

Our Lady's Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119779
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313420
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Williams HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	908
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Rydeard
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Ranson
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2004
School address	St Anthony's Drive Fulwood Preston Lancashire PR2 3SQ
Telephone number	01772 326900
Fax number	01772 760212

Age group	11-16
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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

Our Lady's Catholic High School is of average size. It has held specialist status for mathematics and computing since September 2005. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is below the average found in England. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below the national average, although it is about average for those with a statement of special educational need. The school has offered extended facilities, including breakfast and after-school provision, since September 2006. It also holds Investors in People, Healthy Schools status and the Artsmark award. It is the north of England lead school for its virtual learning environment (VLE).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Outstanding care and support for students and very strong, effective leadership from the headteacher lie at the heart of this good and improving school. Areas of weakness identified by the previous inspection have all been resolved. It uses its specialisms well, not least in the growth of the VLE within the school and wider community. These features, along with current developments, demonstrate the school's good capacity to make further improvements. It provides good value for money.

The school lives out its Catholic Christian faith well. Students' spiritual and moral development is outstanding, so too is their contribution to the community. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. These, along with improvements seen in teaching, so that the large majority of it is good or better, mean that students make good progress in their learning and attain above average standards. They are supported very well during their time in school. Support for vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is excellent. Since the previous inspection good work has been undertaken to develop systems for assessing and tracking students' progress and to ensure the overall quality of teaching is good. The school has been successful in these areas but there is no hint of complacency. Leaders appreciate the need to use its existing systems to improve further the rate of students' progress, and to build on the improvements made in teaching to ensure that lessons meet the needs of all learners.

Students' good progress in their learning and personal development is enhanced by the good quality curriculum that is offered. Since the previous inspection there have been significant improvements in information and communication technology (ICT) provision. The VLE offers opportunities to extend school work at home. Further strengths include modern foreign language provision and the outstanding range of curriculum enrichment activities to support learning. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is very good and there are an impressive number of residential trips, which help to build up students' confidence and social skills.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school well and provides good, strong and clear direction. He is supported well by senior leaders. Leadership is being devolved across the school effectively. Good developments have taken place to ensure self-evaluation is embedded across the school. However, the use of the information varies between departments. Nonetheless, staff are responding well to the challenges laid before them. Together with the governors, they share the headteacher's passion for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make use of existing systems for assessment and tracking to improve further the rate of students' progress.
- Build on the improvements in teaching to ensure that every lesson meets the needs of all learners.
- Strengthen further the good developments in departmental self-evaluation and improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students joining the school have standards at age 11 that are typical of those found nationally. Standards in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are above average. This represents good progress during their first three years at the school. Very high standards are attained in

mathematics, with more able students showing particularly strong achievement. Weaker students make good headway in English.

Students continue to make good progress in Key Stage 4. Standards at GCSE are above average. In 2007, two-thirds of students gained at least five passes at grade C or above. When English and mathematics are included in the five, the figure is 56% and is 10% higher than the national figure. Many subjects are very successful, including art, physical education and expressive arts. There is strong progress in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Success in a few subjects in 2007, science for example, was not as high as it should have been.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make at least as much progress as others. Throughout the school boys do well. Students make good progress because teaching is much improved since the previous inspection. The high quality support, including that through the VLE, also enables students to make good progress in their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' outcomes in this area are good, overall. Particularly strong attributes are students' spiritual and moral development, both of which are outstanding. Their levels of spirituality are enhanced by, for example, retreats to Castlerigg. They care for each other and their community well. They are happy to be students at Our Lady's. This is seen in their good attendance and pride in their uniform. 'When you put on the uniform, you are putting on the school' was one comment made. They learn about cultures other than their own through subjects such as art, religious education and drama. They have regular opportunities to provide service to the school community, for example, acting as 'buddies' when in Year 11 to help Year 7 students settle into the routines of a new school, assisting office staff with reception duties and preparing worship for Wednesday Mass. They also work with primary school children, for example, training them to be 'play leaders'. They carry out these duties diligently and, in the case of preparing worship, do so prayerfully and with due solemnity.

Since the previous inspection behaviour has improved. It is good, overall and exclusion rates have declined markedly. Students report that bullying is not a major issue and, if it does occur, it is always dealt with swiftly and effectively. The most impressive school council has played a significant role in writing the anti-bullying policy. The school council, and the developing year councils, have also been instrumental in providing safe areas to congregate, for example, a space for Year 7, and have been involved in creating new menus for lunchtime. As a result, students have good attitudes to keeping healthy that are enhanced by the very good participation rates in extra-curricular activities. Good progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT ensure they develop well the skills to promote economic well-being. Excellent contributions are made to the wider community. For example, students raised over £5000 for charitable causes over the last year. Overall, students' contribution to the community at school and further afield is outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

At the last inspection teaching was satisfactory but with elements that were less so. Good improvements mean this is no longer the case. There is no teaching in the school that is less

than satisfactory. The large majority is good and some is outstanding. As a result, students make good progress in their learning and attain above average standards, overall. Nonetheless, the school is not complacent. It is aware that, in a few lessons, differing students' needs are not always met, the usual good questioning techniques used by teachers that enable students to explain their answers is not always a feature, and the usually helpful marking and in-class assessment of students' work is not always consistent.

