



Loreto Grammar School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106378
LEA Trafford
Inspection number 277546
Inspection dates 8 December 2005 to 9 December 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Brian Sharples HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Dunham Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Altrincham
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Cheshire WA14 4AH
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	0161 928 3703
Number on roll	930	Fax number	0161 928 7659
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr G Brown
Date of previous inspection	11 September 2000	Headteacher	Sister Patricia Goodstadt

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Loreto Grammar School is a slightly smaller than average voluntary aided school based in Trafford. There are 970 girls on roll which includes 220 in the sixth form. The students come from a wide geographical area and a range of social backgrounds but the majority from high social class areas. However, Loreto Grammar is more comprehensive than its grammar status suggests and offers places to pupils in the top 50% of the ability range.

The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is very low. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and the number of minority ethnic pupils is below the national average. The school has recently been awarded specialist science college status, which is opening greater links with neighbouring schools and the wider local community.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that provides good value for money. Its caring and fully inclusive ethos creates a supportive and co-operative learning environment for all students. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and in the sixth form it is outstanding. Students make excellent progress and achieve very high standards by the end of each key stage. However, the school is not complacent and continues to strive for higher standards of attainment. The curriculum provision is outstanding. It meets all statutory

requirements and is varied to meet the different needs of students. Students are prepared well for making decisions about future routes into further education, training or employment.

The school has recently received specialist science college status and, while it is too soon to measure its impact on standards, the vision and potential for improvement are clearly evident. The care, guidance, support and personal development of students are exemplary reflecting the school's catholic ethos. All parents acknowledge this through the parent questionnaires. The students' attitude to school and one another is outstanding. Their manners, behaviour and moral respect are a credit to all concerned.

The leadership and management provided by the headteacher, governors and the senior leadership team are outstanding. Though there are some excellent systems for carrying out ongoing self-evaluation and the school as a result knows its strengths and weaknesses well, its planning does not yet include consistently clear and sharp measures for success. The school finances are managed efficiently to ensure that resources support teaching and learning well. However, there are cramped conditions in some classrooms.

The inspection team agree with many of the school's judgements provided for the inspection. In four areas the school was too reserved in its judgements. There is an ethos of close co-operation and a sharing of common goals between all parties including staff, governors, students and parents. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. The capacity for this school to maintain the standards and quality of provision under the current leadership team is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are outstanding. Standards at GCE advanced level have been consistently well above average for the last 3 years, even though results dipped slightly in 2005. Students praise the support and guidance they receive from all staff, which is effective and timely. Students respond very well to the additional responsibilities they are given and play an active role in the school and wider community. Teaching is outstanding in many lessons. Teachers display a profound knowledge of their subject and students enjoy the many opportunities they have for

independent learning. The consultative leadership and management of the sixth form are highly effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen further its development planning process through the provision of sharper and more measurable success criteria.
- Continue to seek funding to address the problem of cramped conditions in some classrooms.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement and standards are exceptionally and consistently high. Students enter the school with standards of attainment significantly above average in English, mathematics and science. At the end of Key Stage 3 almost all students have reached level 6 or above in these subjects. This is exceptionally high. By the end of Year 11, GCSE results across the full range of subjects are very high, and have been so for a number of years. The most recent validated data for GCSE shows that performance by all measures was outstanding. Virtually all of the students gained 5 x A*-C or more. In 2005, GCSE results were even better than in 2004. In 2004 at AS-level and A2-level (GCE), almost three quarters of sixth form students gained passes at the higher grades of A and B, with a very high pass rate overall. The small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified accurately and supported appropriately. Those with gifts and talents are challenged relentlessly. All groups of students make outstanding progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students are self-confident, quietly dignified and full of enthusiasm; their personal development is outstanding. All students are proud of their school and use their talents to make a difference in both the local and wider communities. There are excellent relationships between all those connected with the school. Students are extremely supportive and appreciative of others' skills. They hold strong moral views, back them up with well thought out arguments, respect each other's opinions and are sensitively aware of others' needs. They welcome diversity and enjoy the richness of their own and others' cultures. A strong sense of spirituality pervades this community in which students unselfconsciously look beneath the surface of life.

