



Notre Dame RC School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113552
LEA Plymouth
Inspection number 279199
Inspection dates 1 December 2005 to 2 December 2005
Reporting inspector Valerie Pearson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Looseleigh Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Derriford
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Plymouth, Devon PL6 5HN
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01752 775101
Number on roll	795	Fax number	01752 768120
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Sister Edith Brash FND
Date of previous inspection	20 March 2000	Headteacher	Miss Fiona Hutchings

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	1 December 2005 - 2 December 2005	279199

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Notre Dame Roman Catholic School is a small voluntary aided girls' comprehensive school. There are 799 students, of whom 145 are in the sixth form. Seven boys joined the school in the sixth form. The number of students entitled to free school meals is just below the national average. Although the number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is just below the national average, the proportion with statements of special educational needs is in line with national averages. 2.1% of the students do not have English as a first language.

The school has specialist school status in humanities. English is the lead subject, supported by religious studies and drama.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Notre Dame Roman Catholic School is a good school. This judgement supports the school's evaluation of itself. The school has a strong sense of community which reflects its Roman Catholic foundation. It combines effectively its determination to improve learning with good provision for the students' personal development. It welcomes students from a variety of backgrounds and abilities and is committed to doing the very best for all of them. Good teaching, a commitment to continuous improvement through staff training and resolute leadership result in standards that are above the national average.

The students describe the school as an 'optimistic' place to be because they have a say in how it is developing and because they are encouraged and supported by staff. A particularly outstanding feature of the school is its work to empower students so that they can fully contribute to its life and work.

Inspectors judge that the school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and agree with the priorities for improvement that the school has identified. Strengthening the work of subject and pastoral leaders and making sure that the new assessment for learning policy is implemented across all subjects are of particular importance in securing further improvements within the school.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection, most notably in developing effective systems for evaluating its performance. The headteacher is a strong force for change and she is ably supported by a talented senior leadership team. These are clear indications that the school will continue to improve. It manages its resources well and provides good value for money.

The school gained specialist school status in humanities with effect from September 2005. This is already having positive consequences, particularly in very recent improvements to accommodation and resources.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school judges the sixth form to be good and inspectors support this evaluation. The increasing number of students being recruited and staying on throughout the sixth form and improved attendance are a result of the good care, guidance and support given by staff. Provisional results indicate a drop in standards in 2005, going against a trend where they have been consistently above the national average. The school has a good understanding of the reasons for these results. Teaching is good and students benefit from careful monitoring of their work to keep them on track. There is an excellent programme to support students' personal development. Students demonstrate responsible attitudes and leadership qualities and they care for others in the school. Sixth formers are proud of their school and are good role models for younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

• Ensure that all subject and pastoral leaders engage rigorously in the processes for judging how well the school is doing and use the findings to raise standards. • Ensure that the new assessment for learning policy is implemented consistently across all subjects and monitor its effects on students' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school has a healthy record of good standards, which are above the national average in tests and examinations. Although the overall picture for 2005 is not as robust as recent years, strong features in the attainment and progress of students remain.

Most students enter the school with average standards. They make good progress and, by the age of fourteen, their standards are above the national average, with particularly strong results in English and science. Whilst standards in mathematics are above the national average, students' progress in this subject has not been as rapid as in English and science. The 2005 results, however, demonstrate improved progress in this subject, a direct result of action taken by the school.

Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have risen over the last two years from a very low base to just below the national average in 2005. This rapid improvement is the result of planned actions taken by the school. The school makes good progress towards challenging targets.

At the end of Year 11, standards continue to be above the national average. Although progress is not as strong as in Key Stage 3, the majority of students make sound progress. There are some variations between subjects, with students doing particularly well in art and design, history and religious studies. In comparison, students do not progress as well in mathematics, combined science or modern foreign languages. Unusually, the school just missed challenging 2005 targets it set itself for students taking GCSE examinations.

The school's good support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities means that they are starting to make better than expected progress. Above average standards have been maintained in the sixth form. The provisional results for 2005, however, indicate a drop in standards, although they are largely in line with the expectations of the school. The school can clearly explain the reasons for these results. For example, nearly half of the higher ability students left at the age of sixteen to follow a combination of courses which the school was unable to offer in that year. The senior leaders have good plans to tackle issues emerging from their analysis of results.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. The school gives high priority to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students and this aspect of provision is

outstanding. In particular, recently introduced opportunities for students to influence key school debates, such as improving the quality of learning and the promotion of healthy living, are excellent. Although in its early stages, this emphasis on leadership through the school senate and 'Make a Difference' groups is highly valued by the students. It makes a significant contribution to their self-confidence and to the development of their personal and social skills. Students have already influenced decisions such as the introduction of healthier options into the canteen. They make an excellent contribution to the local community, engaging in a wide variety of activities, including supporting primary school pupils.

Students' behaviour and attitudes are good and they generally enjoy school. Attendance has improved and is now above the national average. Students adopt safe practices. They say that if they have a problem they know they can obtain help and are confident that matters will be dealt with swiftly. This includes prompt responses to the infrequent incidents of bullying or racism.

