



Jersey Schools Review Framework Independent Report of Victoria College

Le Mont Millais
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Headteacher: Dr Gareth Hughes
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Summary

Leaders have made great strides in recent years towards their mission for Victoria College to be known for more than high academic results. They are determined 'to nurture more well-rounded, resilient young men'. The values of 'respectful, resilient and aspirational' encapsulate their ambitions perfectly and are woven explicitly through all aspects of school life. Older students confirm how the culture has changed for the better. Younger pupils take for granted an environment that is orderly, accepting of difference and much more focused on kindness and respect for those in the college and beyond.

Education at the college is far more than academic study. Staff are generous in the time they give to ensure that pupils benefit from a myriad of co-curricular and enrichment activities. Here too, pupils have seen significant changes. Previously, the co-curricular programme was very sport orientated and competitive. Now, it appeals to a wider range of interests.

Leaders are right to continue to be proud of the college's high academic standards. Overall, pupils' attainment is higher than their counterparts in other Jersey schools in public examinations at the end of Years 11 and 13. Invariably, all students go on to university or into employment when they leave aged 18. Progress could, however, be even better at times if teaching and assessment were consistently of the highest quality.

The Victoria College Foundation is successfully opening the college's doors to pupils who otherwise may not be able to benefit from what it has to offer. A number of bursaries offer financial support. The school has committed to meeting the needs of boys who demonstrate academic potential, yet have barriers to learning to overcome. There are promising signs in the provision for pupils with additional needs, but it is early days.

Understandably, it has taken time to achieve a significant change in culture and ethos. The restructured leadership group has been instrumental in shifting the focus and ensuring that, on the whole, stakeholders understand what the college stands for now. The refreshed heads of year team plays a crucial role in keeping a close eye on individual pupils' academic progress and pastoral needs. Leaders and governors are under no illusion that there is more to do to fully achieve their vision. They know that the next step is to ensure that all departments, and indeed all staff, are fully subscribed to the positive direction of travel and playing their part.

Full report

Achievement

- Achievement at Victoria College is so much more than public examination results. The extensive co-curricular programme provides many other opportunities to succeed. Pupils can gain awards or certificates for a range of skills, from public speaking to financial services to photography. Their contributions to their house are recognised, as is work to, for example, champion an end to violence against women and girls, or participation in the Youth Parliament. Some pupils gain qualifications as a peer mediator or sports leader.
- The extended project qualification is a notable strength of sixth form provision. Over half of students now choose to pursue this alongside their studies. The depth of learning, such as the underpinning scientific evidence behind addiction, or the importance of international human rights law in businesses operating in war zones, is impressive. The skills sixth formers hone as they plan, structure and refine their research stand them in good stead for the future.
- Academic attainment is equally strong. Headline published data show that overall outcomes are consistently high. Pupils' attainment in Year 7 and Year 9 is markedly above other schools. By the time they get to GCSE, they outperform Jersey averages and UK equivalents on almost all measures, often by some way. Virtually all pupils achieve a standard pass, and most a strong pass, in English and mathematics at age 16.
- Typically, pupils sit examinations in 10 GCSE subjects. Results are strong in the large majority of subjects. In the few subjects where that is not the case, leaders know where the weaknesses lie and what needs to be done to tackle them.
- Post-16 outcomes too are mostly above other schools, although results are a little more variable from year to year. Leaders are working closely with other schools within the sixth form collaboration to ensure that pupils' progress is carefully tracked, wherever they are learning.
- Well-planned careers advice means that destination data at age 18 is positive. Around three-quarters of students go on to university, most achieving their first-place offer. Those who do not wish to study at university are equally well supported to make informed decisions and move successfully into their chosen employment.
- Achievement could, though, be even better. The progress pupils as a whole make between joining the school in Year 7 and taking their GCSEs is more in line with other schools, rather than above. Leaders acknowledge they need to focus more on the value added over time and recognise that this is primarily a Key Stage 3 issue. Assessment is not always precise enough to keep all pupils on a strong trajectory of progress.
- While Victoria College is committed to being inclusive, outcomes for some groups of pupils are not as strong as their peers in school. Notably, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not perform consistently strongly across all phases and subjects. The same is true, but to a lesser extent, for those who are eligible for Jersey Premium funding or are multi-lingual.

