



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR ST DOMINIC'S SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

Name of College:	St. Dominic's Sixth Form College
Headteacher/Principal:	Andrew Parkin
Hub:	Chrysalis Hub
College phase:	Post-16
MAT (if applicable):	Not applicable (N/A)

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	N/A
Date of this Review:	20/11/2024
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	Leading
Date of last QA Review:	21/11/2022
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	17/05/2022

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host college leaders and visiting reviewers, agrees that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels N/A

Quality of provision and outcomes N/A

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged students and students with additional needs

Area of excellence Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) - Accredited

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence Exceptional teaching and learning at Key Stage 5, 21/11/2022

Overall peer evaluation estimate N/A

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a college's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the college chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the college's internal use to support the college's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit colleges'



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safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the college

St Dominic's is a well above average sized, post-16 co-educational sixth form college. The impressive college buildings and grounds provide students with plenty of pleasant space in former convent grounds for Dominican nuns. In keeping with its history and its Catholic mission, the college retains an on-site chapel.

The college's location within Harrow is an area of below average deprivation. However, due to its popularity, students travel to college from over 150 different schools around London and the home counties, as well as two main Catholic feeder schools. The proportion of disadvantaged students is well below the national average. The college is very diverse, with students from a range of cultural backgrounds. The majority of students are of Asian, African or Afro-Caribbean heritage.

The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and with an education, health and care plan is well below the national average.

The college is in the county of Middlesex within Greater London and sits within Harrow local authority (LA). It is a Roman Catholic designated voluntary-aided sixth form college. St Dominic's mission is to ensure the personal and spiritual growth of all its members based on British values, academic excellence and high-quality pastoral care. This is underpinned by 'fostering the independent learner'.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders are keenly aware of the college's purpose in helping students along their journey to university and beyond and show strong commitment to their role in this. They have high standards for the provision provided to all learners and the community around them. That leaders achieve these high standards is evident on arrival at the college. Staff welcome visitors at the gate and escort them to reception, past the memorial poppy garden, clear signage and beautifully maintained grounds. Students are calm and orderly as they move around.
- Friendly and organised reception and administrative support staff plan and meet all visitors' needs in advance but repeatedly check whether they can

provide further help. As a result, everything works quickly and smoothly. Students find it difficult to think of ways the college could improve.

- Staff are well-versed in welcoming visitors because leaders frequently invite schools and colleagues to the college to work together or to share their strong practice. Similarly, staff frequently host speakers, employers and alumni who contribute to students' wider experiences.
- For students, this approach starts before they begin college. Leaders' effective systems and processes ensure that students are on the right courses with the right support for their needs. This includes comprehensive marketing, enrolment, induction and transition processes.
- Leaders maintain their high standards by following developments in education and driving innovation. Their approach to artificial intelligence (AI) exemplifies this. Staff training focused on demonstrating useful AI applications in the classroom prior to asking staff to share their experiences of experimenting in lessons. For those staff who feel they need more support before experimenting, additional training operates in a team structure. In the case of AI, some students supported the training team as part of their enrichment programme.
- Leaders' passion to support students to become independent learners is a shared vision. Several initiatives, such as explicit expectations, flipped learning and the student magazine, ensure that this happens.
- Students' holistic development is a priority. Students are actively involved in a volunteering programme contributing to the local community. Students say they are proud of what they achieve.
- In a college of 1400 students from many different schools, leaders offer a weekly timetabled enrichment programme that is important for developing social skills as well as new talents. Students immediately cite how their activities have helped, such as football for team building and strength conditioning, fitness for life-long socialising and health, public speaking for oracy and AI for studies now and future work.
- Staff say there is a family ethos amongst them, supported by leaders' focus on well-being. Staff enjoy many social activities, with tea and cake, as well as an annual community building trip to Kew Gardens.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...