The school's pursuit of the Healthy Schools award means that students are growing increasingly aware of options for healthy living. They participate, in reasonable numbers, in extra-curricular sporting activities. Students make good progress in acquiring skills that contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good. Excellent training in teaching and learning has improved the quality of lessons.

Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and, in good lessons, they use a range of interesting activities to engage and challenge students. This helps the students to make good progress. Students know, through their targets, what they are aiming to achieve. Relationships between staff and students are good. The great majority of students have positive attitudes to their learning and they respond enthusiastically to good teaching. In a few lessons, however, the teaching is less successful because the work is not sufficiently well focused on the needs of all students. The special needs co-ordinator and the teaching assistants provide effective support to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The good relationships developed with parents and carers enable them to make valuable contributions to their children's learning.

Teachers' marking does not always give sufficient feedback to students on what they need to do next to improve. The school's new assessment for learning policy includes action to address this issue.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum that meets the needs of students. It has broadened the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to meet the wider range of students' needs. Vocational courses, work-related opportunities and additional Advanced Level courses have been set up in partnership with local secondary schools and the college of further education.

The school is extending the ways in which students are helped to gain an insight into the world of business through work experience, enterprise opportunities and contributions from local businesses.

All students in Key Stage 3 now study ICT as a separate subject and recent initiatives mean that it is being taught and used more effectively through other subjects.

A good variety of clubs and activities in the main school and the sixth form enriches students' learning and personal development. Nevertheless, opportunities to promote a healthy lifestyle are limited by the inadequate sports facilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support to students.

Students feel that staff care about them and are approachable should they have any problems with work or personal issues. There are very good arrangements, highly valued by students and parents and carers, for the successful transition from primary school into Year 7. Systems for safeguarding students' health and safety are well established.

The school has good arrangements to guide and support students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are vulnerable in other ways. These students are carefully monitored to ensure that their personal and academic needs are met. Very good liaison between staff and external agencies strengthens further the support for specific groups of students, including those learning English as an additional language. The recently introduced academic tutoring programme is popular with students and parents and carers. It enables them to meet tutors to track individual students' progress, discuss issues and agree targets.

A broad programme of careers advice provides good support to students as they make important educational and career decisions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong and determined leadership and, since her appointment in 2003, she has made a significant number of essential improvements to the school. The aim of improving students' learning drives

the work of the school and provides a clear direction. The recently formed senior leadership team is purposeful and energetic.

The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate. Students and parents and carers make valuable contributions to the process. The methods and range of evidence the school uses to judge how well it is doing have greatly improved since the last inspection. However, this aspect of the school's work needs to be improved further because not all subject and pastoral leaders are fully engaged in the process.

Strong subject and pastoral leaders have responded well to opportunities to improve students' learning. The school has rightly identified the need to focus on raising standards through these key people but good practice is not yet consistent amongst all those who have leadership and management responsibilities.

The governing body is very supportive of the leaders of the school. It now understands its role and is becoming increasingly effective in appropriately challenging the school. The school monitors and manages its budget well and provides good value for money. Although there are still issues concerning accommodation to be resolved, the school has made good progress since the last inspection. It has recently secured funding for a new sports hall and teaching block. In addition, the school is outward looking and has successfully developed a range of strong partners to improve the quality of its provision.

The school has demonstrated its capacity to improve in a variety of ways. These include raising standards in ICT, improving the sixth form and gaining specialist school status. Not all of the school's recent initiatives, however, have had time to embed and make a difference. Nevertheless, the achievements of the strong leadership team indicate that the school is very well placed to improve even further.

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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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
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	2	

The quality of provision

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

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
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	2	
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	2	
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

Notre Dame RC School Looseleigh Lane Derriford Plymouth Devon PL6 5HN

December 2005

Dear Students,

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to my colleagues and me during our recent visit. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views about your work and the school.

It is our judgment that your school is good. Some of you told us that it is an optimistic place to be and we agree with this view. We are particularly impressed by the way in which you are contributing to discussions about important issues through your school senate and 'Make a Difference' groups. You value the responsibility given to you and the school listens and responds to your views. The sixth formers are effective leaders in the school and provide good role models for younger students.

You told us that you feel safe and secure in school. You also told us that if you need help you know who you can go to and you feel confident that you will receive good support.

Members of staff are committed to doing the very best for all of you. Your good behaviour and enjoyment of lessons help you to make the most of the best teaching in the school. Most of you make pleasing progress and your school has a healthy record of good results in national tests and examinations. We are pleased that your attendance at school has improved and is now good.

Your school is determined to keep improving. We agree that everyone ought to be encouraged to contribute their ideas about how this can be achieved. We have asked your school to make sure that all teachers use the information about how well you are doing in every lesson to provide you with work that is right for you. Part of this is making sure, through marking, that you know what you need to do next to get better.

Valerie Pearson HMI Lead Inspector