

Carmel College

Sixth-form college

Inspection dates

30 April–3 May 2019

Overall effectiveness			Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding	Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding		
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Outstanding

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- The Catholic mission of the college, to promote excellence, opportunity, challenge and support for all students in a caring environment, infuses the organisation. The behaviour and actions of governors, staff and students reflect this mission daily.
- Governance, leadership and management are outstanding. Governors and leaders are relentless in their pursuit of excellence.
- Leaders and managers foster a culture across the college that is compassionate and accepting of difference and one in which students express their own ideas and flourish as individuals.
- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. As a result, most students make rapid and sustained progress.
- Teachers inspire and challenge students so that they are inquisitive and eager to learn. They use highly effective and skilful questioning routinely which extends learning, probes deeper understanding and builds students' confidence and resilience.
- Leaders' and managers' swift actions to improve the proportion of students who leave the college early have been very effective. The proportion of students who remain on their courses has improved significantly and is now high.
- Students are proud to study at the college. They value and respond positively to the very high expectations and aspirations teachers have of them. They take great pride in their work, which is of an exceptional standard.
- Students on level 3 vocational courses, the art foundation programme, GCSE English and mathematics, and the vast majority of A-level courses make exceptional progress.
- Students benefit from an extensive range of additional activities that build their self-confidence and self-awareness exceptionally well.
- Students benefit significantly from valuable careers advice and guidance that help them make aspirational and sound decisions about their future. Students' progression into university, further education, employment and apprenticeships is excellent.
- Students with high needs on courses at level 1 or below do not always make the progress expected of them because their teachers do not set specific enough targets or record them well enough.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Carmel College is a Catholic sixth-form college located in St Helens, Merseyside. The college provides 16 to 19 study programmes, mainly through A-level programmes, with a small amount of vocational provision. Currently, 1,761 students are enrolled at the college. The vast majority of students are on programmes at level 3, with a few studying an art foundation course at level 4. A small number of students with high needs are enrolled on foundation courses at entry level and level 1.
- Around one third of the working-age population in St Helens have qualifications at level 4 or above, which is lower than regional and national averages. Levels of unemployment in the local authority are similar to those regionally and nationally.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning in the few subjects that are underperforming to ensure that students reach their potential.
- Improve the quality of the setting and recording of targets for students with high needs on courses at level 1 or below so that they make the progress expected of them.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Governors and leaders are unswerving in their aim to provide the highest quality education. They maximise opportunities for students to progress to higher education, higher-level apprenticeships or employment. Governors' and leaders' vision is clear and reflects the culture of high expectations and uncompromising ambition for students that permeates the college. Students strive to achieve the very high standards their teachers set. They make excellent progress, achieve their qualifications and progress to aspirational destinations.
- The Catholic mission of the college is to promote excellence, opportunity, challenge and support. Leaders foster a highly supportive, yet demanding culture and ethos set in a Christian context in which students excel. Managers and teachers create a very caring and inclusive environment. Students model British values exceptionally well through their behaviours and attitudes. They demonstrate high levels of respect, celebrate individual difference and strive to be the best they can be.
- Since the previous inspection, governors and senior leaders have developed a vibrant modern campus with excellent facilities for learning. For example, students work independently in the very well-resourced open-access 'learning pods'.
- Governors, leaders and managers are relentless in their drive to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have a thorough understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement, which they self-assess accurately. Leaders use a model of 'formal subject review', 'support and challenge' and 'maintain and sustain' to target underperforming courses. This timely and highly effective approach brings about rapid and sustained improvements in the quality of teaching and the progress that students make.
- The judgements that college managers make about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are accurate and valid. Leaders use the outcomes from observations of teaching and learning to plan highly effective individualised continuous professional development for teachers that improves their practice. Teachers are extremely committed to continuous improvement and strive for excellence in their teaching practice. They deliver innovative and dynamic teaching that enables students to excel.
- Leaders and managers have been quick to recognise and rectify the issues associated with the introduction of linear A levels. The changes to the curriculum, the design of the course and initial advice and guidance, combined with targeted staff development, have brought about rapid improvements to the proportion of students who remain on their course.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is outstanding. Governors are highly ambitious and committed to providing aspirational teaching and learning for students. They have an excellent understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement and an accurate overview of the progress that groups of students make.

