



# Our Lady's Catholic College

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 119798  
**Local Authority** Lancashire  
**Inspection number** 291546  
**Inspection dates** 6–7 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Vincent Ashworth HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Morecambe Road
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Lancaster, Lancashire
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		LA1 2RX
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01524 66689
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1017	<b>Fax number</b>	01524 849441
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	153		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Wyn Lambert
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Michael Webster
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2002		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	6–7 December 2006	291546

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## **Introduction**

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

## **Description of the school**

Our Lady's Catholic College is slightly larger than average in size. It is the only Catholic high school in the district. Students generally come from a wide social background and most are White British. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals reflects the national average. However, the school attracts many students from some of the most socially and economically deprived parts of Lancaster. Although the school's intake is fully comprehensive, the presence of selective schools in the local area has meant that, compared to similar schools, Our Lady's has fewer of the most able students. The proportion of students with lower than average levels of prior attainment has risen. Similarly, the number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities has increased and is higher than average at Key Stage 3. Our Lady's became a specialist sports college in September 2003 and has achieved the Sportsmark Award.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Our Lady's Catholic College provides a good standard of education. The school provides students with good care and support that allows them to flourish within a strong Catholic ethos. The support provided to students with specific learning difficulties is commendable. Staff and students have a strong allegiance to the school. Their shared commitment to the school's mission 'to grow in knowledge, faith and understanding as a caring Catholic community' is evident and respected throughout the school. This is also apparent through pupils' involvement in a wide range of activities and events that allow them to give something back to other communities and people less fortunate than themselves.

Students enter the school with a wide range of ability, many with low levels of prior attainment. Standards in Key Stage 3 and at GCSE are broadly average. However, this masks the fact that students with higher levels of ability achieve particularly well. Because of good teaching and systematic monitoring of students' individual targets, the vast majority make good progress by the time they complete their compulsory education. Standards in mathematics, science and physical education are particularly impressive. There is much good teaching and some of it outstanding. The school has rightly recognised the need to harness the talents of its very best teachers and deploy these more effectively across the school.

The school provides a calm and welcoming environment in which students feel safe. Most parents share this view. Instances of bullying are rare and students have confidence that, should this occur, it would be dealt with appropriately. The majority of parents have a high regard for Our Lady's. A minority feel that students' behaviour is not good enough. Inspection evidence indicates significant recent improvement in the standard of students' behaviour. Nevertheless, a minority of students continue to misbehave in lessons; this spoils other students' learning. A new behaviour policy has been introduced which is having a marked impact on students' behaviour in lessons; in some instances, staff are not sufficiently stringent in applying this policy.

The appointment of an inspirational head of sixth form has brought a complete turn around in the sixth form. Through an incisive review of all aspects of sixth form activity, he has been able to prioritise the necessary improvements which are starting to bring about transformational change. Inspection evidence identified that students currently in the sixth form are making at least satisfactory progress. Teachers communicate much higher expectations to their students; as a result, the number applying to higher education has almost doubled. The range of provision is still too narrow and focuses predominantly on traditional advanced level courses. The very wide range of ability and diverse needs and interests of students accessing sixth form provision are not sufficiently provided for.

Senior managers provide strong leadership and have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The process of self-evaluation is precise and accurate. The school has successfully tackled the issues identified in its previous inspection; it is very well placed to continue improving. Overall the school provides good value for money.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Sixth form provision is satisfactory. A high proportion of learners enter the sixth form with low levels of prior attainment. Many of them are unable to achieve their full potential because of the academic demands of a full GCE A-level programme. The new head of sixth form has recognised what actions are required to ensure that all learners are able to achieve their full potential. As a result, teachers are more systematic in monitoring progress. Teachers now make good use of assessment data to challenge learners individually and ensure that they work to the best of their abilities. Learners have action plans that are focused on specific, meaningful and achievable targets. Teachers pay greater attention to developing students' skills in independent learning and a strong study ethos has been introduced which ensures that learners are able to use their private study time in a meaningful way. The more able learners are given sufficient challenge to ensure that they aim for the very highest grades. A review of the sixth form curriculum is also underway. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these improvements on learners' achievements. Learners enjoy their time in the sixth form and appreciate the benefits of continuing to study in the familiarity of a school environment. They particularly value the high quality of support they receive from their teachers and form tutors. Many take on additional responsibilities and support younger students, and some learners undertake voluntary work by teaching in local primary schools.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure the school's behaviour policy is applied with consistent rigour in lessons by all teachers.
- Ensure the outstanding teaching in some subjects is shared and fostered more systematically in all subjects.
- Develop a range of courses in the sixth form that reflects more closely students' interests and aspirations.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