Behaviour, personal development and welfare

- The culture of kindness and respect in the college is palpable. From the headteacher down, staff typically greet pupils warmly and show an interest in how they are. Pupils mirror that in their courteous responses to staff and their relationships with, and high expectations of, each other. As one female member of staff observed, they 'find conversations with boys immeasurably different now'.

- Staff actively challenge societal issues such as misogyny, gender bias and misuse of social media through work with pupils, their parents and bringing in outside agencies. This allows pupils to be reflective about their own actions and their place in today's society. Bullying is rare. Undoubtedly, the sixth form is a much more positive place for girls to learn than has been the case in the not too distant past.
- Pupils are, rightly, appreciative of the education they receive. This is reflected in attendance above other schools. Almost unfailingly, pupils are respectful to teachers and their peers in lessons. They tend to follow instructions to the letter, are keen to learn and take pride in their work. The review team particularly noted a 'grown-up seriousness about their studies' amongst sixth formers. The cumulative impact of careers education through the school helps pupils to make informed choices when the time comes.
- Outside of class, behaviour is positive. Pupils move from one lesson to the next swiftly and with purpose. Despite the limitations of the school site, breaktimes are a pleasant affair. Many pupils get the most out of lunchtimes, joining one of the many clubs or co-curricular activities on offer.
- On occasion, reviewers noted some passivity where the lesson was very teacher-led, but never any intention to disrupt. Suspensions from school have been higher in the last couple of years. Leaders assert that this has been necessary to reinforce expectations. Lessons have been learned and repeat offences have been avoided.
- The strong co-curricular offer is one of the college's unique selling points. It makes a significant contribution to pupils' wellbeing and enjoyment of college. Typically, there are more than 60 activities a week, with the programme changing as the year progresses. Around two-thirds of pupils attend at least one extra activity a week, the vast majority of which are free. Where this is not the case, arrangements are made to ensure that ability to pay is not a barrier to participation for pupils eligible for financial support.
- The reach of the co-curricular offer is impressive. The college makes sure that the line-up goes well beyond the traditional drama, music and competitive sports. So, pupils can have a go at alternative sports from table tennis to archery to mountain biking. They can join a range of activities from the thriving combined cadet force to the orchestra. Clubs cater for a wide range of interests, including chess, debating, faith and animation.
- The refreshed personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum complements the focus on kindness and respect well. It has a much higher profile than in the past. The programme tackles current and contextual issues such as consent, drugs and alcohol awareness proactively. It is, however, early days and while pupils value their lessons, the depth of their understanding of some aspects is variable.
- That said, pupils know who they can turn to if they need more information or have concerns. They trust staff and feel safe.

Effectiveness of teaching

- Across subjects, teachers' own subject knowledge is a commendable strength. Indeed, pupils are impressed by the fact that, as one group explained, teachers 'are specialists and loads have doctorates'. Teaching is invariably focused on what learners need to know. Coupled with established routines, lessons are typically purposeful.
- Senior leaders know what good teaching and learning looks like. They are spearheading a shift from didactic or instructional teaching to a greater focus on learning. More often than not, the influence of this can be seen in lessons, with teachers making good use of resources and different teaching strategies.
- The recently introduced oracy project is at the heart of this work, although it is early days. The aims are twofold. The first is to nurture pupils' confidence, particularly in the

lower years. The second is to encourage discussion and debate in lessons, helping pupils to articulate and embed their learning.

