



Notre Dame Catholic College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104706
Local Authority Liverpool
Inspection number 287011
Inspection date 11 October 2006
Reporting inspector Gina White HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Everton Valley
School category	Voluntary aided		Liverpool
Age range of pupils	11–18		Merseyside L4 4EZ
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	0151 2633104
Number on roll (school)	840	Fax number	0151 2632689
Number on roll (6th form)	236		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	T Westwell
		Headteacher	Miss C McCann
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2002		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–18	11 October 2006	287011

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. During the inspection, meetings were held with representative groups of students across the college, a governor, the headteacher and other senior staff, some curriculum team and subject leaders and coordinators of special needs and inclusion support. A small sample of lessons was visited. The college provided a wide range of documentation including recent pupil data to support its self-evaluation. Over 181 questionnaires were returned, enabling the inspection team to gather and take into account the views of approximately one fifth of the parents with children at the college. A section 48 inspection of the college's religious education and collective worship took place at the same time, carried out by a member of the Liverpool Archdiocese.

Description of the school

The college, founded in 1869 under the trusteeship of the Sisters of Notre Dame, provides education and care for girls within a distinct Catholic ethos. The college serves an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. Around 50% of students are eligible for free school meals and this is much higher than average, as is the 35% who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Just over 8% of students are of minority ethnic heritage, including six asylum seekers and refugees. Five of these students are in the early stages of learning English. The college is well established as a specialist arts college and has achieved a number of national awards for college improvement and inclusion. Since September 2004 the college has been part of the North Central Liverpool Sixth Form Collaborative and has joint sixth form provision with three other schools.

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 is a good college with a number of outstanding features: it provides a good education for its students. Its values and mission to 'serve the students' needs and aspirations' and to 'give students what they need for life' are very well demonstrated in the outstanding provision throughout the college for students' personal development and well-being and in the extensive range of additional opportunities in the curriculum.

Students respond well to this supportive and caring environment and one girl summed up the feelings of many when she said, 'It is like a family here and we all get on well with each other.' A large majority, including significantly high numbers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and all looked-after children, choose to continue their education into the sixth form.

Specialist arts status underpins these strengths and has contributed significantly to promote students' cultural and social development. In discussions, students are enthusiastic about the difference it has made to them: they value the wider opportunities to learn musical instruments; enjoy participating in the productions and musical events; feel more confident and are proud to represent their college.

Standards are improving, particularly in performing arts subjects, although they remain below national averages overall at Key Stage 3 and in the proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, at GCSE. Nevertheless, in 2005 the students' overall GCSE results placed them in the top 3% in England, taking their context and earlier attainment into account. Most students gain qualifications and successfully complete elements of vocational courses. The inconsistent attendance of some students and very poor attendance of a small minority undermine the college's efforts to raise standards further.

Students' behaviour during the inspection was exemplary in lessons and around the college. Relationships between students and teachers are supportive and help to encourage confident attitudes to learning. Teachers have recently participated in training to introduce new approaches to lessons to make them even more stimulating. In the best lessons, tasks are well devised according to students' levels of attainment and work is matched to individual learning needs, but this is inconsistent across the college. In some lessons students know their targets and the level they are working at but teachers' feedback to students does not always explain precisely enough what they need to do in order to improve to reach the next level.

Partnerships with other schools, local networks and support services are excellent. They are used effectively to promote and enrich work with students and the local community and to share best practice. The college has become a focal point for the community, and performing arts events have successfully helped to break down barriers and informally engage more parents in its work. Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire are supportive of the college and the positive impact it is having on their daughters: one parent is 'proud her daughter attends the college'.

The headteacher's leadership is excellent. Her commitment and determination to improve the life chances for students is shared by staff. She has played a key role in promoting partnership work and has harnessed the strengths of staff extremely well to create a very effective senior leadership team. The college has a good track record of responding effectively to the needs of vulnerable groups of students and in meeting performance targets but governors and senior leaders are not complacent and they say rightly that 'more needs to be done'. Establishing good attendance patterns amongst students remains a significant problem which the college has yet to crack despite its best efforts. The college has made progress in tackling the issues from the last inspection and the good leadership and management throughout the college demonstrates good capacity to promote further improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good with some outstanding features. It is well led and students' progress is monitored effectively. Advice and support to meet students' needs is good and attendance is improving. The quality of teaching and learning is good: standards are rising in most subjects and improvement plans are in place to tackle those that are slower to respond. Opportunities to study a wide range of academic and vocational courses and an extensive programme of performing arts and activity significantly enrich the curriculum. Provision for students' personal development is outstanding. Planned opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the community promote students' confidence and maturity and prepare them effectively for life after the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure students' individual needs are met consistently in lessons.
- Ensure consistency in teachers' feedback to students so that they know precisely what they need to do to improve and move their learning on.
- Improve attendance to raise standards further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good overall. Students enter the college with standards that are below national expectations. Intensive support helps many students make good progress in their reading skills, although Key Stage 3 test results in the core subjects were below average overall in 2005. This was because science and mathematics results were exceptionally low in 2005. Both subjects' results improved markedly in 2006 because of successful efforts to tackle this. Currently, most students are making good progress in Years 7 and 9 across all subjects, although regular checks on how well students are doing has identified recently a number of Year 8 students who are not making the progress the college expects them to. Curriculum leaders are investigating this.