... broadly, subject staff continued to evaluate student performance success by comparing target grades to actual grades through the Progress Check, the internal assessment system.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Subject leaders work together to ensure a consistent offer that is appropriate for the students. Leaders, including governors, show their commitment by maintaining courses in important subjects, such as music, drama and languages despite low numbers of students electing these courses.
- Leaders' commitment to high quality provision extends to pastoral and CEIAG programmes, their staff teams and spaces. A team of specialist tutors deliver the college's own programme for life skills and CEIAG, Veritas. Students shared how they learnt about the general election and put this into practice by voting at the Brent Youth Parliament. In their lessons for core religious education, students learn about the beliefs and customs of other faiths, as well as what it is like to live outside of Harrow from weekly speakers. As a result, character development and all aspects of careers education are key strengths of the college's provision. As well as these programmes, students also benefit from courses beyond the college such as work experience and online courses.
- Subject leaders have high expectations of what students can achieve and make sure that the work given interests and engages students. They design and provide booklets for students, which organise key notes and activities. The activities help students to link their learning to real life and the world of work. For example, in religious studies (RS), students used their knowledge of Kantian ethics for different situations, such as banning designer babies and worker rights. In psychology research methods, an activity asked students to conclude whether the advertising for brand X was more effective than that of brand Y.
- Staff have strong subject knowledge. Teachers are clear about the knowledge, skills, and vocabulary that students must learn. In particular, students appreciate teachers' knowledge of examination techniques and how they share what they need to do for examination success.
- In preparation for mock and actual examinations, teachers focus on assessment criteria, presenting mark scheme rubrics for students to use to

peer assess their work. Leaders support teachers to become examiners, which many of them take up.

- Teachers plan a variety of activities with which students engage positively, such as, expecting students to challenge their peers' presentation on 'how committed Aeneas was in his mission to arrive in Italy', comparing model answers in philosophy, a speaking and translating dictation activity in Spanish and group work with set roles in RS.
- When teachers use high quality modelling of small steps for challenging calculations, all students accurately work through independent activities, such as using two tailed hypothesis testing to calculate a critical value.
- Where teachers use their knowledge of students to plan who should answer their questions, they challenge students at the appropriate level. They also move around the classroom to check students' progress through the activities.
- Leaders meet students' high expectations because they care deeply about how students feel and what they think about the college. They respond to student feedback, routinely collected in student surveys and via the student executive, and then go beyond this practice by helping students to see their potential and to flourish. For example, in addition to a college produced termly magazine, students produce the St Dom's Discovery Magazine. This is a joyful read of deeper dive articles on aspects of students' courses that appeal to young people. As well as the exceptionally well written editorial in the November 2024 edition, students shared 46 articles, including synesthesia, lucid dreaming, depression, and how professional football is dealing with mental health issues. The argument that doodling is the ultimate form of rebellion was persuasive, beguilingly presented in pictures and words.
- Students enjoy and appreciate all aspects of college life. They feel well looked after and supported by all members of staff, citing senior leaders, the study plus manager, the careers team, tutors, teachers and librarians. As a result, students attend frequently.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...

...in response to students' request to suspend homework tasks in favour of revision time prior to examination sessions, leaders considered a 'whole college' approach to help students manage their pre-examination workload through the 'Wellbeing Award for Schools' process.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged students and students with additional needs - What went well

- Leaders focus on the needs of potential students with SEND from open evening, including early identification of examination access arrangements. Teachers have this information on seating plans so that they can adjust their activity, homework and assessment expectations. One student showed how teachers printed her resources onto coloured paper.
- Leaders respond to changes in need. For example, tutors trained with LA mental health practitioners to support the increased number of students with mental health anxieties on a 1:1 basis. Middle leaders cite examples of what tutors communicate to them to help provide further support. Students prone to panic attacks have continuous access to support from the study plus manager. Other students attend weekly study support sessions which help them achieve their target grades.
- Leaders meet the needs of high achieving students by directing them to 'A* lectures' and the Oxbridge programme. Following a review, leaders have improved this programme and Oxbridge applications have increased. Disadvantaged students achieve historic destinations outcomes above the local and national averages. In particular, disadvantaged students go on to study at Oxbridge in equal proportion to their non-disadvantaged peers.
- Using their knowledge of student barriers, the careers team adjust their events and programmes accordingly. For example, by adding a slot to the end of the careers day event, students with sensory needs return when it is quieter and less overwhelming.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged students and students with additional needs - Even better if...