- Governors have extensive expertise and experience in a wide range of sectors. They use their skills and knowledge exceptionally well to support and challenge senior leaders to improve continuously the quality of provision and outcomes for students. They take swift and decisive actions to address any concerns.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Students feel safe and are safe. They know who to talk to and how to raise concerns about the safety and welfare of themselves and others. Students have a very well-developed understanding and awareness of the risks and dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Governors and staff at all levels place a high priority on keeping students safe. They receive appropriate training and regular updates on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty and have an excellent understanding of their responsibilities. Leaders have put in place comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures that staff adhere to and use very well.
- Managers follow safer recruitment practices to ensure that staff are suitable to work with young people. The designated safeguarding lead and safeguarding team record and monitor carefully all safeguarding referrals. They have highly effective links with external agencies to keep students safe. The safeguarding coordinator acts quickly to support students with mental health concerns using the expertise of in-house mental health first aiders and external support agencies, as appropriate.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching is of a consistently high standard across the vast majority of subjects. Teachers have exceptionally high expectations of students and want the very best for them. They challenge students successfully so that almost all make rapid and sustained progress from their starting points.
- Highly committed, skilled and enthusiastic teachers inspire and motivate students to achieve their very best. Students are inquisitive and eager to develop their knowledge and skills. Teachers create a respectful learning atmosphere in which students feel comfortable asking for points of clarification or attempting difficult questions. As a result, they develop a thorough understanding of the subject.
- Students appreciate greatly the wide-ranging and stimulating strategies that teachers use to check their understanding. Excellent and skilful questioning by teachers extends learning and builds students' confidence and resilience. Students develop higher-order thinking skills that help them to grasp complex topics. Teachers challenge misconceptions sensitively and clearly, which supports students to make exceptional progress.
- Teachers help students to develop very good English skills, particularly their use of technical language. As a result, students use subject terminology accurately and skilfully. For example, in GCSE English, students justified their use of adverbs, alliteration and figurative speech when describing a visual image. In A-level law, students used terms

such as 'duty of care' and 'mitigation' competently when discussing a case of gross negligence.

- Students benefit greatly from a range of activities that develop their wider skills. For example, in a 'tomorrow's engineers' enrichment session, students demonstrated a robot they had built that was able to solve a Rubik's cube. They developed valuable teamworking, problem-solving and communication skills, as well as applying physics theory to practice.
- Teaching, learning and support for students with high needs are good. Managers coordinate specialist support between the college and external agencies extremely well. As a result, they meet the individual needs of the students. Leaders and managers effectively plan and manage transition arrangements. Students adapt to college life quickly and improve their self-confidence.
- Students are highly motivated and take ownership of their work and the progress they make. They identify improvements and redraft assessments to improve their grades. Students know their minimum expected grades and the progress they are making towards these. Most are ambitious and take steps to do even better. Teachers provide very useful and thorough feedback on students' work that enables them to fulfil their potential. Regular tests and assessments develop students' understanding and recall, preparing them well for examinations.
- A sophisticated and highly effective tracking system enables teachers to monitor rigorously students' progress. Teachers make timely interventions that enable students to improve rapidly. Targets for improvement are closely monitored by teachers to ensure that students make good or better progress. Where students fall behind with their work or fall below expectations, they attend extra study sessions. As a result, they catch up swiftly and improve their grades.
- Leaders and managers create a culture of equality and diversity across the college in which staff and students celebrate difference. Students flourish in this inclusive environment as confident and mature individuals. They participate fully in discussions in lessons and tutorials that explore British values. For example, in A-level French, students investigate freedom of expression and speech, and the benefits of being a good citizen. In A-level physical education, students discuss the equality of opportunity between elite and amateur athletes from poorer countries.
- Teachers take part in an excellent staff development programme that supports improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. For example, teachers developed and implemented successfully a 'challenge in the classroom' strategy to extend the learning of the most able students. As a result, this group of students made significantly better progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Leaders and managers foster a culture across the college that is compassionate and accepting of difference and one in which students are encouraged to express their own ideas. The high levels of respect and tolerance that students show towards each other, staff and visitors are exemplary. Students' behaviour is excellent in and out of class.

