

Notre Dame Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104706
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	377114
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2012
Lead inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	857
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Thomas Westwell
Headteacher	Frances Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2006
School address	Everton Valley Liverpool L4 4EZ
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Introduction

Inspection team

Moira Fitzpatrick

Additional inspector

Robert Birtwell

Additional inspector

Jim Bennetts

Additional inspector

Mary Lanovy-Taylor

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 41 lessons, observing 40 teachers. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and groups of students from Year 7 to Year 13. They observed the school's work in and out of the classroom and looked at documentation relating to safeguarding, school improvement and students' progress. Samples of students' work were examined and younger students were heard reading. There were no responses available to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) before the inspection. In total, 78 questionnaires were returned by parents and carers during inspection and these were taken into account along with the questionnaires returned by staff and students.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized secondary school. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds, with a broadly average proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is well above average, including those supported at school action plus. The school exceeds current government floor standards.

The school holds specialist status for the arts. It also holds a number of awards including Artsmark Gold, Healthy School Status and Investors in People.

There have been significant changes to both senior and middle leadership since the previous inspection. In 2010 a new headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed. A new head of department was appointed to mathematics in 2010 and an acting head of department to science.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
 Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- Notre Dame is a good school. Provision and outcomes in the sixth form are good. Students, staff, parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school.
- The care and support provided for students and their families is outstanding. This plays a significant part in students’ success by removing barriers to their learning and providing the support they need.
- Students in the main school and in the sixth form make good progress and achieve well from their starting points because of good teaching and a good curriculum that is well planned to meet their needs, interests and future aspirations.
- The school’s specialist arts status makes a strong contribution to the community and the cultural experiences of students.
- Performance in national examinations has been on a rising trend in the last three years. On a number of indicators the school is significantly above the national average at the end of Key Stage 4, including students’ progress from their Key Stage 2 results.
- Gaps in performance between different groups of students and subjects are narrowing. For example, mathematics has improved year on year in the last three years and is closing the gap with English.
- Students are well behaved and feel safe and happy in school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and contributes much to the positive atmosphere in the school. Students’ independence and confidence are less well developed. Students do not always take a lead in their learning or display confidence when expressing their ideas to the class. The attendance of some students is well below average, despite the tenacious and robust strategies used by the school.

- Good leadership and management at all levels have led to improved teaching and learning, and rising standards since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Persist with those strategies which have proved most effective to further reduce the absence of the poorest attenders.
- Develop the confidence, independence and autonomy of students by:
 - providing regular opportunities for students to engage in whole class discussion
 - encouraging and supporting students to express their ideas and viewpoint clearly and confidently to the whole class
 - enabling students to take the initiative in their learning and lead the direction towards the goals set.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

In 2011 the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was the highest at the school in the last three years and continues a rapidly rising trend of improvement. The school exceeded its target for this measure by over 20%, reflecting the rapid increase in students' progress and achievement. In the sixth form, examination results have improved since the previous inspection, because students have a much wider range of subject and examination choice. Progress in the sixth form is good overall. Students nearly all go on to either a place at university, a job with training or a suitable course in further education.

Students' progress is good and improving, as teaching and new systems to support students develop and embed. Students are keen learners, who listen closely and work hard in lessons. Sometimes students' learning is passive because they are over directed by the teacher, who harnesses learning for the class to one pace. This prevents students from developing autonomy and setting their own rate and way of learning. It slows learning for students, some of whom are seen in other lessons progressing at a brisk rate because they have been encouraged to set their own pace by the teacher. Students' achievement and progress are best in lessons where teachers have high expectations and use their knowledge of students to prepare a range of tasks from which they can learn. The option to move on to more challenging work fires students' enthusiasm and propels them to reach their targets quickly. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make the same progress as others because of the in-class support they receive through teachers' planning and teaching assistants. Students who speak English as an additional language often achieve more highly than other groups, because teachers ensure they are well matched with a partner who can support them with language difficulties in lessons.

Students' attainment is above the national average by the end of Key Stage 4 on a number of measures; it is average in English and close to average in mathematics. Given their significantly below average starting points when they join the school this marks good achievement for students. The overwhelming proportion of parents and carers agree that their children make good progress. Their children agree too.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Good subject knowledge and consistency in planning for lessons make a significant contribution to how well all students learn across different subjects and in all key stages, including the sixth form. Teachers are skilled at explaining or demonstrating new work so that students are able to make a prompt start with their tasks. Occasionally, there are exceptions when teachers over explain or do not make clear to students what the expected outcomes of their learning will be. This results in slower progress and sometimes confusion for students, so their interest wanes. The vast majority of teachers have a good knowledge of students' needs through careful marking and assessment of their work. This information is well used to plan activities that interest students and support them to make good, and sometimes excellent, progress. For example, a lively discussion in a Year 7 English lesson, about how a writer used language to bring a character to life, buzzed with enthusiasm and had students eager to contribute. This was because the teacher used knowledge of the individual students to direct questions they could answer and encouraged others to join in and add their views. Enjoyment and engagement were excellent, and students were developing a wide range of skills and insights at a rapid rate.

