

Notre Dame RC School

Looseleigh Lane, Derriford, Plymouth, PL6 5HN

Inspection dates 9–10 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students start at school with standards that are broadly average and make good progress to achieve above average standards in their GCSE examinations.
- The school has responded well to the dip in results in GCSE English and mathematics in 2012, so that now students achieve well in these subjects.
- The sixth form has improved greatly this year and is good. It prepares students well for their futures. Many leave to study at very good universities.
- Teaching is mainly good or outstanding. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Teaching helps students to develop a good understanding of what they are learning.
- Behaviour around school and in nearly all lessons is good. The school deals with the few incidents of poor behaviour well. Students feel safe and well cared for. They say the school supports them in their faith, which is very important to them.
- Support for children from service families, those in the care of the local authority and students who act as carers is very good and shows the school's caring attitude.
- Leaders and governors have a clear understanding of what the school needs to do to improve. They have worked well to improve the quality of teaching and achievement across all subjects. They have made particular improvements to achievement in science which has not been good for a few years. This shows that the school leaders are able to carry on improving the school further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always use assessments to ensure activities are set at the right level for students of different abilities, or to adjust the work for students during lessons.
- Marking does not always tell students how they can get better or give students additional tasks to complete.
- The school has a great deal of information on students' achievement and other areas, but it does not always analyse this to identify trends or what needs to be improved.
- School leaders have a clear ambition for continual improvement, but this is not understood or shared by all staff.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 35 lessons. Many of these were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors took account of 61 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and an additional response directly from a parent. They observed the school’s work and analysed 71 staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors looked carefully at examination results for 2012, assessment records, including teacher predictions for 2013, records of governing body meetings, equalities policies, responses to the school’s questionnaires for parents and carers, and the school’s development plans and evaluations.
- Inspectors met staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, the school chaplain and students, including students who attend part time at alternative provision, and students from service families.

Inspection team

Michael Smith, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Teresa Gilpin	Additional Inspector
Deborah Wring	Additional Inspector
Janet Harvey	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized girls' Roman Catholic school which has a mixed sixth form.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium, which is additional government funding, is below average for students known to be eligible for free school meals and above average for those looked after by the local authority and those from armed service families.
- The proportions of students supported at school action, school action plus and with a statement of special educational needs are broadly average.
- The school works as part of a consortium for sixth form provision with four other secondary schools within the Plymouth Learning Trust (PLT).
- A number of students are educated part time at alternative provision, including at Saltash College, City College and Duchy College.
- A new headteacher started at the school in September 2012.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- At the time of the inspection students from Years 11 and 13 had completed their public examinations and were not in school. The remaining students had started their new timetables in June.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make all teaching at least good and more outstanding by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessments to inform their planning so that work set is always at the right level of difficulty, and students of different ability are fully stretched in lessons
 - teachers continually assess the progress of students during lessons to identify who needs additional support or who needs to move on to the next level
 - marking gives advice on how students can improve their work, including tasks which they should complete before, or at the start of, their next lesson.
- Increase the impact of leaders and managers at all levels by:
 - analysing the wide range of information collected to identify trends or concerns and using the analysis to help plan further improvements
 - ensuring all staff understand and share the school's ambition for continual improvement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start school with standards which are broadly average. In Key Stage 4, students mainly study GCSE subjects with a few vocational subjects as appropriate. Standards are above average and show that students make good progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their starting points because they receive good support, often from teaching assistants during lessons.
- Achievement in English language had been consistently high for a number of years, but fell in 2012; although results for English literature showed students achieved well. School leaders analysed why this happened and have prepared students well for 2013 so that achievement is back at the previous high level.
- Achievement in mathematics fell in 2012. A high ability group was entered early at the end of Year 10 and many did not achieve as high as possible, although all achieved a least a grade C. The school identified that this was not appropriate. Consequently, for 2013, the high ability group worked until the end of Year 11 before sitting their GCSE. Many students did take their GCSE early and were successful at gaining a grade C. These students are continuing with their studies in order to improve upon this grade. Consequently, achievement in mathematics is back to good. Lessons in mathematics help students' understanding which makes sure students are able to use their mathematical knowledge across a variety of applications.
- The improved teaching in science has meant students have made good progress and standards are above average.
- Standards in music, art and history GCSE are very high. Students who attend alternative provision make good progress with their courses for catering, animal welfare and hairdressing. These are planned effectively so no other work is missed. Students enjoy the work experience part of their course.
- AS-level results have been above average over the last few years. However, students have not then gone on to achieve as highly when they complete their A-level courses. There is some significant variation between subjects with results in art, drama, geography and music being particularly good in 2012 compared to other subjects. The strong focus by the school to improve A-level results is successfully raising standards.
- Pupil premium money has been used effectively to support targeted groups. In 2012, the difference between GCSE results for English and mathematics for students known to be eligible for free school meals, and those who are not, was around half a grade. This was around half of that found nationally. It is due to reduce further in 2013. Funds have been used for additional classes for mathematics and English. Very good support for children who are looked after by the local authority means they make good progress whilst at school.
- Additional funds for students who arrive at school in Year 7 with standards below average have been effective in getting these students to make accelerated progress. Funds have been used well so that students have improved their reading levels and calculation work.
- Students develop their literacy and numeracy skills across a variety of different subjects. Sixth form students, who are studying a science subject at A level but not taking a mathematics course, receive additional support to tackle the statistical work within science. Students have opportunities to read during tutor periods, but these are variable in quality.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is mainly good and frequently outstanding. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and students enjoy the majority of lessons.
- Teachers' questioning is a strength. Students are expected to give full answers and justify what

they have said. Consequently, they acquire a good understanding of their work as well as developing their speaking and listening skills.

