

Loreto College

Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 3RQ

Inspection dates

1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students' progress in English and mathematics is excellent. They join the college with above-average results and achieve exceptionally well across many subjects. As a result, their attainment when they leave is very high.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers display excellent subject knowledge, know their students exceptionally well and plan their lessons meticulously. Consequently, students of all abilities enjoy their learning and respond readily to the challenges they are set.
- The college's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional. Students develop into considerate, compassionate, thoughtful and confident young people as a result.
- Behaviour is exemplary. Students develop wholly positive attitudes towards their learning and to each other. The school is, consequently, a very caring and safe community.
- The commitment of the school to support all its students is very strong. All students are able to participate fully in the experiences offered, regardless of their background or need. Support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is outstanding.
- The headteacher has established very clear aims and expectations about the quality of education the college should provide. She has brought significant improvements to teaching and achievement and has the overwhelming support of staff, students and parents
- Governors are very experienced and have a very accurate view of the school. They are very supportive but are not afraid to set demanding targets for leaders and staff.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students are being very well prepared for the next stage of their education because they are taught to be independent, achieve very well and make a significant contribution to the community.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons, of which eight were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors observed an assembly and visited tutorial time lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a senior representative of the Sisters of Loreto.
- Inspectors studied a wide range of information about the work of the academy; analysing students' achievement, attendance and behaviour, the quality of their work in books and folders and looking at documents used by senior teachers for planning and evaluating the academy's performance.
- Interviews were held between inspectors and four groups of students about their experience and life at the academy. Reading sessions were also observed.
- The inspection team took account of 101 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), email correspondence received during the inspection and 60 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

David Turner, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynne Thorogood	Additional Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Additional Inspector
Andrew Lyons	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Loreto College is an average-sized secondary school academy.
- The college is one of the British group of schools linked to the world-wide Loreto organisation, established by the Sisters of Loreto. As a result, it has links with many overseas schools.
- Loreto College converted to become an academy school in March 2012. When its predecessor school, Loreto College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average but the proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding to support students in local authority care and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is very small.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below that found nationally. A below-average proportion of students are supported through school action. A below-average proportion of students are supported through school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for student attainment and progress.
- One student is educated in off-site, alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make all lessons as successful as the very best by ensuring that teaching in all subjects provides regular opportunities for students to develop their learning for themselves and work independently of the teacher's direction.
- Support subject leaders by ensuring that up-to-date and detailed information on students' progress in their subject is available to all teachers in a more manageable form so that they can respond quickly to any student at risk of falling behind.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students make exceptional progress. They join the college in Year 7 with above-average standards. High-quality teaching, encouraging support from teachers and parents, and their own exemplary attitudes enable them to achieve outstanding results by the end of Year 11. As a result, their attainment is high.
- In 2012, at 74%, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE A* to C grades was higher than the national average. Evidence from the inspection indicates that 90% of students in Year 10 and Year 11 are likely to achieve this standard this year. Importantly, the proportion of students achieving A* or A at GCSE has risen across a range of subjects.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is outstanding. Inspectors observed students acquiring knowledge quickly and developing a deep understanding of concepts and ideas. As a result of skilful teaching, they develop a range of skills which they are able to apply successfully in examinations. These strengths are reflected in the higher proportions that are now attaining A* to B and A* to C grades at A level.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is outstanding. Many have profound needs and significant learning difficulties. As a result, some start Year 7 below the bottom levels of the National Curriculum but go on to obtain mainstream GCSE qualifications by the end of Year 11. This is because of the exceptional support they receive, which allows them a normal school life and helps them to succeed with the work they are set. Some students with profound learning disabilities make exceptional progress.
- A very small proportion of students are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding. The college has used this funding to offer them close teaching support, academic mentoring and counselling. In 2012, some of these students were the equivalent of two and a half years behind their classmates in English and almost four years behind in mathematics. However, the great majority of these students are now making very good progress and gaps are rapidly closing.
- The school has a policy of not entering students early for GCSE examinations.
- Across many subjects, students apply literacy and numeracy skills very effectively to solve real-life problems. Reading is promoted exceptionally well and many younger students are supported by older mentors as part of an effective daily programme to encourage reading. Additional 'catch-up' funding is used effectively to help students who are behind when they join Year 7 to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- During the inspection, over a third of teaching seen in the main school was outstanding, while the proportion of outstanding teaching in the sixth form was even higher. This closely matches the college's evaluation and no inadequate teaching was seen. There are many opportunities provided for staff to share their practice and plan how to deliver the best teaching. Teachers possess expert subject knowledge and act quickly on the constructive advice they receive from leaders.
- High-quality planning and assessment allow teachers to plan demanding but interesting lessons which offer students exceptional learning experiences, particularly in the sixth form. Teachers'

personal knowledge of each student and their encouraging, good-humoured approaches build excellent relationships. As a result, students are inspired to strive for the best at all times.

