

Loreto Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106378
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	324388
Inspection dates	15–16 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1014
Sixth form	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr G Brown
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Beever
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2005
School address	Dunham Road Altrincham Cheshire WA14 4AH
Telephone number	0161 928 3703
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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

This voluntary-aided selective grammar school is for girls in the top 50% of the ability range in and beyond Trafford. It has a distinctive religious ethos. Approximately 98% of students are baptised Catholics. The school has grown in recent years. Very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very few are known to be eligible for free school meals. Nine per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds, though very few have a first language other than English. The school is designated as a specialist science and mathematics college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstandingly effective school. It has improved substantially since the last inspection and has demonstrated excellent capacity to develop further. Whilst being fully aware of the school's current strengths, the governors and managers of the school are far from complacent. They have laudable ambitions for further improvement, for example, to the school's accommodation.

The school provides an excellent atmosphere in which the girls are challenged to think and learn. It enables students to develop as confident individuals and as considerate members of the school community, and to be very well prepared for their future lives. It also contributes significantly to their excellent standards of attainment and capacity to understand the views of others and the importance of community cohesion. It is rooted in the school's deeply embedded Catholic ethos within which the students' spiritual and moral development is profoundly nurtured. Students receive highly personalised care, guidance and support. A very wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities contributes considerably to students' development. Those who are talented in, for example, music or sport, are able to develop their performance to impressively high levels. The students' enjoyment is palpable. This is supported by excellent behaviour and application and very high attendance. Parental satisfaction is very high.

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding throughout the school, as is the quality of the teaching. Staff have excellent subject expertise. They are enthusiastic and many were observed giving inspirational lessons. Course planning is very thorough and the curriculum is carefully managed, for example, to enable older students to follow the courses in which they are interested. The school's specialist status in science and mathematics has been valuable in supporting the school's strengthening of the curriculum in these subjects. Students with specific learning needs are sensitively and effectively catered for and this is helped by the civilised nature of the school and the high levels of mutual respect between students and staff. Staff training has effectively supported curriculum development and improvements in areas such as assessment. Marking is thorough and staff make effective use of targets to ensure that students know how to proceed. They have a clear understanding of the standards students are attaining.

Financial management is highly effective. Administration is meticulous and the school runs very smoothly. The premises are very well managed though some classrooms are cramped causing discomfort for both students and staff.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision in the sixth form is outstanding. Very good transition arrangements are in place to help students settle into the pace of advanced studies. Students in Year 11 receive good guidance as to the extensive range of courses available and every effort is made to accommodate their choices.

Girls in the sixth form enjoy coming to school. They say that it is a happy community where relationships are built on mutual consideration and respect. Attendance is well above the national average. The outstanding procedures for care, support and guidance ensure that very few students fail to complete their course and that progression rates to higher education are consistently excellent.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. The assistant headteacher and the two year coordinators set challenging targets, monitor students' progress and take positive steps to identify and remedy any underachievement. These steps, together with high quality lessons, ensure that girls make good progress and achieve standards that are well above national averages. Sixth form provision gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to seek ways to overcome the cramped conditions in some classrooms, as identified in the previous report.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement overall is outstanding. Girls enter the school in Year 7 having attained standards well above average at their primary schools. They reach very high standards in National Curriculum tests in Year 9, GCSE examinations and, ultimately, at AS and A level. Overall, progress is excellent, including that of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

In 2007, results at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the national averages. Inspection evidence shows that standards have risen this year and that results in mathematics, which is one of the school's specialisms, are outstanding. This level of achievement continues as girls move through Years 10 and 11. GCSE results have consistently been well above average, the 2008 provisional results being better than those of 2007. The proportion of top grades in English is very high with over 80% of girls obtaining grade A or A*. In 2008, a further outstanding feature was the high number of girls obtaining a total of 10 passes at grade A or A*. The achievement of Sixth Form girls is also outstanding. Students maintain their previous standards and leave with results that are again well above national averages. The school is justifiably proud of the fact that a record 75% of A level passes in 2008 were at grade A or B, comfortably beating the school target.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The vast majority of students enjoy school. Attendance is consistently well above the national average. Behaviour is excellent in lessons and around school.

The school has a positive, caring ethos which fosters excellent relationships. This is extended to the local community through the extensive work carried out by students. An example is the charity appeal week, raising awareness of the NSPCC and parish work. Students make the most of the opportunities to take on responsibilities. For example, sixth formers act as mentors for students in Year 9 and there is considerable involvement with local primary schools. Such involvement develops communication and leadership skills extremely well. Knowledge of the wider world is enhanced by fund raising activities and volunteer work in the global community, for example, in the link with the Loreto school in Kolkata.

