

Notre Dame RC School

Looseleigh Lane, Derriford, Plymouth, Devon PL6 5HN

Inspection dates

4–5 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have created an inclusive school in which most pupils are well supported with both their academic and their personal challenges.
- Leaders have high expectations for all pupils, who are encouraged to do their best. Attainment is above average in most subjects.
- Leaders at all levels understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Teaching and learning are monitored carefully. However, leaders do not evaluate precisely the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.
- Teaching in most subjects is engaging and effective. Teachers' planning takes into account most pupils' needs. Even so, the expectations of some teaching are not high enough. This is reflected in the standard of some pupils' work.
- The progress of the most able pupils is improving but teaching does not challenge consistently some of the most able pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils' writing and their spoken language skills are developed well. However, leaders have not yet developed a similarly coordinated approach to the teaching of reading and numeracy.
- Staff and pupils are proud of their school. Pupils are highly considerate of others. Their behaviour in lessons and around school is good.
- Pupils attend school well. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has steadily reduced because leaders have raised expectations and tightened monitoring systems.
- The school's ethos and values enhance school life. Pupils value the opportunities they have within the curriculum to think about their place in the world.
- Pupils have access to appropriate careers advice and guidance in key stage 4. However, leaders have not extended careers advice to the youngest pupils.
- Sixth-form students have access to work-related learning and work experience, but this is not yet a prominent feature of the school's programme of study.
- The progress of pupils on A-level courses is average. Pastoral support in the sixth form is strong. The vast majority of students go on to employment or further study. Many students take up apprenticeships.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by:
 - making sure that teachers across all subjects have the same high expectations of what pupils can do
 - consistently challenging the most able pupils to think more deeply about their work and so make greater progress.
- Improve pupils' personal development by extending the careers guidance programme so that key stage 3 pupils develop a better understanding about the careers they can aspire to.
- Improve 16 to 19 study programmes by extending the range and depth of work-related learning activities provided to sixth-form students.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the checks leaders make on the quality of teaching take more account of the progress pupils make
 - coordinating efforts to improve pupils' reading and numeracy skills more effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher provides principled, compassionate and effective leadership. She leads by example and has steered the school through a period of rapid improvement with determination. She ensures that the school's ethos, which is to educate 'head, heart and hands', enriches pupils' experiences and informs the school's direction.
- A strong team of governors and leaders from the trust provide effective support and challenge to the headteacher and to other leaders in the school. Leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have the capacity and will to see through further improvements.
- Middle leadership has been reorganised around a faculty structure. This has been an empowering process for middle leaders who are now sharply focused on improving the standards of teaching and learning in their subject areas. Most middle-leadership roles are clearly defined. There is a shared vision of what good teaching looks like. However, the approach to the development of literacy and numeracy across faculties is underdeveloped.
- The school has invested in the leadership of teaching. Senior leaders have identified the features of good teaching and have provided training to teachers in the light of this. With the support of middle leaders, they closely monitor teaching and learning. Teachers now receive regular feedback on their practice, and welcome this approach, which has created a healthy culture of continuous improvement. However, further action is required to ensure that teaching is consistently effective across all subjects.
- The leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is strong. Pupils with high levels of need follow a bespoke curriculum which is highly effective in preparing them for the next stage of their lives.
- The pupil premium and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium are spent wisely. The leader responsible for this carefully evaluates the impact of spending. The school is not afraid to identify where spending has been less effective and think again, or to focus the funds where the need is highest. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who need to catch up make good progress.
- Leaders have introduced a new system for the performance management of teachers. This has sharpened teachers' focus on planning for the progress of all pupils, taking into account their different starting points.
- Teachers at different stages in their careers are encouraged to undertake further training. For example, they take qualifications in middle and senior leadership. Newly qualified teachers appreciate the high level of support they receive.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum offered is broad and balanced. When pupils take their options in Year 8, they are encouraged to choose subjects they will enjoy. Most pupils study a language, with many starting a new language for the first time in Year 9. Pupils take two languages if they wish. Increasingly, disadvantaged pupils are choosing to study languages because of the motivating teaching they receive. All pupils have the opportunity to deepen their scientific understanding by taking triple science as an

option. Due to the religious character of the school, all pupils continue with religious studies (RS) to GCSE.