- Where teaching is strong, questioning is used well to draw on and consolidate previous learning. Posing questions such as 'how do you know?' challenges pupils to articulate their learning and develops their thinking. In these lessons, it is clear that teachers are constantly alert to, and checking what pupils understand.
- Through this approach, pupils learn from discussion and sharing ideas. Indeed, they recognise that sometimes they may not have taken many notes in a lesson, but have actually learned a lot. Teachers explicitly tackle common misconceptions and errors and pupils learn that it is okay to have a go and make a mistake.
- Not all teaching is of the highest quality. A significant minority of lessons, and this typically reflects some departmental attitudes, are still more focused on imparting information or knowledge than actively engaging pupils. Where questions are posed, a 'hands-up' approach means some pupils can quietly opt-out without drawing attention to themselves. There is insufficient challenge for high prior-attaining pupils at times and the needs of those with SEND are not met as well as they might be.
- Across the school, but particularly in Key Stage 3, there is a tendency to rely on tests as a measure of progress towards examination grades. There is a lack of clarity in some departments about the purpose of marking and feedback, and if and how pupils are expected to respond. Sometimes, the solution for below-expected scores is repeat testing or practising examination techniques. There is not always sufficient consideration given to what the results say about what pupils may not have learned securely and how best that can be remedied. In the lower year groups, the curriculum is not always sequenced and planned in sufficient detail to support this.
- Work to support the growing number of pupils with SEND and the wider range of needs they are presenting with is an important development in the college's work to be more inclusive. It is, though, still at a fairly early stage. The strongest teaching takes account of different pupils' needs. Teachers make well-considered adaptations to challenge or support. The pupils themselves appreciate the additional support or opportunity for some time out when the classroom environment gets too much.
- There is, however, a sense that some staff and pupils think that pupils with additional needs are someone else's responsibility. Pupils with more complex needs or who find it difficult to manage their feelings or regulate their behaviour would benefit from social and self-management targets as well as academic ones.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

- Senior leaders and governors are determined, as the prospectus promises, to always be seeking to improve the academic, pastoral and co-curricular offer so that pupils can be 'the best versions of themselves'. The unwavering focus on, and success in redefining the culture of the college is inspirational. The breadth of wider opportunities open to pupils is impressive. Leaders are not complacent. Work to enhance teaching and learning is already reaping benefits, but they know there is more to do to ensure it is consistently of the very best quality.
- Much has been achieved in balancing and enhancing the curriculum. For example, a rich programme extends sixth form provision beyond the academic. Timetable adjustments have facilitated PSHE being taught as discrete lessons by dedicated staff in most Key Stage 3 and 4 year groups, rather than through tutor time. Leaders know, though, that there is more to do to develop curriculum thinking, particularly at Key Stage 3.

- The leadership group live and breathe 'respect, resilience and aspiration'. Day by day, they consistently model the consideration for others that they expect of staff and pupils. Senior leaders have an honest appraisal of what the college does really well and where it could be even better. Considerable time and energy has been invested in consulting with stakeholders and deliberating thoroughly their ambitious vision for the college to inform their plans. They are resolute in their drive to make further improvements. A greater sense of urgency on occasion would drive improvements more quickly.
- The heads of year team take on the same mantle. With a clear remit now for both academic and pastoral oversight, they are caring of and ambitious for the pupils they are responsible for. The team are clear about their crucial role in linking with other key staff to help all pupils achieve their potential. They seek to understand underlying issues and put in place whatever they can where a pupil is not performing as well as expected.
- Departmental leadership is not as consistently strong. Some heads of department are fairly new to their role and have not yet had time to make the difference they know is needed. A minority of subjects are not fully on board with changes to teaching and learning. Current line management responsibilities for heads of department are unwieldy. Senior leaders acknowledge that finding a solution to strengthen this layer of middle leadership and increase their accountability sooner rather than later is crucial to enhancing provision further.
- Similarly, the leadership of SEND in its new guise needs strengthening. There is more to do to ensure that all staff see themselves as teachers of pupils with SEND. Further training is needed at all levels to ensure a collective and deep understanding of the range of needs the school is now catering for. It is imperative that the effectiveness of the provision for pupils with SEND is monitored and evaluated closely to determine its efficacy.
- The vast majority of staff are on board with, and understand, the direction of travel. Teachers new to teaching or to the school get a comprehensive induction package. A few staff, however, remain to be convinced about or fully enact the required changes.
- Performance management and target-setting for staff are not as inextricably linked to the school's priorities as intended. Like some departmental plans they sometimes lack the precision needed to make the necessary difference.
- Safeguarding is effective. It is integral to the school's focus on a culture of kindness and underpinned by a suitable framework of policies and processes which promote a culture of vigilance. The PSHE curriculum is updated and adapted in the light of information the school gathers in relation to safeguarding and health and safety. It could be further enhanced by more in-depth analysis of behaviour records.
- A good number of staff are trained to designated safeguarding lead level, including heads of year who are kept informed of all notifications for their tutor groups. All staff are trained to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk. They know how to report any concerns. Occasionally the college's response to incidents needs to be more accurately recorded, swifter and sharper.
- Leaders are well aware of the constraints posed by their site. They do their best to mitigate any safety issues this causes. Health and safety concerns about on-site parking and road signage confirmed in a recent external report have been raised beyond the school at the highest levels.
- The governing body understand the 'eyes on, hands off' nature of their role. Collectively they bring a useful set of skills and experiences to their work. Individually and together they have been instrumental in drawing up the new strategic plan which sets the school's direction for the coming five years. They have recently redefined the terms of reference of sub-committees to ensure a clear focus on each aspect of the school's work.

Recommendations

The school should take the following actions:

1. Further improve achievement by:
 - refining how progress is tracked and interventions managed, at Key Stage 3 in particular, with a greater focus on identifying through the curriculum what pupils should have learned at key points
 - ensuring that all teachers see themselves as teachers of pupils of different abilities and those with additional needs, and that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet those needs effectively.

2. Ensure that teaching is consistently of the highest quality by:
 - improving teachers' pedagogical knowledge to the same standard as their subject knowledge
 - developing and embedding the focus on oracy to encourage pupils' articulation of their thinking and understanding
 - setting out unequivocal expectations, monitoring practice at departmental and classroom level and following up with support and challenge where improvements are needed.

3. Maintain the pace of change by:
 - developing the role of, and ensuring robust accountability for the heads of department as key middle leaders
 - further developing the role of the special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator as a crucial leader in the school
 - ensuring a more precise target-setting process linked to school priorities so that everyone is clear about, and held to account for, the part they are expected to play in the school's further improvement.

Information about the school

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Boys

Number of pupils on the school roll: 684

Headteacher: Dr Gareth Hughes

School telephone number: 01534 638200

School website: www.victoriacollege.je

Contextual information

- This is a selective, fee-paying school for boys with its own governing body. Sixth form provision is delivered through a collaborative arrangement with three other schools, meaning some older girls learn at the college.

- Most of the sixth form have been at the school since Year 7. Some pupils, as with other Jersey schools, leave the school at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 to attend school elsewhere, so the numbers of pupils in the older year groups tend to be smaller. A number of students join the sixth from other on and off-island schools.
- The proportions of pupils eligible for Jersey Premium funding or who are multilingual learners are much lower than other schools on the island. The same is true of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the number of pupils with a diagnosed need has risen significantly this academic year.

Information about the review

- The review team visited lessons to observe teaching and learning, including looking at pupils' work, across all year groups and a wide range of subjects. They also scrutinised samples of pupils' work in a number of subjects in more depth and visited some tutor times and a morning briefing.
- Reviewers observed pupils at break and lunchtimes and as they moved around the college. They talked to many pupils informally at these times to gather their views of the college, including how it ensures their safety and wellbeing. Reviewers also met with members of the school council and took account of the views pupils expressed through the college's most recent survey. Similarly, the team considered the views of staff and parents gathered through surveys conducted both by the school and specifically for this review.
- Discussions were held with members of the governing body, senior and middle leaders and other staff, including some new to teaching or to the college. The college's published assessment information and data were analysed and taken into account, alongside the college's internal data and leaders' analysis.
- Reviewers considered a range of documents, including leaders' self-evaluation, their strategic and development plans, a sample of departmental plans and behaviour and safeguarding records. A tour of the college site was made to check on security and safety.

The review team

The review was led by an experienced off-Island reviewer. There were eight reviewers in total in the team.

Enquiries about this report should be addressed to Head School Improvement & Advisory Service, Children, Young People, Education and Skills, Highlands Campus, PO Box 142, St Saviour, Jersey JE4 8QJ.