- Where teaching is best, teachers often check on students' learning and adjust their teaching as a result. However, at times, teachers do not intervene and support students when they need extra help, or extend students when they have shown they understand the work. Occasionally, work does not meet the needs of differing ability groups within a class and the same work is set for all students.
- The quality of marking is variable. In the very best marking, teachers identify what students need to do to improve their work and then give clear advice on how they could achieve better. They include an activity for students to complete at the start of, or before, their next lesson. Students then respond to the teacher's comments. However, sometimes marking is not very detailed and it does not explain how students could improve their work. Comments do not include an activity which would be relevant for students.
- Teachers direct students to work in carefully organised groups in some lessons which allows students to be more in charge of the way in which they work. This gives them opportunities to develop good skills to work when not under the direct control of the teacher.
- Responses from parents and carers showed that the large majority believe that their children are well taught in school. Students said that they usually enjoy lessons but are aware of differences in the quality of teaching. This variation is often within the same subject.
- Students are provided with excellent opportunities for their spiritual development across a wide variety of lessons, often considering how they would feel if they were in different circumstances. Students also appreciate the support of the school chaplain.
- Students often discuss moral issues. For example, in an English lesson, students considered the difference between nurture and nature.
- Cultural development is very evident around the school. Display is used well and students enjoy taking part in a wide variety of activities after school, including many musical activities. A student won a recent competition for the city's best young composer.
- Social development is excellent. Many students attend retreats and other residential opportunities. These make an important contribution to students' sense of community.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour around school and in most lessons is good. When behaviour falls below these standards the school provides good additional support. At present there is a small group of students whose behaviour is weaker than others. These students are of concern to staff, but the school is working closely with them to adapt their behaviour accordingly.
- The school's very strong family and faith atmosphere means that students have a sense of belonging and that they feel safe. Virtually all parents and carers who responded to Parent View said that their children feel safe in school. This support is seen through the very good work the school does with students who act as young carers.
- Pupil premium funds are used for students from service families to be able to attend a support session, HMS Heroes. This has helped some new students settle into school, as well as enabling others to discuss their concerns. These students have recently made a video of how they feel when their parents go off to active service and when they return.
- Students have a good understanding of the key issues of keeping safe, appropriate to their age. This includes aspects of sexual health and of substance abuse, including cigarettes and alcohol.
- Bullying incidents are rare. Students know about the different types of bullying, including that from the use of social networking sites and the inappropriate use of text messaging, including the use of personal images. They are aware that staff challenge any student who make inappropriate comments or uses expressions like 'gay' as a form of abuse.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leadership is strong. All staff who responded to the questionnaire said they were proud to be a member of the school. There is clear purpose and ambition, but some staff feel they are not aware of what the key priorities of the school are. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have made significant improvements to the overall quality of teaching and in raising achievement.
 - School leaders have reduced the amount of teaching that is not yet good. Most teachers commented that they feel well supported and that they can get additional help to improve their teaching when required.
 - Subject leaders have improved achievement in their areas. Effective subject reviews identify and improve the quality of work within departments.
 - The school has a great deal of information on its students such as progress, attendance and take up at clubs. However, some of this information is not consistently analysed to show trends or to identify concerns. Hence, areas in need of improvement are not always identified quickly enough so that the necessary improvements can be put in place.
 - Teachers have clear targets for improvement linked to their performance. The governors are in the process of updating the way in which staff performance is judged to ensure that those who successfully meet their targets are suitably rewarded.
 - The school has received good support from the local authority. The school improvement adviser has provided help during the past year to support the transition of the new headteacher. The local authority does not consider the school needs any additional support.
 - All students complete a GCSE course in religious studies. There is a wide variety of clubs and sports which students enjoy. Students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced across all subjects, with spiritual development being very strong.
 - The school has used pupil premium money well to close the gap between the achievement of eligible pupils and that of others. It is being successfully narrowed at a faster rate than national figures.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - is good, and through its three main committees challenges the school to improve constantly
 - checks to make sure safeguarding meets all current expectations
 - is supportive and contributes well towards the school's pastoral and spiritual development
 - checks how well different groups of students achieve to ensure equality of opportunity with a very close analysis of children in the care of the local authority and students from service families, along with students known to be eligible for free school meals
 - shows a secure understanding of the school's performance compared to that of other schools
 - holds leaders to account for the use of pupil premium funds.
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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	113552
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	412802

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	886
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Graham Johnson
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine White
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2009
Telephone number	01752775101
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