The school provides a secure environment. Students cope sensibly with the congestion experienced in some narrow corridors. They feel safe in school and are confident that any problems will be dealt with quickly and effectively. The girls are aware of the importance of

healthy lifestyles and demonstrate this through their enjoyment of the range of high quality meals on offer, including those from different cultural backgrounds. Students benefit from participation in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school accurately judges the quality of teaching and learning to be outstanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, lessons are very well planned and learning is focused on catering well for the needs of individual students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, engagement in the challenging and interesting activities for all is paramount and achieved. Regular communication promotes excellent home-school relationships which helps students to achieve as well as they do.

Students take full advantage of the opportunities for independent learning and collaborative work during lessons. They are highly attentive, concentrate well and have excellent attitudes to their work. This, and the brisk pace in interesting lessons, promotes outstanding learning. Excellent relationships between staff and students enhance learning. Classroom management is consistently good and behaviour is excellent. Students tell us they enjoy their lessons. Their work is marked regularly and consistently and there is often clear guidance on how to improve further. They know what is required of them and are able to comment perceptively on the quality of their work. Accurate assessments made during the term enable both teachers and students to agree on achievable challenging targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is diligently managed and provides an outstanding range of opportunities for all students. All statutory requirements are met and the school covers in depth the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, together with the subjects of the National Curriculum with 11-16 year olds. It also carefully plans provision to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, their personal and health education and their capacity to contribute to various community activities. The exceptionally wide range of high quality and popular extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including sports, music, external visits, careers guidance and work experience, effectively promote high standards of attainment and levels of motivation. Students and parents are rightly appreciative of the opportunities provided, including participation in the school's vibrant community life, both within and beyond its walls.

At various times in students' school careers, the school surveys their interests and adjusts the curriculum to meet their changing needs: this is particularly effective in the sixth form whose range of courses is very wide and caters well for the diverse interests of the large cohort. As a result of the school's continuing review and development of the curriculum, it has improved well since the last inspection.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school considers this aspect to be outstanding and inspectors agree. All statutory requirements for the safeguarding of students are met. Attendance rates are very high, and

effective measures are taken if a student's attendance becomes irregular. Vulnerable students are helped to make progress through the school's support systems and outside agencies. Parents appreciate the high level of care and support their daughters have received throughout their time at the school. The school makes an outstanding contribution to social cohesion through its very caring ethos and the involvement of students in the wider community. A system of tracking students enables those not making sufficient progress to be identified quickly and supported. Students know their targets, such as GCSE and A level grades and what they have to do to attain them. Arrangements for the transition of pupils from primary schools to Year 7, and the progression of students through the school are very thorough and support them in making choices about their studies and possible careers. The school promotes students' health and safety very effectively, for example, in managing their regular journey from the school to the sport grounds some 300 metres away. In the sixth form, outstanding academic guidance is given to students, which contributes to the high retention and university entrance rates.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school is led and managed outstandingly well. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and has developed highly effective management systems. These include a rigorous cycle of school planning, firmly rooted in a clear vision to develop the provision for students. Very strong senior and middle leadership teams cooperate to ensure that planning is strengthened by informed and specialist contributions. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation are rigorous. When problems are identified effective steps are quickly taken to solve them. Performance management is excellent.

Consultation with parents is regular and thorough. Careful attention is paid to financial management, both for development and for day-to-day running of the school and ensures good value for money. Thrifty use has been made of funds, including that gained from the school's specialist science and mathematics status, to improve the building. The premises are very well maintained and provide an excellent ambience for learning, though some classrooms are cramped and some subject departments have widely dispersed specialist classrooms. The vast majority of parents are deeply appreciative of the school's provision and how well it communicates with them, though there is justifiable concern about lack of space on site for sports and physical exercise. Governance is outstandingly effective. The experienced governing body has an accurate picture of school performance. It co-operates well with the local authority and it provides the school with constructive support and rigorous challenge.

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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?	1	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
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 learners' needs?	1	1
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Loreto Grammar School, Altrincham, WA14 4AH

After our visit to your school I would like to tell you of our findings.

- Loreto is an outstanding school.
- You are all given a first class education through the strong academic curriculum and the wide range of enrichment activities.
- This is supported by excellent care, guidance and support. You are given clear and helpful advice on your studies and preparation for your future lives.
- The school's strong Catholic ethos gives you excellent opportunities to develop both spiritually and morally.
- Teaching is outstanding and teachers have clear subject expertise.
- You take every advantage of this teaching which, together with your excellent behaviour, concentration and attendance, enables you to learn very well and make good progress.
- The management and governance of the school are outstanding. Though the school is already excellent, managers and governors are always looking for ways to improve it further.

Although the school is excellent overall, we believe one improvement is needed.

- Continue to seek ways to overcome the cramped conditions in some classrooms.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you well for your future studies and activities at Loreto.