- Leaders' and managers' focus on improving initial information, advice and guidance has been successful. Personal achievement tutors (PATs) are well qualified in providing advice and guidance. They work expertly with individual students before they start college to ensure that they enrol on an appropriate pathway at the start of their course. PATs monitor closely groups of students who are at risk of leaving early or of making slow progress. For example, students taking four A levels and those with lower GCSE scores meet with PATs early in their course to discuss their progress and to make sure that they stay on track.
- Students benefit from an extensive range of additional activities. Students build their self-confidence and self-awareness significantly as a result of participating in trips, visits, events, societies and teams throughout their time at college. For example, students in the Mandarin Chinese society demonstrate their skills in speaking Mandarin Chinese in front of their peers. The teacher inspires them to speak confidently and fluently and answer questions about their presentation.
- Students engage in a range of purposeful and relevant work-related learning experiences. Dedicated work experience staff work with students to develop bespoke placements and activities that match students' future career goals and ambitions. Examples include students interviewing and shadowing midwives, participating in summer schools with local engineering companies, attending train the trainer development in cyber security and undertaking work placements in cardiology hospital departments.
- Students know how to keep themselves fit and healthy. They take part in college sports teams and a range of non-competitive sporting activities. For example, students enjoy archery, taekwondo, canoeing and table tennis. They learn how to cook healthy meals and join in a range of activities during well-being week. Students who take part in a mental health awareness group build their resilience. They develop skills in mindfulness and dealing with stress. Students improve their attendance and make better progress in their studies.
- Students know how to be a successful learner. They are clear about the steps they need to take to achieve their learning goals. Teachers work tirelessly with students who are at risk of falling behind and those who are making exceptional progress to ensure that they fulfil their potential. Students in the 'high-achievers' programme attend conferences and lectures from Oxbridge professors, which inspires them to do the very best in their studies.
- Students are proud to study at the college. They take great pride in their work, which is of an exceptional standard. Students value and respond positively to the very high expectations and aspirations teachers have of them. For example, in A-level English, students take part in a wider reading project. The students embrace the project and use a wide range of texts to inform their study of English. Consequently, they produce work to an excellent standard.
- Students benefit from valuable careers advice and guidance that help them make aspirational and sound decisions about their future. Careers staff are well qualified and skilled in helping students make the right career choices. Students gain places at prestigious universities and with respected employers. For example, students gain internships with a high-profile fashion magazine, gain employment as an international aid worker and study degrees, including marine and natural history photography and visual

anthropology, at university. Students secure summer placements at London and American universities, and with local and national businesses.