Typically lessons are planned well. Very good relationships exist in the vast majority of lessons. Students usually work hard and their books indicate that they take pride in their work. In the best lessons teachers have high expectations and there is a brisk pace and appropriate challenge. Students respond very well in these lessons and make rapid progress. There are good opportunities for students to work independently and the impressive VLE enables them to continue this at home. These are reflections of the good improvement in teaching since the previous inspection.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. It meets the needs of students well. Since the previous inspection there have been significant improvements in ICT provision. Modern foreign language provision is a strength. All students learn French and Spanish in Years 8 and 9 and, as a result, more are now choosing to study a foreign language in Years 10 and 11. The flexible option pattern at Key Stage 4 enables students to follow their strengths and interests while maintaining a well-balanced academic curriculum. The school has introduced two Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses: science and health and social care, and is seeking to develop business links to enrich these. About one fifth of students follow National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 1 practical courses at a local further education (FE) college on one half-day a week. All students follow a programme that includes personal, social and health education, citizenship and careers guidance. However, leaders are aware that work related learning does not currently include enterprise activities for all students.

There is an outstanding range of curriculum enrichment activities to support learning. These include courses in study skills in Years 7 and 11, faith and justice days in Year 9, revision classes in Years 9 and 11 and homework clubs. The study support provided on-line via the school's very popular VLE offers exciting opportunities to extend school work at home. The provision for able and talented students includes additional GCSEs in German and additional mathematics plus challenge days at a local FE college and university. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is very good and highly valued by students. These include an outstanding range of activities in both sport and performing arts. The school's sports teams enjoy a high degree of success, as does the Young Enterprise group. There are an impressive number of residential trips, which help to build up students' confidence and social skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school cares deeply for its students. It is outstanding in this respect. Students and parents appreciate this level of care very much. Thorough systems are in place to ensure students are kept safe. Staff have up-to-date training in child protection procedures. Students and parents report that staff are very approachable. Students in Years 10 and 11 speak very positively about how teachers treat them as adults.

Overall guidance provided to students is good. Excellent induction procedures, including the extension of the VLE into local primary schools, ensure the transfer from Year 6 to Year 7 is smooth. Students are given very helpful advice regarding option choices in Year 9 and post-16 opportunities in Year 11. Students' progress is tracked well, particularly in mathematics and ICT, but although the school's systems are good they do not always pinpoint with precision exactly what individuals must do to ensure their continual improvement.

Support for students is outstanding. 'No matter what your ability is, there is always support for you' is a comment typical of many. Students also report that the VLE supports them well because they can access it readily and receive regular and quick feedback. Support for vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is excellent. Very good strategies are in place to ensure such students make at least as good progress in their learning as others. The dramatic reduction in the rate of exclusions is the result of carefully planned programmes of support and very clear guidance to students about what is and is not acceptable behaviour.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership of the headteacher is very strong and effective. He is passionate about improving the school. Under his leadership the school, since the previous inspection, has done just that. Other senior leaders and managers in the school share his vision and are working well together to secure and sustain further improvement. They know the strengths of the school and which areas need to be developed. Good systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school which inform planning for improvement. However, despite good developments, the use of this information varies between departments. Leadership is being successfully devolved throughout the school and staff are responding positively to the challenge of their developing roles.

Targets set by the school are appropriate and challenging. Students have every opportunity to succeed at the school. The specialist status has improved the level of resources at the school. The VLE is held as an example of good practice; indeed the school is the lead school for the north of England in this exciting initiative. Governance is good. Governors provide good challenge to the school. This has been an improvement since the previous inspection. The governors have worked diligently with leaders to improve the learning environment and correctly prioritise expenditure. Overall, the capacity to improve is good.

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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
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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
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

30 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Our Lady's Catholic High School, Lancashire, PR2 3SQ

'I want the school to do well during the inspection even though I'm in Year 11 and it won't affect me. I love this school.' This is what one member of your school council, reflecting the views of a great many of you, said to one of my colleague inspectors when we visited Our Lady's in November. Well, it has! Your school is a good school and you are right to be proud of it. Well done to you all!

First of all thank you for being so welcoming to the inspection team, and for taking the time to speak to us. We were impressed with how clearly you articulated your thoughts about the school.

Second, I want to highlight some key strengths of your school. We are pleased with the progress you make in your learning. We judge this to be good and this helps you to attain above average standards in your Key Stage 3 tests and your GCSEs. You do so well because the quality of teaching is good and staff support you very well during your time in school. You are provided with lots of opportunities to succeed. Your behaviour is good and we could see your positive attitudes. The curriculum the school provides is good. We could see the improvements in the provision of ICT and how much you appreciate the VLE. Several of you in Year 11 told me how helpful the VLE is in supporting you in your revision. Best wishes for your 'mocks', by the way! Outstanding features of your school include your contribution to the school and wider community and the care and support adults provide. Of course, none of this happens by chance. It happens because your school is led and managed well. The headteacher has a vision and passion for improvement and we could see that others share this too.

Third, I want to outline what your school can do to make further improvements. That said, I want you to appreciate these are not weakness; if you look at the grades in the report we have judged nothing to be less than good. What we believe the school has to do, is build upon the systems and developments in place to make sure all lessons meet your needs, you make further strides in your progress and that departments use the information they gain from their evaluations to make the whole school even better.

Finally, I want to thank you again for playing such a big part in the inspection. The team and I encourage you all to continue to give of your best and work with the school in its shared passion and vision for improvement.

Every blessing for the future

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector