

Cardinal Newman Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109699
Local Authority	LUTON LA
Inspection number	310070
Inspection date	13 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Middleton HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1442
6th form	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Morgan
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Crow
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	Warden Hill Road Luton Bedfordshire LU2 7AE
Telephone number	01582 597125
Fax number	01582 503088

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- Inclusion: To what extent does inclusion contribute to the distinctive identity and effectiveness of the school?
- Independence: How effectively do learners develop and apply initiative and take responsibility as they progress through school and into the sixth form?
- Innovation: How innovative is teaching, learning and the curriculum in meeting individual needs, interests and aspirations? How does specialist status contribute?

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, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report. Evidence was gathered from documentation, assessment data, meetings with key staff, governors, students and a sample of lesson observations.

Description of the school

Cardinal Newman Catholic School is a popular, over-subscribed school serving a wide area in and around Luton. The attainment of students on entry is average but the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The percentage of students claiming free school meals is low in relation to national levels. A higher than average proportion of students are from families with minority ethnic groups but the percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low. The school is the only one with a sixth form in Luton. The school was awarded specialist school status in science in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Cardinal Newman Catholic School is a good school with many outstanding features. The care, guidance and support provided by staff at all levels contribute to the strong sense of community valued by individual students, their parents and carers. It is exemplified by effective team work by senior leaders and governors through to collaborative learning in the best lessons. It is underpinned by the clear vision for continuous improvement that is well informed by and communicated to all.

Students start at the school with average attainment, make good progress and reach standards in national tests and in GCSE examinations above national averages; achievement and standards are good. Provisional results for 2007 indicate that overall trends in students' performance continue to rise in all Key Stages. Almost all students achieve at least five or more qualifications at GCSE level and a very high proportion gain 5 A*-C, including English and mathematics. Science results were above the national average but slightly below specialist college targets. Most subjects achieved improvement in 2007 including those that have less consistent success such as modern foreign languages. Target setting for the school and for individual students is based on secure procedures in all subjects and goals are sufficiently challenging to promote further improvement. The school's inclusive approach ensures that students of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress. Results show that the progress of boys and students predicted with borderline grades accelerated following a concerted effort to identify and address the underachievement of particular groups of students.

The personal development and well-being of learners overall is outstanding. The impact of learning and academic mentoring is significant because all staff and many students contribute; role models are plentiful. Students appear well prepared for their future economic well-being because they develop qualities of value in the workplace; good attendance and listening, cooperative and supportive relationships, trust and responsibility, secure literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. Students have earned a good reputation through their positive attitude when on work experience and when visiting local colleges for vocational courses. Most students respond positively to behaviour policies and expectations of homework but a small minority remain dependent on direction at the expense of showing initiative. However, when lessons heighten active participation students' self-discipline, enjoyment and enterprise are evident.

The quality of teaching is good overall. School monitoring records indicate an increase in the proportion of outstanding teaching since the last inspection. The impact of professional development is significant. New teachers to the school receive comprehensive support differentiated to their needs. Established teachers are able to select from a menu of 'craft of the classroom' activities, closely matched to the expectations made of them to deliver individual, departmental or school improvement priorities. For example, the school is aware of the need to develop students' independence; leading teachers' lessons in school contain challenges for students to think for themselves, take initiative in paired or group work or demonstrate their understanding to others. The impact of the national secondary strategy is also evident; interesting starter activities get students quickly and enthusiastically engaged in the best lessons. Whilst teaching remains variable across the whole school, qualities of importance to the school's vision for improvement are identified accurately and promoted regularly.

The school's specialist status contributes well to partnership links with other schools and educational settings. For example, work with primary schools has strengthened the continuity of the curriculum in science from Year 5. Opportunities to sustain learning at secondary school have increased through focused activities such as the 'Mission to Mars' day. Significant additions to the curriculum have broadened the range of opportunities open to students with differing needs, interests and aspirations in addition to a strong core of provision. The curriculum is enriched with a typical range of events, visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities but some students have experienced only a few of these due to financial constraints used to remove the school's deficit. Nevertheless, the curriculum overall is outstanding due to judicious use of school and local provision. Efficient use of resources leading to continuous improvement in performance indicates that the school gives good value for money.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding because the extensive range of strategies used in school are well integrated with external agencies to diagnose and resolve students' individual needs. Frequent monitoring of students' progress in subjects is supplemented by innovative assessment and tracking of students' learning skills across subjects. This contributes to a convincing picture of a large school in which individual students are known and valued and if appropriate, supported through additional resources such as the student progress centre. Not all parents are convinced that the new system of meeting with mentors to overview progress with students is successful. However, where particular teachers and subjects have embedded new approaches and talk authoritatively about students as learners as a whole, parents are appreciative and feel able to support students out of school.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection and its strong leadership team places it in an excellent position to improve further. For example, improvements in modern foreign languages have significantly increased the proportion of students achieving higher grades and in art and design the expertise of an advanced skills teacher (AST) has been deployed to improve provision and outcomes. Self-evaluation is now used more consistently across the school, supported by rigorous monitoring and evaluation of performance matched with excellent professional development opportunities. The need to develop higher level thinking skills in the sixth form has been interpreted as an opportunity to balance good examination results with more challenging, interesting and independent learning earlier on. Not all plans have yet achieved maximum impact but leadership and management is outstanding overall because at all levels staff are driven by a shared commitment to improvement and the principle that 'every child matters' is a reality at Cardinal Newman.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has an inclusive sixth form that successfully meets the needs of students with a wide range of ability and backgrounds, including some that join from other schools. Because it is the only school sixth form in Luton, some Cardinal Newman students pursue the wide opportunities in the area. However, a good proportion of students prefer the supportive approaches with which they are familiar. They also benefit from a good choice of curriculum options because effective collaboration exists between the school and local colleges. Students make good progress overall but it is better in vocational courses and in their second year. Average standards are achieved overall. Their personal development is good but the school is right to promote more independence in order to accelerate their progress at sixth form level. Strategies to ease transition into the sixth form whilst adding to the range and challenge of courses show good leadership and management but the full impact on students' study skills

require continued evaluation. Nevertheless, sixth formers make an active contribution to the school, show responsible attitudes towards other students and value the opportunity to work with respected teachers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Tackle remaining inconsistencies in teaching by continuing to focus on the depth of thinking, participation and progression of learners in the main school and sixth form.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	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	2
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	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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	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?	1	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	2
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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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, 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

14 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Cardinal Newman Catholic School, Luton LU2 7AE

Thank you for introducing us to your school during our recent inspection. We enjoyed the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you in lessons and through discussions. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in confirming what staff told us about the school. We agree that Cardinal Newman Catholic School is a good school with many outstanding features.

We particularly liked the following things about your school.

- You get outstanding care, guidance and support to help you achieve your best.
- Standards of work and examination results are good and rising.
- You contribute positively to the school as a community and value support.
- The school is very well led and managed by an outstanding team.
- There is a wide range of courses, preparing you well for the future.
- You enjoy teaching that makes learning interesting by getting you involved.
- Your parents are supportive of the school and many are keen to help you too.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Ensure that you enjoy learning and achieve well across all subjects by involving you actively in lessons, developing your depth of thinking and independence as you progress through the school.

We wish you success in working together to build on the school's reputation,

Ian Middleton HMI Susan Hartropp AI