

Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100859
Local Authority	Southwark
Inspection number	307513
Inspection date	11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	637
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Garvey
Headteacher	Sister Anne Marie Niblock
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2005
School address	118 St George's Road London SE1 6EX
Telephone number	020 7261 1121
Fax number	020 7620 2922

Age group	11-16
Inspection date	11 June 2008
Inspection number	307513

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, leadership and management, teaching and learning, aspects of personal development and well-being, and care, guidance and support. The main areas investigated were the current progress of students, particularly in mathematics, and the effectiveness of the actions taken by the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation (SEF), national published assessment data, the school's own records and other documentation, and observation of the school at work. Parents' questionnaires, interviews with senior staff and students also informed inspector's judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments in these areas, as given in the SEF, were other than justified.

Description of the school

Notre Dame is a smaller than average secondary school situated in the heart of London. The school was founded in 1855 and is under the trusteeship of the sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Students are not selected on ability but on their commitment to the Roman Catholic Church.

The number of students eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average, but has decreased since the last inspection. The number identified with special educational needs is above average, and about half of these students have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. The proportion of students with statements of additional need is below average. There is a very high proportion of students from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest group is of West African origin who account for more than half the school population. The number who speak English as an additional language is very high, and about 15% are at the early stages of learning English.

Notre Dame has been a specialist language college since 2003 and, in 2007, was redesignated with Leading Edge status as its second specialism. It was awarded Healthy Schools status in 2007. It is a partially extended school offering services beyond the school day to students and the community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Notre Dame School's claim to take an holistic approach to ensuring the successful development of the whole child is no idle boast. Apart from the exceptional leadership of the headteacher, what makes this school outstanding is the concerted approach to ensuring the exemplary personal development of confident, articulate young women who also achieve academic excellence. This enables almost all of them to continue their studies once they leave. That they come from a such a wide variety of social and ethnic backgrounds, and arrive with relatively low prior attainment, only adds to the exceptional nature of their achievement. The Christian values that are the bedrock of the school are embodied by the extremely caring relationships between students and staff. As one student reported, the school is a community that really 'does have our best interests at heart'.

Academic achievement is excellent. Students begin Year 7 with standards that are generally well below those typically found nationally. By the end of Year 9 they attain results in examinations that are a little above the national picture. This is good progress. Since the last inspection GCSE results have continued to improve and are now well above the national average. The school was able to provide compelling evidence that this trend would continue in 2008. Students therefore make outstanding academic progress during their time at the school. In Year 11 they achieve best in science and English, particularly in literature. In 2007 they achieved less well in GCSE mathematics and French. Specialist status in languages has enabled the school to widen the number of courses it offers to students, primary schools and the local community. However, although it met its whole school specialist targets in 2007 it did not meet the GCSE targets for individual languages. Senior leaders have investigated the reasons for this thoroughly and taken a robust approach to ensure better progress this year.

This academic excellence is underpinned by exceptional personal development. Across the school community relationships and attitudes are warm, caring and supportive. The students are lively and unafraid to express themselves, but do so in a courteous and considerate manner. They value the self-discipline which, they believe, is instilled in them by the religious doctrine of the school. The behaviour seen during the inspection was largely exemplary. This very positive 'snapshot' of behaviour is supported by both student and parental comment. This is especially impressive when the lack of a playground and the constrained nature of the site is taken into account. This is students' main concern and they are looking forward, as are staff, to the forthcoming remodelling of the school.

Since the last inspection, the range of opportunities to participate in sport has increased significantly and this, together with the high priority given to healthy eating, supports the development of a healthy lifestyle very well. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and community, for example through the school council's work on recycling, the charity committee and support for local pensioners. Their future economic well-being is promoted very effectively through both the standards they attain in literacy and numeracy, and their high levels of confidence and social skills. A very large number go on to further education, including science courses. Students really enjoy everything that the school has to offer. This is evidenced by both the high participation in the very wide range of social, spiritual and multicultural activities, and their attendance, which has been significantly above the national average since the last inspection. However, they find some lessons relatively dull. They especially enjoy English and science but would like more creativity in mathematics lessons.