- In personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons and on 'Dimension Days' pupils learn about risks and how to keep themselves safe. Pupils' knowledge of how the British parliamentary system works is strong, and their appreciation of other faiths and cultures is well developed. A programme of tutoring and assemblies complements learning in PSHE and RS. A 'theme of the week' is used to focus discussions, for example on the benefits of 'retreat'. Year 7 pupils go on retreat to Buckfast Abbey each year. While there, they take time for quiet reflection and practise arts and crafts. Pupils value highly the time set aside in the planned curriculum for quiet contemplation and this supports their mental health.
- Leaders coordinate a wide and interesting programme of extra-curricular activities. They monitor carefully how well pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, access these.
- Parents and carers are satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school. The great majority believe the school to be well led and managed and would recommend the school to other parents.

Governance of the school

- The trust provides an education standards manager who manages the performance of the headteacher and carries out regular reviews of the school's effectiveness. As a result, the trust understands in detail the areas of practice in need of development, for example teachers' use of challenge for the most able pupils.
- Governors hold leaders to account robustly. They identify aspects of the school's work to focus on and pose questions to the appropriate leaders. Leaders provide detailed responses, and these are used as the basis for further discussion with governors, who report their findings to the headteacher and to the trust. Standards are rising as a result.
- Governors oversee the use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up premium effectively. Pupils who benefit from this funding make strong progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and governors have ensured that there is a culture of vigilance. The appropriate checks are made on all adults working with the school. Governors monitor the school's safeguarding processes regularly and carefully.
- Staff training is up to date. Staff report their concerns through a secure, online system and these are acted on quickly.
- Staff have a good awareness of possible risks, such as those posed to children missing from education or from extremism. Their timely reporting enables leaders to take the appropriate action.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- In a wide range of subjects, teachers present curriculum content in interesting ways. Pupils understand the purpose of activities and these help them to become increasingly independent. Pupils engage well and develop good understanding of concepts and subject vocabulary.
- Teaching in English is particularly strong. In the past, the most able pupils have not made good progress. They now study the richest and most challenging texts and so progress is better. Leaders have thought carefully about how the curriculum in key stage 3 can best prepare pupils for GCSE and A level. When pupils find it difficult to engage with a text, teachers use imaginative methods to overcome this; for example, Year 10 pupils attended a lecture on Frankenstein at a local university.
- Pupils feel supported and challenged by their teachers in most subjects. In mathematics there is sometimes an emphasis on practising fluency even though pupils are ready to apply their knowledge in contexts which promote reasoning and problem-solving.
- The quality of teachers' questions has been an area of focus for the school. Teachers question pupils to check that factual knowledge has been taken on. Most teachers ask searching questions and encourage pupils to answer these in detail.
- Pupils complete homework which reinforces the learning in class or helps to prepare them for future lessons.
- When pupils do not make good progress, teachers are generally quick to respond. Most teachers think carefully about how they can support pupils' learning and progress often improves as a result; for example in science, when pupils do not understand a concept, teachers plan practical lessons to clarify the learning points.
- Pupils receive feedback in line with the school's assessment policy. Most pupils make good use of this feedback to improve their work, especially in key stage 3 and in English, languages and art. Some aspects of the policy are followed less well, for example pupils do not always know when they have made spelling mistakes.
- Pupils complete assessments and tests throughout the year. They find this useful, although many said they would like to spend more time going over what they didn't know before moving on to new learning.
- Pupils who struggle with literacy keep 'word books' in which they record unfamiliar vocabulary. Pupils carry their word books and refer to them in different subjects to improve the variety in their writing. When pupils find it difficult to develop their ideas, they are given prompts which help them to extend their writing. Pupils are encouraged to read widely through fortnightly library lessons. In these lessons, learning support assistants listen to pupils read. Leaders have not yet considered sufficiently the role of the whole curriculum in developing pupils as better readers.
- Although teaching has improved across the school, notably in English, languages, humanities and some of the creative arts, there are still some inconsistencies left in mathematics, science and music. Teaching in these subjects does not consistently provide the right level of challenge or support pupils' need.
- Parents are satisfied with the quality of teaching that pupils receive. The majority

believe that their child is well taught and that they are set appropriate homework.