None identified.

5. Area of Excellence

Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)

5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the college taken to establish expertise in this area?

Students benefit from a robust, aspirational and consistent careers provision described by one student as 'nowhere could do it better'. Students spoke passionately about the support from their personal tutor and careers lead. For the third time, this year St Dominic's achieved the country's dedicated national quality award, the Quality in Careers Standard through external assessment. This accreditation, uniquely, accredits the four components of CEIAG. The fact that St Dominic's is featured as a case study in 'The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit for Colleges' from the DfE funded Careers and Enterprise Company further indicates the exceptionally high quality of provision.

Leaders prioritise their CEIAG provision and show commitment to their view that they are 'a stepping stone to university and the world of work.' Students have access to a careers office which is permanently staffed with a team comprising the careers leader, careers advisor and work experience coordinator. This enables the team to keep up to date and constantly develop expertise as to what students need as this changes over time.

The careers team meets students at enrolment and collect information to know them as individuals. Each student indicates four different subject areas, such as law, mathematics, economics and actuarial which the team uses to create email groups for their bespoke careers portal. The team then triages the vast amount of information sent to them into over 30 professions or academic subjects which students receive according to their interests. This process also identifies individual student barriers. For example, they use an online careers platform, Unifrog, which transfers data from students' prior institutions, to identify those students who have not yet had any experience of work. They quickly target these students to close this gap. Similarly, at the end of Year 1, they use the university admissions software to identify students who are not progressing their application and target them with an additional support programme before they start Year 2.

The key features of the programme include assessment centre practice, network training for *Linked-in*, face-to-face practice with the large alumni and *speed dating* with a range of employers and mentors. Their enterprise advisor from a construction company, arranges site visits, employee mentoring and talks. The alumni of 1900 students offers inspiration and advice ranging from degree apprentices, undergraduates, PHD students and employers. Ex-students are delighted to come back, feeling honoured to be asked. In turn, current students aspire to do the same in the future. As a result, a large number of students successfully secure highly competitive degree apprenticeship places.

The careers team works with subject leaders to create strong links with employers. The impressive list includes specific employer links to every subject which are used in the annual careers week. Nottingham University are working with the mathematics team to tweak the curriculum. The team designs events that appeal to young people. Every two weeks, a new podcast is released which showcases students interviewing employers or exploring careers. Students particularly like the subject-specific speed networking events. The team is adding events in economics, biology and humanities to the annual technology, engineering and mathematics event.

5.2 What evidence is there of the impact on students' outcomes?

Students say that they feel extremely well served by their CEIAG provision. They call in to the team for advice and take up the many opportunities sent to them. They 'love it.' Students impress admissions officers in their university applications because they have lots of courses, contacts and experience to include as evidence of their passion and suitability for studying a higher-level subject. As a result, the proportion of students gaining a place in the top third of universities is well above the national average.

Students gain a strong understanding of the world of work and how to operate in it. Every student has several experiences of the work place with at least one, often two, specific to their career choice. For example, medical students benefit from virtual mentoring, support and webinars by signing up to Medic Mentors. This gives students the knowledge about the careers they might want in five years' time so they can make informed decisions about the best post-18 pathways to achieve them. This is evidenced by an above national average progression score for students' destinations.

Although the vast majority of students move on to university post-18, the provision also prepares them for their post-university next steps by giving knowledge and practice in how to perform well in assessment centres and interviews. It also gives them a grounding in the knowledge they need to manage their future working life, such as understanding their own skills and interests, how to improve weaker skills and how to research the constantly changing labour market information locally and nationally.

5.3 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?

Name:	Nicola Walsh
Job title:	Vice Principal
Email address:	nmw@stdoms.ac.uk

Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the college's internal use to support the college's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

For further support following your QA Review, colleges can access the College Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables colleges to connect with other colleges in your hub and across the national network of colleges.

Colleges can also attend Sharing Leading Practice (SLP) events where colleges showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow college leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a college or attend an online webinar hosted by a college, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the College Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, colleges may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)