- Students have a very good understanding of safety and radicalisation and extremism and know how to keep themselves safe. They are clear about how to report any concerns about themselves or others.
- Students' attendance is high and punctuality is excellent. Systems to follow up absence with students, parents and carers are rigorous and highly effective.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- Leaders and managers quickly recognised that, following the introduction of linear A levels, too many students left in the first year of their programme. They identified that initial advice and guidance needed to reflect better the demands of linear A levels. Leaders and managers put in place swift and effective actions to address this. The proportion of current students who remain on their programme has improved significantly and is now high.
- The proportion of A-level, vocational and foundation students who passed their qualifications in 2017/18 is very high and above that of similar providers. Leaders and managers check rigorously the five courses identified as performing below college-expected standards through a formal subject review process. As a result of the actions put in place, the progress of most students studying A levels in physics, music, music technology and philosophy, and extended project qualification, is now greatly improved.
- A small number of students study GCSE English and mathematics. In 2017/18, the proportion of students who achieved a standard or strong pass was high and significantly higher than the national average. Current students make rapid progress in GCSE English and mathematics lessons.
- The progress that most A-level and level 3 and level 4 vocational students make on their courses is exceptional. Students looked after by the local authority, young carers, those in receipt of discretionary bursary and high achievers make outstanding progress. Students on foundation learning courses make the progress expected of them.
- Students' progression into positive destinations, including university, further education, employment and apprenticeships, is excellent. Leaders and managers continue to track students' progress at university. The proportion of students who leave university before completing their qualification is low and first-class and upper second-class degree outcomes are high. Most students with high needs who left in 2017/18 progressed into further education, supported internships and voluntary work.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Currently, there are 1,761 students following academic and vocational study programmes. Most students study A-level programmes. The remainder are on vocational courses at level 3 and art foundation at level 4. The largest subject areas are in science, mathematics, English and creative art and design.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment on study programmes is excellent and of a consistently high standard across most subjects. The vast majority of teachers have very high expectations of their students. They are passionate about their subject and are highly skilled practitioners. Students quickly develop the skills and understanding they need to succeed on their course.
- Teachers plan and provide highly effective lessons that include a range of stimulating and engaging activities. Teachers create an environment in which students are respectful, engaged in their learning and eager to contribute. For example, in A-level sociology, students listen to the views of others about social-class inequality and make thoughtful and intelligent arguments.
- Teachers use questioning expertly to develop students' existing knowledge while stimulating a deeper understanding of the subject. Students express confidently well-considered views and detailed answers to questions. Teachers build on students' initial responses to questions. They challenge students to expand on their comments or to justify the point they are making.
- Most teachers are unremitting in their drive to ensure that students reach their full potential. Teachers monitor students' progress meticulously and know their individual strengths and weaknesses. They use this information successfully to put in place focused strategies to improve students' progress. For example, students attend extra academic tutorials and group workshops to develop their understanding of the subject. Students have an excellent understanding of the progress they are making on their course.
- Feedback that students receive from teachers is highly effective. The work that most students produce is of an exceptionally high standard because they act on helpful feedback from their teachers. Students take ownership of the improvements they need to make. They organise their class notes well and are proud of their work. Many students produce useful revision diagrams and synthesise accurately key points in their notes.
- Students benefit significantly from a broad range of additional activities that are closely linked to their career aspirations. These activities develop students' confidence and independence. Students use the knowledge and experience they gain to make successful applications to university, apprenticeships or employment. For example, students applying for higher education courses in the medical profession explore sensitively current issues such as patient autonomy.
- Students develop their English and mathematics skills very well. For example, the college offers GCSE English and mathematics classes to students who have already passed their qualifications. Students who attend these lessons improve their grades and, as a result, strengthen their university application. Many students take qualifications in core mathematics, further mathematics or statistics. This helps them make better progress in the other subjects they study.
- Students receive highly effective clear and impartial careers advice, which they use to make informed decisions about their future careers. Careers advisers, personal achievement tutors and teachers work closely with individual students to support them to make the right decisions about their next steps. For example, as well as college staff, an external adviser attends two days per week to work with students who are unclear about their future plans. In January 2019, the college put on a creative industries careers event

that students benefited from greatly. It included a wide range of prestigious guest speakers, including a BAFTA-winning art director.

