As a result, students do not always achieve at the level of which they are capable.

Teachers are aware of students who are the most able and need to be challenged further or those who need additional support to make the progress of which they are capable. However, in the sample of lessons seen, teachers did not use this information to plan and teach lessons that met the full range of students' abilities sufficiently. For example, students who were most able sat quietly waiting for others to complete tasks before teachers moved on to the next topic.

The standard of students' work varies considerably between courses. In the sample of lessons seen during the monitoring visit, students were not developing good enough study skills to support their learning. Teachers' feedback to students is effusive of the positive aspects of their work but not sufficient to enable students to understand precisely how to improve their work further. As a result, students do not understand exactly what they need to do to improve. Students' work on vocational courses is generally of a higher quality than on other courses.

Teachers monitor effectively the progress that students make towards completing their qualification. However, in too many cases, students are not working at the grade expected of them. Where students' performance has declined, teachers do not record what actions they have taken for students to improve.

Teachers feel well supported by leaders and managers to improve their practice. For example, they talk about how they use data from assessment points to plan and provide learning in order that students make progress. However, the results of improvement actions have yet to be borne out in students' achievements across all the provision.

What impact have leaders and managers had on Reasonable progress improving students' attendance?

Leaders and managers have stemmed the decline in students' attendance over the last three years. They have recently implemented a new approach to improving students' attendance, with detentions for students, as well as telephone calls to parents and carers for those missing lessons. In the 2017/18 academic year, students' attendance was better than for the previous year. Managers' data for the first few weeks of the current year shows that this improvement has been sustained. Students' attendance for the first weeks of term is better than for the same time last year.

Students are aware of the new approach to improving attendance and talk positively about the impact it is having. They have a greater motivation not to miss lessons.

Students are also aware of the impact that non-attendance has on the progress they make towards achieving their qualifications.

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