- The great majority of pupils feel that teachers give them challenging work and they enjoy learning at school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are quietly confident. They have the self-assurance to be able to approach adults and strike up polite conversation.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Through its Christian ethos, the school develops reflective pupils who are contemplative and caring in their outlook.
- Pupils wear their uniform proudly. Leaders have raised expectations and enlisted the support of parents to instil higher standards in the presentation of work.
- Pupils are punctual to school and to lessons. Leaders have raised awareness of the importance of punctuality by increasing communications with parents and being a visible presence when pupils arrive at school.
- Pupils appreciate that leaders have emphasised rewards and celebration over sanctions; for example, pupils are awarded tokens which they use to vote for rewards.
- Pupils feel safe and they know how to keep themselves safe. They receive appropriate information about how to manage themselves in relationships as they develop into young adults. Pupils are taught about fundamental British values and their understanding of these is good.
- Pupils recognise that bullying does happen but when it does, teachers deal with it effectively and it stops.
- Leaders have reviewed the tutoring system so that older pupils benefit from increased support with their examination subjects, alongside information to support mental health. The youngest pupils benefit from the vertical tutoring system, which places pupils from Years 7 to 9 in tutor groups together. Older pupils support the younger ones well.
- Pupils value the careers interviews they have in Year 10. They are advised to consider multiple routes into their chosen careers to maximise their chances of success. Leaders have not yet extended careers guidance to the youngest pupils who need this before they choose GCSE subjects in Year 8. Students in the sixth form are encouraged to take work experience placements but many do not do this. The programme of work-related learning in the sixth form needs development so that this becomes a more prominent feature of the programme of study.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' conduct around school and in lessons is courteous. They are respectful of one another and of their teachers. Disruption in

lessons is rare and when it happens, teachers deal with it effectively.

- Attendance has improved to above average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has fallen to below the average.
- Pupils are rarely excluded from school. The number of exclusions is below average. Leaders and governors monitor patterns in behaviour. Pupils say that behaviour has improved markedly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The progress of pupils at key stage 4 in a wide range of subjects was average or above average in 2018. Pupils currently in the school make good or improving progress because teaching is improving across the school. Work in pupils' books indicates that they are making good progress across most subjects and all year groups.
- Pupils' progress in GCSE English was around the national average in 2018. Pupils currently in the school are making better progress than last year. Inspection evidence demonstrates that the great majority are now making good progress in this subject.
- Last year, pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics was above the national average. Most pupils continue to do well. However, teaching does not challenge sufficiently the most able pupils in mathematics and so their progress is hindered.
- Disadvantaged pupils are supported well. They make good progress. There were no differences in the quality of work seen in the books of disadvantaged pupils when compared to other pupils.
- Leaders monitor the work of pupils with SEND closely. Teachers understand their needs and provide appropriate extra help for them. These pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who enter the school with lower than average levels of attainment in English and mathematics are well supported by catch-up programmes. As a result, they make strong progress overall.
- In 2018, the proportion of pupils entered for the English Baccalaureate was below average. However, rates of entry for languages were above average and this continues to be the case. Increasing numbers of disadvantaged pupils are now choosing to study a language, which shows that leaders are raising aspirations.
- Attainment is above average in most subjects. A greater proportion of pupils attain a grade 5 or better in both GCSE English and mathematics than is seen nationally.
- Pupils are well prepared to move on to the next stage of their education. A higher proportion of pupils than seen nationally go on to purposeful destinations when they leave the school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The leadership of the sixth form has improved the quality of teaching over time. Teaching is challenging and engaging. Teachers are innovative in the classroom and students are given the right help to improve when they find the work difficult. They appreciate that staff are highly responsive to their needs. One student's comment was

typical of many, 'Without a shadow of a doubt, this school will go the extra mile for you.'