By Year 9, students make good progress. Boys make almost as much progress as girls, which is better than the national picture. Standards at Key Stage 3 have improved since the last inspection and are broadly average. Standards in mathematics and science are impressive, shown by the increasing number of students attaining higher levels in national tests. However, in 2006, students' results in English were disappointing. Inspectors saw that students currently perform much better in English, because of recent improvements in the quality of teaching.

Standards by the end of Year 11 are broadly average and students' achievement is good overall. Students' achievements in mathematics are outstanding because teaching

and learning are excellent. The number of students who gain five or more good GCSE passes has improved significantly over the last three years. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because of the good support they receive both in and out of lessons.

Learners' attainment in the sixth form is broadly average. Results in GCE AS level examinations in 2006 show significant improvement. Similarly, pass rates in GCE A-level examinations have also improved. Learners' progress has been very slow in the past and their overall achievement unsatisfactory. Recent improvements in the quality of teaching in the sixth form mean that learners are making much better progress.

The school has much to celebrate in terms of students' individual talents. Students' achievements in sports, art, performance and enterprise have gained recognition both locally and nationally. For example, the design by a group of students for an airport trolley of the future won a national competition for young engineers.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Personal development and well-being are good with some significant strengths. The Catholic ethos of the school and opportunities to enrich and enhance learning ensure that students' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Across all ages, students engage in an extensive range of charitable activities. Their enthusiasm and drive to support the needs of the local and wider communities is boundless. For example, their enthusiastic commitment to the principles of Fair Trade is commendable. The majority of students enjoy their learning and are spurred on by the progress they make. This is clearly evident from the impressive improvement in attendance rates for the current year.

Students' conduct around the school is good. They are polite and welcoming to each other and to visitors. In some lessons, a few students become disengaged and misbehave. This disruption is increasingly well managed by a measured use of the school's rewards and sanctions policy. More effective procedures, including peer mentoring, have been established to ensure that instances of bullying are rare.

A wholesome menu at lunchtimes and access to the 'Living for Sport' programme ensures that many students adopt a healthy lifestyle. Participation rates are high in the wide range of sporting activities that take place through the school's specialist sports college status. Students' progress in numeracy and literacy together with a commendable programme of citizenship, economic awareness and work related learning ensure that all students are acquiring knowledge and practical skills that will help them to succeed in adult life.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding practice. Well planned lessons provide pace and challenge and require students to be active learners. Stimulating activities at the start of lessons and incisive questioning ensure pupil's engagement and involvement. Where teaching is enthusiastic and expert, learning becomes fun and students respond with equal levels of fervour. Lessons have clear objectives, which are shared with students; the best also have shared outcomes. Lesson plans include clear strategies to support and challenge the more able students. However, there is variation in the quality of students' learning experience within and across subjects. In a minority of lessons, learning activities fail to motivate lower attaining students, particularly boys, who tend to become disaffected and misbehave. This detracts from their own and others' progress. The school recognises a lack of consistency in matching tasks to all students' abilities and has identified this as an area for further development. Most teachers follow the school's behaviour policy effectively to ensure a positive learning environment. When this is not followed through consistently, the pace of learning for the whole class is affected adversely. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Learners understand clearly their course requirements and know how to improve their performance. Teaching provides many opportunities for learners to develop their skills in independent learning. The quality of marking is variable and the school is taking action to improve this.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum in the main school is good. The programme in Years 7 to 9 provides a broad and balanced experience, meets statutory requirements and provides good opportunities for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum has evolved to meet the needs of students through four pathways. Students speak highly of the pathway system and they appreciate the opportunities and choices it provides. All students have the opportunity of work experience, and an especially good feature is the vocational, work related learning programme. There are good links with the local business community and the further education college. The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory. The range of courses offered meets the needs of learners with academic aspirations well, but does not cater fully for the needs and interests of all learners. A wide range of clubs, trips and other activities helps to enrich the curriculum. Many students actively engage in these activities and the school's sports teams enjoy success in a number of inter-school fixtures and leagues.

## Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for all students is good with some outstanding features. Arrangements to help students make a smooth transition from primary to secondary school are very effective because of the strong links with local primary schools. Students are confident that they can turn to a member of staff if they are experiencing difficulties. The Oratory provides students with a refuge for quiet reflection, prayer and contemplation. Many students benefit from the sensitive support and range of activities provided through the school's chaplaincy. Provision for students with additional learning needs is very strong. For example, the exemplary care and support given to one pupil with learning difficulties enabled him to develop from a challenging individual to an increasingly confident young adult who is now giving much back to the community.

Teachers know their students very well and monitor their academic and personal development systematically. When individuals are not achieving their challenging targets, they receive help quickly and, as a result, they achieve well. The school has recently revised its behaviour policy, which is already having a positive impact on students' behaviour, resulting in fewer exclusions. Appropriate systems for child protection are in place, backed by staff training. Arrangements for careers education are satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Leadership and management are good overall and satisfactory in the sixth form. It is too early to evaluate the full impact on students' achievements of the changes to the management of the sixth form. The headteacher demonstrates a caring and perceptive leadership style. He conveys his passion for learning and his belief in the integrity of the human spirit to everyone. Consequently, a sense of purpose and warmth pervades the school community and students' needs are placed at the heart of day-to-day school life. Middle management is now much stronger and there is well-focused personal and professional support from senior staff. The reinvigorated strength of middle managers and the school's specialist status have developed a common sense of purpose.

The school's self-evaluation processes and procedures have been improved. Both senior and middle managers are skilled in working out what the school does well and where things need to be done better. They make good use of data on students' performance, the views of staff, parents and students, as well as the extensive information from quality assurance systems. These are used well to produce improvement plans that are coherent, clearly focused and measurable. The curriculum is being revised to match students' interests and aspirations and where subjects were not well led, changes have been made. However, the analysis of strengths and



weaknesses in teaching and learning has inconsistencies and the monitoring of initiatives aimed at driving up achievement for the slow learners is not sharp enough. Plans are in place to address these issues as well as to ensure greater levels of consistency in the quality of teaching across all subjects. Structural changes in the sixth form promise much improved outcomes, but the impact on students' achievements is not evident as yet.

The supportive and hard working governors bring a valuable wealth of experience to share in the responsibilities towards achieving the agreed targets. Governors are becoming critical friends in holding the school to account, but there is scope for them to be more proactive in helping to identify its future direction.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
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	1	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	3
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

Our Lady's Catholic College

Morecambe Road

Lancaster

Lancashire

LA1 2RX

6 December 2006

Dear Students

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school. Thanks also to many of your parents who returned a questionnaire to express what they think about your school. This was very helpful as I was able to take their views into account when making judgements. We found that Our Lady's is a good school and that your teachers and school managers work very hard to make sure that you have a happy and fulfilling education. We were particularly impressed with how well you do in mathematics and science and were pleased to see that you are now doing much better in English. We found that some students in the sixth form struggled to keep up with the demands of a full GCE A-level programme. The new head of sixth form has made a number of changes for the better. He has some good ideas on how to improve the range of courses so that all students in the sixth form can achieve well. We were disappointed to see that a minority of older students continue to misbehave in lessons. This is selfish because it prevents other students from enjoying their learning. We think that the school's 'Fair Play Policy' is really good and when your teachers make use of it in lessons then you respond well and the quality of learning is good. You told us that your school has many strengths and we agree:

- your teachers are caring and supportive; they monitor your progress well so that you can achieve your very best
- you develop as considerate and compassionate young people and demonstrate this through your commitment to charitable and fundraising activities
- teaching is good and in the best lessons you really get involved because the teachers know how to capture your imagination
- there are many good opportunities for you to learn new skills and develop wider interests that will help you when you leave school.

We think your school can improve even further and have asked Mr Webster to think about:

how courses in the sixth form can provide opportunities for all students to achieve their best; making sure that all teachers use the 'Fair Play Policy' properly so that everyone can enjoy their learning; ensuring that teachers share their ideas and techniques on the sort of things that make lessons exciting and fun. Keep up the good work, you have a school to be proud of.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Ashworth

Her Majesty's Inspector of schools