- Questioning and discussion are significant strengths in teaching across the college. Teachers require students to think hard and use their learning rather than simply recall what they know. Teachers consistently encourage the use of a rich vocabulary. As a result, discussion work leads students to gain a deeper understanding of key ideas and concepts and gain critical knowledge.
- Teachers are highly skilled in helping pupils understand how to improve their work. In a Year 7 textiles lesson, the quality of students' self-assessment, using grade criteria, was exceptional. Marking by teachers is uniformly good.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are taught very well. They are set work and given support that are very well planned to help them succeed academically. Teaching assistants are skilled in ensuring students keep focused at all times.
- Time is used wisely, especially in sixth form lessons. Most teachers quickly explain the purpose of lessons then allow students to take high levels of responsibility for their own learning. A good example occurred in a Year 10 biology lesson where students quickly linked the detail of their research about species survival to Darwinian theory. In a very small number of lessons, there are insufficient opportunities for students to explore ideas and solve problems for themselves, and work independently of the teacher.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The college is an exceptionally safe, caring and supportive environment for learning and personal development. The attitudes of students towards achievement, their relationships with each other and teachers and their conduct are exemplary. They are welcoming, polite, keen to succeed and eager to learn.
 - Students' attendance is above average and they are very punctual for school and lessons.
 - Students' attitudes in lessons are outstanding, especially when teachers provide the opportunities for students to lead the learning. Students are always thoughtful, keen to share ideas and use their time very productively.
 - An exceptional feature of life at the college is the way that all students show great care for those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who are disabled or have special educational needs. They do this without making these groups feel different from the rest of the community.
 - Those pupils experiencing difficult personal circumstances are very well supported and cared for and, as a result, their achievement is similar to the rest of the students with rare exceptions. Older students frequently support younger ones with reading. They are impeccable role models.
 - Senior staff and subject teachers know all students by name and take a close interest in their progress and wellbeing. Consequently, students feel very secure and safe, and are clearly aware of potential risks involving e-safety, alcohol, drugs and relationships. They are very well informed about all forms of bullying and are confident that swift and effective action is always taken on the very rare occasions when it occurs.
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The leadership and management are outstanding

- The college is extremely well led. The headteacher and senior staff are a highly determined team who value academic excellence and personal development in equal measure. They are highly successful in communicating their vision and expectations. Governors, staff, students and parents fully support these aims.
 - Leaders have a most perceptive and accurate view of student achievement, the quality of teaching, behaviour and the effectiveness of subject and other leaders. They ask very thoughtful, searching questions and use timely, well-considered plans to improve the quality of the education the school provides.
 - The leadership of teaching is a significant strength. There are robust procedures in place to evaluate its quality and to manage the performance of teachers and other adults.
 - Staff are wholly committed to sharing their expertise and speak highly of the professional development opportunities and the support they receive. Equally, staff receive demanding performance targets, and their promotion and remuneration are linked to how well they meet them.
 - Subject leaders work as an effective, mutually supportive team. Senior staff, subject leaders and teachers have a striking sense of common purpose; all strive to help students achieve the highest possible standards. They check data closely to identify and support any who may be at risk of falling behind. However, some of the information used to monitor students' progress is not always organised in a way that can be quickly understood by all leaders.
 - The extensive range of subjects and courses offered by the college is a further reason for students' outstanding achievement. There are numerous extra-curricular activities provided, and the college has made links with similar schools in every continent. The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong. As a result, students are well prepared for living in modern Britain.
 - Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements.
 - The local authority offered an appropriate degree of light touch support for this school up to the point where it converted into an academy. Subsequently, the college has developed additional support networks with other schools and agencies but links with the local authority remain positive.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds and bring a very valuable range of skills to their roles. They are closely involved in the life and work of the school and strongly support the vision set out by the headteacher and senior staff. They have a very accurate understanding of the quality of education provided, know how well it is doing and offer thoughtful challenge as well as support to the college's leaders. Governors' oversight of arrangements for managing teachers' performance is good and they know how teaching is being improved. They ensure that all funding, including the pupil premium money, is spent wisely and as intended, and keep a careful check of its impact.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138106
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	413331

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	905
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	158
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Keiley
Headteacher	Maire Lynch
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01727 856206
Fax number	01727 833794
Email address	admin@loreto.herts.sch.uk

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