While most staff develop students' speaking skills during lessons, this is more often done by short question and answer sessions which do not develop the students' confidence to speak clearly to a large group or develop their ideas through whole class discussion. Some lessons are over-directed by teachers, so they do not provide students with opportunities to take a lead in their learning and develop different ways of working and discovering for themselves. Older students comment that lessons have changed since they joined the school and that they are now more fun and interesting. This is because a well constructed curriculum has been developed in all key stages and is adapted well to meet the differing needs, interests and goals of the students. This, together with the good and sometimes excellent teaching that students receive, promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well. In Key Stage 3, the emphasis on basic skills is helping students to overcome low levels of reading, writing and mathematical skills when they join the school. This is helping younger students to access the rest of their curriculum more effectively. At Key Stages 4 and 5, developments in a range of accreditation and the provision of vocational courses, which supplement the traditional academic courses, have been significant in providing routes to success and future pathways for all students. This has resulted in a steep rise in staying on rates and in the number of students moving on to further or higher education at the end of the sixth form. The good quality of teaching is recognised and appreciated by parents and carers.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students typically behave well in lessons and around the school. Sometimes their behaviour is exemplary, especially in lessons where they are highly motivated and

absorbed in their learning. The vast majority of students agree that behaviour is generally good and that any bullying, such as name calling, is quickly and effectively dealt with, so that they feel safe and happy in school. Students value the new progress guide system which allows them to regularly share any concerns about their learning or personal issues with their progress guide. They comment that since the system was introduced, their learning and sense of well-being is improving. This is because the school responds positively to the information gathered by providing additional support in after school sessions, in lessons or by counselling to help resolve students' concerns. Disabled students and those with special educational needs, including behavioural and emotional difficulties, are very well supported by dedicated staff in class and in the inclusion centre. The school works very closely with those groups of students, and their families, whose attendance gives concern. The high proportion of persistent absentees is reducing and attendance figures have risen in the last two years. This is the result of the unrelenting determination of the headteacher to get students into school so that they can benefit from all it has to offer. The range, rigour and creativeness of the school's strategies to improve attendance are impressive, and though progress is not yet rapid, the school does not lose heart or commitment to these students. Parents and carers overwhelmingly agree that their children are safe and secure in school. Very few felt that behaviour was an issue in some lessons.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's ambitious vision and determination to get the best for and from students are taking the school forward at a good rate. Leaders and managers at all levels share this ambition, and have the expertise and determination to continually improve the school. Since her appointment, the headteacher has developed the roles of senior and middle leaders well, and generated a strong collegiate approach to school improvement. This shared leadership, together with regular and robust monitoring of teaching, learning and students' progress, gives the school an accurate picture of where improvements are needed and is enabling it to move forward quickly on many fronts. Weaknesses in some departments have been remedied, so that the school's performance in national tests has increased rapidly in the last three years. Improvements in learning are also evident in the school's progress and tracking data, and are confirmed by the work in students' books.

Teaching is improving well and sharing good practice is becoming the norm, both within and across departments. Professional development is very well promoted and supported so that many staff are engaged in school-based research projects to improve teaching, learning and the curriculum. The good curriculum is dynamic. It continues to develop at all key stages and is responsive to the changing needs of students, both in the main school and the sixth form. It is well planned to keep abreast of changing government demands, for example, by preparing more students to qualify for the English Baccalaureate. The rich curriculum, including that for the school's specialism in the arts, contributes very well to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Given improvements since the previous inspection the school is demonstrating a good capacity for further improvement.

Members of the governing body are robust in their challenge to the school and are dedicated to its improvement. They work closely with the headteacher and have

played a significant role in securing a new school build in the near future, as well as moving to admit boys into Year 7 to the school from the start of the next school year. They and the staff ensure that all students have equal opportunities to access learning and to succeed, and are free from discrimination in any form. They have devised and implemented robust policies, which are regularly monitored. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and demonstrate good practice in record keeping and monitoring effectiveness.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Notre Dame Catholic College, Liverpool, L4 4EZ

Our thanks to all of you for making the inspection team feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. You will be pleased to know that we judged your school to be good. Well done, because you have made a large contribution to our judgements. You work hard in lessons and behave well so that everyone can concentrate on learning. This helps you all to make good progress and achieve well by the time you leave school. Sometimes your behaviour is outstanding and helps to create a real buzz in lessons when you are all working flat out and enjoying your work!

Your teachers take excellent care of you and are determined to remove any obstacle in your path to success. You are well taught through a curriculum that is carefully planned to meet your needs in all year groups, including the sixth form. This is why you make good progress and achieve well. We noticed that in many lessons you only get a chance to talk when answering teachers' questions. While this is one important part of your learning, we think that more opportunities to speak to the whole class, discuss your ideas and make presentations to large groups would help to develop your self-confidence further. We also think that teachers could provide more opportunities for you to take the initiative and lead your own learning by deciding how to work and follow your own ideas. This would allow you to see how much you could decide for yourself and be another way of increasing your self-confidence as you mature. We know that some of you do not get the best from your school because your attendance is low. We have asked the school to continue to work with you and your families and external services to improve your attendance, so that you can benefit from all the good things your school has to offer.

Your headteacher is determined to get the best from you and for you. She is very well supported in this ambition by your teachers and the members of the governing body. They have ambitious plans for the future of the school, and you have your part to play in them by working as hard, and being as supportive and caring, as you are now. Very best wishes to all at Notre Dame Catholic College for a successful year ahead.

Yours sincerely

Moira Fitzpatrick
Lead inspector

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