These exceptionally positive attitudes mean that, as one parent wrote, 'students have a true thirst for learning and desire to do well'. They listen carefully, concentrate well, take pride in their work and thoroughly enjoy their education. Participation in extra activities is high as are attendance levels throughout the school. Students adopt healthy lifestyles and act in a safe manner. They cope well with some cramped conditions in classes and their behaviour is exemplary. Involvement in many enterprise activities,

excellent collaborative and organisational skills combined with outstanding academic standards mean that these students are very well equipped for future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning in the school are good overall and outstanding in the sixth form. In the sixth form the students take full advantage of the many opportunities they have for independent learning. Throughout the school the depth of the teachers' professional knowledge allows students to explore ideas with confidence and security. The students work very hard, want to do well and have excellent relationships with their teachers. The pace of learning is very fast in the outstanding lessons. Students progress quickly because teachers make sure they have many chances to reflect on the lessons' clearly stated aims. Expectations are high, informed by the school's ethos of challenge and achievement. The students have many opportunities to explain their understanding and this accelerates their learning. Regular and consistent marking gives clear guidance about both the strengths of the students' work, and how to improve their grades or levels. Challenging targets are agreed between teachers and students on the basis of accurate assessments. The presentation of students' work is of a high standard. It is well organised and a good aid to revision. When students are not clear about what they have to do, or when unchallenging work is set, learning slows down. Some of the teaching spaces are cramped.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Curricular provision is outstanding throughout the school, and is complemented by an extensive enrichment programme which includes sporting activities, subject clubs, residential visits and performing arts activities. All statutory requirements are met and the curriculum is responsive to local needs. The school continually reviews the curriculum and incorporates student and parental requests for new courses in the development process. Excellent opportunities are provided for all students, including those with specific needs, to progress and perform well. All students in Year 10 undertake a period of work experience and there are further opportunities in Key Stages 4 and 5 for work related learning.

In the sixth form the wide variety of academic courses is well matched to students' interests and ambitions. Recent additions, such as critical thinking and Life Skills have further developed the breadth of courses offered.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for students are outstanding. All staff know the students very well as individuals and work hard, and often imaginatively, to cater for their needs. This results in students' exceptional development as mature individuals as well as high achievers. Students of all ages are well aware of what they need to do next to improve their learning. They have access to high quality, impartial advice to guide them in future decision-making and also to support them through any personal difficulties. Arrangements to ease the transition into Years 7, 10, 12 and 13 are exceptional. Procedures to ensure child protection and health and safety are secure. Any students with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities are very well provided for and the school works well in close partnership with parents to secure the best for each individual.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding. The head teacher, governors and senior leadership team (SLT) provide a clear vision and highly effective leadership and management for moving the school forward. There is a strong commitment on everyone's part to ensure that each student achieves her full potential. This vision is implemented successfully.

The school development plan (SDP) correctly identifies the priorities and actions for improvement. This, and other strategic plans, are produced as a result of very good team work and consultation between the SLT, governors and subject leaders. Each subject in turn has its own action plan which is well linked to the SDP. Overall the plans are effective in identifying areas for action, however, there is not yet consistency in their quality and in the sharpness or clarity of criteria against which success is measured.

Nevertheless, the school has some excellent systems for monitoring and evaluating its own progress and standards across the school. This involves all parties including students and parents through things such as questionnaires and consultation groups. Members of the SLT meet half termly with subject leaders to review progress and the governors receive termly progress reports on the SDP. An effective performance management system is in place for all teachers and staff. Subject leaders are developing well as an important leadership force in the school and are responsible for monitoring the standards in their curriculum areas.

The governing body is strong and carries out its statutory duties effectively and with rigour and challenge. The school's finance is well managed by the governors and is used efficiently to ensure that teaching and learning resources around the school are generally good.

Within the constraints of its budget, the school endeavours to ensure that the accommodation adequately meets the needs of teachers and learners. However,

inspectors are concerned over the cramped conditions in some classrooms. The school has recently been awarded specialist science status; it is too early to measure the impact of this initiative. The great majority of parents, through their questionnaire, agree that the school is led and managed well.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to talk with you about your work and to listen to your views about the school. We have decided that Loreto Grammar is an outstanding school and recognise that you, along with the teachers, parents and other helpers, all help to make it the way it is.

What we liked most about your school

- Your outstanding behaviour, manners and attitude towards school.
- The interest you show and outstanding progress you make in lessons.
- The excellent standards you achieve during your time at school and in public examinations.
- The excellent leadership of the school by the head teacher, senior leaders and governors.
- The Catholic ethos which surrounds everything about the school.
- The teaching is good or better and this helps you to do your best.
- The outstanding care, guidance and support available for you.
- The range of courses that you can study, particularly in years 10 to 13.
- The wide range of activities available to you at lunchtime and after school.
- The way you care about other people in school, locally, nationally and internationally. Relationships are very good.
- The amount of money you raise for charities and good causes.
- The interest your parents show in the school and that most of them rightly believe it is an excellent school.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Continue to try and acquire funding to solve the problem of any cramped classrooms.
- Make sure that the whole school and subject plans have clear criteria against which success can be measured.

The inspection team hope you are pleased with the things we have said about your school and are proud of what you, your staff, governors and parents have achieved. We found our two days in the school to be a most delightful experience.