The systems to care, support, and guide students are outstanding. This is because both their academic and personal needs are carefully monitored and effective intervention programmes are in place. This ensures that barriers to learning are dealt with very effectively and enable the majority of students to make outstanding progress. This was confirmed by one student who reported that, 'teachers never give up helping you progress in your work and personally'. Rigorous systems to track students' progress and teachers' marking ensure students are aware of their academic targets and, more importantly, know what to do to improve. They feel safe in school and there is little bullying because they look out for each other through highly valued schemes such as 'Big Sisters' and peer mediation. Students are confident that they can seek help with any problems from the chaplain and other staff. During the inspection, creative use was made of a visiting theatre group to develop students' awareness of internet safety. Good relationships with a range of external agencies and other education providers, and extended services such as a breakfast club and study provision, enhance student achievement. Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet government requirements.

The school rightly judges the quality of teaching to be good with some outstanding aspects. During the inspection outstanding teaching was observed in English. A very wide range of texts was used in a creative way to ensure high levels of enjoyment. This contrasted with the teaching observed in mathematics, which although good, did not offer the same opportunities or the same sense of engagement with learning. Since the last inspection the senior leadership team has developed its ability to judge the quality of teaching and now does so securely with reference to the progress of students. However, senior leaders do not use that information to target specific improvements to the quality of teaching, for example, in mathematics. The school most certainly has the expertise and capacity to do this by ensuring that the best practice in some departments is shared across the school.

Students clearly both respect and like the headteacher. They are right to do so. She is absolutely committed to their best interests and her passion for their education infuses the school. Rigorous self-evaluation by governors and leaders at all levels identifies the right priorities for improvement, and there is clear impact in most of the important areas. However, although teaching and learning has rightly been identified as a key priority, and good measures taken to foster improvement, there has yet to be an impact in the classroom. The school development plan and systems for performance management provide clear direction for raising standards further. The headteacher sets challenging targets to drive up expectations of all students. The commitment to equal opportunities is evident in the close monitoring of individual students' progress and the wide range of intervention programmes to prevent underachievement.

Governors fulfil their role of critical friends very well by challenging the school to raise achievement further for all students. The school is fortunate to have a very reflective, experienced chair who is not afraid to challenge senior leaders to do even better. The continuing improvements are secured within the constraints of a restrictive site, so the school certainly provides excellent value for money. The school has very clearly demonstrated the outstanding capacity to improve even further.

The very high number of parents who responded to the confidential survey were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. It is difficult to summarise their views but this quote typifies many, 'My daughter is doing exceptionally well and has been encouraged from day one. She loves all her teachers and will go on to university with the confidence that she has from being at Notre Dame...we need more schools like this.' A significant minority of parents echoed the views of some students, that they would like the school to do more to take into account the views of children. The school acknowledges this and has plans to develop this area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that more students have the opportunity to experience and enjoy the creative teaching that is evident in some lessons, for example in science and English.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

19 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girls' School, London, SE1 6EX

It was really good to meet some of you when I came to inspect your school. Thank you for talking to us so openly and honestly.

I do not think that it will come as a surprise that we judged your school to be outstanding. This is because not only do you make excellent progress academically but you also develop into articulate, confident young women. The school prepares you very well for the next stages of your lives. I agree with you that the school really does have your best interests at the forefront of everything that it does. I was impressed by your behaviour, which was excellent, particularly on such a small site. I certainly agree with you that you could benefit from more space, or as one of you put it 'more room to breathe'. Hopefully, the forthcoming remodelling of the school will achieve this.

I could see how much you enjoy all the extra opportunities that the school provides for you outside of the timetabled curriculum. I agree with you that this aspect of the school is outstanding. I also agree with both yours and the school's judgement that teaching and learning is good rather than outstanding. You said how much you enjoyed science and English, and your GCSE results in these subjects are excellent. However, although you think that teaching in mathematics is good you want to have more opportunities to be creative and think for yourself. Some of you, and your parents, also told me that you would like the school to take more account of your views. The school realises this and will be working with you to make improvements in both these areas.

Congratulations to both you and your teachers on creating, and sustaining, such an excellent school. Good luck to all of you, particularly those in Year 11 who will be eagerly awaiting examination results this summer. I hope that you achieve the results you need to further your studies.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes

Her Majesty's Inspector