- Students enjoy bespoke work experience that allows them to explore future career options. For example, students shadow paramedics at a local ambulance station. In many instances, students make a significant contribution to local business. For example, health and social care students devised a very successful eight-week activity programme to reduce social isolation and loneliness for residents in a care home.
- Students' attendance in class and at work experience placements is high. They arrive on time to lessons. Students are confident, well-spoken and courteous. They are extremely respectful to each other, staff and visitors. Students embrace the culture of tolerance, respect and opportunity that is embedded across the college. They benefit greatly from topics in tutorial sessions that deepen their understanding of British values. For example, students explore world religions and produce a range of examples that show their understanding of the role of faith in the wider world.

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

- Currently, there are 35 students with high needs. Of these, 31 are foundation students studying at entry level and level 1 and four are on level 3 academic programmes. The college receives funding for 32 students with high needs.
- Leaders and managers use high-needs funding effectively to plan, manage and provide resources for the provision. They invest in specialist staff training, including autism spectrum disorder, travel training and understanding education, health and care plans. Students take part in a wide range of experiences and events that equip them with the skills they need during and when they finish their college course.
- Well-planned and well-managed individual transition arrangements ensure that students settle in very quickly to college life. Leaders and managers have developed a link programme with local schools in which prospective foundation students, from as early as year 9, attend the college for taster days. Managers gather very detailed support information for each student during transition, which the majority of teachers use effectively to plan a student's individual learning. In the few instances where this does not happen, students do not make progress at the rate of which they are capable.
- Most teachers have high expectations of students. In foundation classes, they plan and provide creative and innovative lessons that develop students' higher-level thinking skills, such as problem-solving. For example, foundation students who participate in a local farm shop initiative selected fruit to match customers' orders and packed it into boxes ready for distribution. Students on academic programmes make excellent progress and achieve as well as their peers. Support staff work very effectively with teachers and adapt teaching and learning materials and activities skilfully.
- Specialist support for students is very effective. The care team and learning support mentor work together seamlessly to ensure that they meet the needs of students. They work with external agencies and parents to put in place suitable interventions so that students make the best progress they can. For example, recent interventions have resulted in students being able to go on holiday for the first time and accessing fully all learning opportunities at the college.

- Most teachers use questioning techniques very well to challenge foundation students to reach their potential. They build on students' existing knowledge, giving them confidence in what they learn and the skills they gain. Teachers successfully use a variety of methods, such as pictorial, written and writing boards, to make continual checks on learning. Students are able to articulate the progress they have made during their time at the college, for example how to use the college vending machine.
- Teachers develop foundation students' English and mathematics skills successfully. They use very effective speaking and listening activities to develop students' functional communication skills. Students speak confidently in lessons and contribute well to discussions. Students gain useful numeracy skills through sequencing, sorting and division activities.
- The behaviour that students display in and out of class is impeccable. Teachers support foundation students very well to manage their behaviour, which minimises disruption to learning and other activities. Students are polite and respectful to visitors, staff and their peers. For example, foundation students who sold cakes in the college refectory dealt with a wide range of customers politely and professionally, with very little support from staff.
- All students participate in a rich and extensive additional programme which promotes their well-being and self-advocacy. They develop their knowledge of personal welfare and learn how to stay healthy by taking part in short courses such as yoga, creative art and cookery.
- Teachers do not plan work experience placements and community access opportunities for students well enough. The supporting risk assessments include all safety aspects but teachers do not consistently base them on an individual student's needs. Consequently, teachers do not set students sufficiently challenging goals so that they make rapid, substantial and sustainable progress.
- The rate at which students develop skills for independence in everyday real-life situations is too slow. Teachers do not plan students' development of their softer skills, such as personal and social skills, sufficiently because they do not record them well enough. As a result, students are not able to recognise the small incremental steps they make towards achieving their personal targets. This slows their progress in moving towards employment and greater independence.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130489
Type of provider	Sixth-form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1743
Principal/CEO	Mr Mike Hill
Telephone number	01744 452 200
Website	www.carmel.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	30	17	-	-	1,672	5	35	2
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	32							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners, parents and staff; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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