Standards at Key Stage 4 are improving and the proportion of students achieving five or more higher GCSE grades is very high, taking the students' earlier attainment into account. In 2005, 60% of students gained the equivalent of five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C and results improved further in 2006. Students have responded well to the increase in vocational courses and this is driving results upwards. However, fewer than 20% of students achieved an A* to C grade in both English and mathematics. A range of measures to tackle this problem early, as well as additional literacy and numeracy support in the sixth form, has been put in place. This is beginning to reap benefits and most Year 10 and 11 students are now making good progress in English and mathematics.

Standards in the sixth form are broadly in line with national averages and the college's data show that students make good progress overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students enjoy their education and make a positive contribution to it through involvement in the college council. Their views are taken seriously and acted upon. Healthy lifestyles are extremely well promoted: students have been instrumental in convincing caterers to introduce healthier options in the canteen. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have many opportunities to care for and support each other: they coordinate and raise significant amounts for charities and sixth formers are proud to serve as mentors to younger students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall and this leads to at least good achievement. There is variation in the quality of teaching across the college; some is outstanding and most is good, particularly in performing arts. Pockets of satisfactory and weaker practice are present but college records show that regular and thorough lesson observation and the sharing of good practice are reducing them. Most teachers explain things well, emphasise new subject language and develop interesting and relevant tasks to engage students in learning. In the best lessons students discuss and explore ideas amongst themselves and have opportunities to develop independent learning skills. A few lessons are not planned carefully enough or in sufficient detail to help all students learn well. More commonly, students do not know precisely enough what they need to do to improve to reach the next step in learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is redesigned annually to meet the specialist interests and needs of individuals, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Vocational courses, including student apprenticeships and extended work placements, promote students' engagement in learning and contribute to their exceptional achievement. The college's status as an arts college is clearly reflected in the opportunities students are offered to gain qualifications in performing arts and in the extra provision for gifted and talented musicians, dancers and actors. A strong work-related learning programme prepares students very well for the future. Citizenship is integrated well into the curriculum and students are well informed about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. A high proportion of students participate in the outstanding range of sporting and performing arts activities which take place outside of college hours.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care and support for students are good. Vetting procedures and arrangements for child protection, and adequate training for staff with responsibilities, are in place. All students are confident in seeking help from teachers and support staff and are equally assured that it is there when they need it. Students who need extra support to learn English and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities know that, 'every lesson someone is there to help us with our reading'. Students know that they are improving. Practices in the college draw data together but the tools to rigorously analyse the progress students are making in all subjects are underdeveloped. The gap is identified and the college has plans to tackle this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are effective: the day-to-day running of the college is orderly and systems and procedures are firmly established. Governance and the senior leadership of the college are good: the senior management team work well together and they have a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Self-evaluation is good: the leadership team, staff and governors share an accurate understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses. Priorities in college plans target the weaker areas effectively and strategies to take the college forward are firmly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Senior staff have an accurate view of the quality of lessons.

Work is ongoing to improve further the rigour of tracking procedures. A planned programme of training to prepare and support middle leaders to play a more comprehensive role in checking and improving the quality of learning has started.

Governors are well led and are both supportive and challenging of the college. Procedures are sound but there is scope for more challenge and questioning of the impact the college is having on the learning of specific groups of students. Resources are well managed and the college provides good value for money.

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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?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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	3	3
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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?	1	1
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 to below 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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection. We were able to visit lessons and talk with a number of you in meetings and around the college at break and lunchtimes. This is a summary of what we found.

Notre Dame provides a good education and excellent opportunities for your personal development and welfare. We think you respond exceptionally well to this. Your behaviour in lessons and around the college during our visit was outstanding. We were impressed by your confidence in answering our questions and the concentration and good attitudes you displayed in lessons. Your college is very well led. The headteacher, senior staff and governors have good plans to improve it further and all staff want to help you to do your best. The way the college cares for and supports you is good. You know who to go to if you have a problem and are confident it will be dealt with.

The curriculum at Notre Dame is outstanding. It is much broader than in many schools and inspectors admired the way it is redesigned each year to meet your interests, needs and opportunities. You have a wide choice of courses and we were delighted to hear that the oldest students are happy with the choices they made. Your college is very good at partnership work and it is working hard to encourage more of your parents and carers to visit the college. We agree with your teachers that most of you are making good progress towards meeting your targets. Teaching and learning are mostly good but your teachers are trying out new ideas and approaches to make lessons interesting and help you learn even better.

We have asked the college to do three things to improve further.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that the work you do in all your lessons is adapted and suited to meet your individual needs.
- Make sure that you always know exactly what you need to do to improve and reach the next level in your work.
- Improve attendance to raise standards further. Students, particularly in Years 9 to 11 must attend regularly to improve their chances of getting the qualifications they need to enable them to achieve their dreams and ambitions.