- Most students take A levels. Progress on A-level courses has been improving year-on-year and in 2018 was average overall. Students make better than average progress in English language, English literature, drama, media, biology and chemistry. Progress is less strong in A-level psychology, sociology and geography. However, leaders now monitor student progress more closely and achievement in these subjects is improving.
- Students also make average progress on their AS-level courses. The number of subjects in which students make better than average progress has grown when compared to A level to include art, religious studies, mathematics and history. Although most students continue their studies into A level, when they do choose to discontinue subjects at the end of Year 12, they achieve AS-level qualifications in line with national expectations.
- Teaching enables the most able students to fulfil their potential. Students who achieve the top grades at GCSE go on to make above-average progress on A-level programmes.
- Study programmes provide for a small proportion of students to take applied GCSE courses in health and social care and level 3 vocational diplomas in health studies and business. Students made strong progress in business, but progress is below average overall.
- Students who retake GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics are well taught. As a result, they make better than average progress and most improve their grades when they resit these examinations.
- The sixth form reflects well the inclusive spirit of the school. Leaders and teachers welcome students who join the school part way through the year. They help students to make a fresh start and support them to be successful on courses into Year 14. With the help of the school, these students often overcome personal difficulties to become resilient young people.
- Leaders provide well for the welfare of students. Students are given useful information about mental health. They know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They have good awareness of possible dangers, such as those posed by drugs, the internet and exposure to extremist views.
- Students develop a strong sense of social responsibility. They contribute to the wider life of the school by hearing younger pupils read. Student participation in the National Citizenship Scheme is very high. Students are more confident as a result of these experiences.
- Students in the sixth form attend well overall. When students find it difficult to attend school, leaders ensure that they get the right support so that their attendance improves.
- Students receive appropriate careers guidance. They attend careers fairs and so are well informed about higher education and apprenticeships. However, students do not gain enough knowledge and experience of the workplace. They are not as well prepared for the world of work as they could be because relatively few students take the opportunity to complete a work experience placement.

School details

Unique reference number	140737
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10088328

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	707
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	128
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Rt Hon Lord Burnett
Headteacher	Kate White
Telephone number	01752 775 101
Website	www.ndonline.org/
Email address	info@ndonline.org
Date of previous inspection	25–26 January 2017

Information about this school

- Notre Dame RC School is an 11 to 18 Roman Catholic school for girls with a mixed sixth form. It is a smaller than average sized secondary school. The sixth form is part of a consortium of five local providers of 16 to 19 programmes of study.
- The school is part of Plymouth CAST multi-academy trust. The trust was formed in April 2014. The school joined the trust and became an academy on 1 April 2014. The work of the trust is overseen by a board of directors. Plymouth CAST is responsible for 35 schools, including two secondary schools, in the south west region.

- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities with an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The school uses ACE multi-academy trust for alternative provision.
- The school was last inspected under Section 48 on 5 September 2018.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in lessons, often alongside senior leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide sample of pupils' work, taking into account a range of year groups and subjects.
- Inspectors held discussions with pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5. Inspectors also observed and talked with many pupils informally across the site.
- Interviews were conducted with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teachers, representatives from the trust and the governing body.
- Documentary evidence was scrutinised with reference to the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning, safeguarding, external and internal reviews.
- Inspectors considered 121 responses and 75 comments in the online Parent View survey. In addition, inspectors considered direct communications from two parents.
- Inspectors took into account 158 responses and 31 comments in the online pupil survey, and 78 responses and 12 comments in the online staff survey.

Inspection team

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Non Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Marcia Headon	Ofsted Inspector
Katherine Powell	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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