

Notre Dame Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107159
Local Authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	324539
Inspection date	18 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Heather Barnett 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1356
Sixth form	345
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Peter J Cullen
Headteacher	Mr J M Conway
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2005
School address	Fulwood Road Sheffield South Yorkshire S10 3BT
Telephone number	0114 230 2536
Fax number	0114 230 8833

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and sixth form and investigated the following issues; students' achievement and standards, their personal development and well-being, the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum, and leadership and management, focusing on the use of data and target setting. This was done by gathering evidence from observing lessons, scrutinising school documentation and questionnaires completed by parents, and by talking with students, teachers, school managers and the headteacher. 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.

Description of the school

Notre Dame is a larger than average mixed Catholic high school. The percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is lower than the average nationally. The percentage of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, although this varies over year groups. The school has an integrated resource for students with physical disabilities. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is lower than average. The numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is average. The students attending the school come from all parts of the city, covering areas of advantage and disadvantage. The school has achieved many awards. It was designated a specialist college for technology in 1995 and awarded humanities and Leading Edge status in 2005.

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 Catholic High School is an outstanding school. It provides its students with an excellent education and prepares them very well for the next stage in their life and career. They feel safe in school and enjoy all aspects of school life. Students thrive in an atmosphere where each is cherished as an individual, and all are challenged and supported to achieve their best. All students make very good progress, consistently, throughout the school. Very high levels of progress have been seen at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 over many years. In 2007 the school was placed in the top 15% for progress over Key Stage 3, the top 7% for progress over Key Stage 4 and the top 9% for overall progress from the beginning of Key Stage 3 to the end of Key Stage 4.

Students enter the school having achieved standards only slightly above average but by the end of Key Stage 3 standards are significantly above average, and have been so for many years. This is true overall and separately for English, mathematics and science. Standards and achievement in science are particularly strong and progress in this subject placed the school in the top 5% in 2007. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are also significantly above average, with 77% of students achieving five or more GCSEs or equivalent qualifications at grades A* to C compared to a national figure of 60%. When mathematics and English are included the figure for the school is 70%, compared to 46% nationally for 2007. All groups of students in the school make the same very good progress, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school has well organised systems for setting targets for students and for monitoring progress. These ensure that any underachievement is picked up very early on so that effective intervention strategies can be put in place. These are tailored to meet the needs of each individual or situation, which support their positive impact. Results for 2008 and school tracking data for the current school population show that all years are on track for continuing successful trends.

Throughout the school relationships are exemplary so that students and parents have total confidence in the great rarity of bullying, and the school's ability to deal with any situation quickly and effectively. High levels of tolerance and respect are evident in the way students react to each other, to staff, and to visitors. Students' enjoyment is seen in both the consistently high level of attendance and the extremely rare use of exclusion. They are genuinely appreciative of the way the large site has been adapted to their needs. They use it exceptionally well socially, are diligent about litter and outstandingly sensible and prompt in movement between lessons. They are learning to live healthily because of their involvement in canteen choices and the extensive and highly popular range of sporting activities available.

The majority show an impressive maturity to lessons and school life in general. Respect for faith, belief and personal opinion are strong. These are seen in the way students mix with and listen carefully to one another. Overall behaviour is excellent and other students frown on any occasional misbehaviour. However, very occasionally, the end of some lessons and some use of form time allows these high standards to drift. Students are articulate and feel that their views are welcomed and considered by the school. Students readily embrace opportunities to serve the school and the community. High standards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), added to the excellent teamwork skills the school engenders, prepare them extremely well for future education and work.

Teaching and learning are outstanding because of the consistently high quality of many lessons. This has come about because of the strong determination teachers have to do the best for their students. Planning, some of which was found wanting at the time of the last inspection, is detailed. Teachers are expert at explaining the purpose and context of a lesson. Most teachers are very adept at using new technology appropriately. The majority of lessons see confident and knowledgeable teachers sharing their enthusiasm for learning with students. As a result, relationships are excellent and there is a genuine sense of exploration and curiosity in the classroom: many students talk of the 'excitement' of many lessons.

Homework and research are regular and challenging, and students appreciate the great detail of marking and advice given them. A strength is the skill with which teachers respond to students' varying needs and abilities whilst still maintaining the pace and challenge which enables all groups to make very good progress, and many to achieve in excellent fashion.

The curriculum is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the students and to keep pace with new developments. Every subject is reviewed each year to see if improvements are needed or a replacement course would be more appropriate. As in all areas there is a focus on the individual and how best adaptations can be made to suit all learners. At Key Stage 4 in particular, staff and students are involved in detailed discussions as to which subjects will be best for them. There is a broad range of options, including the vocational opportunities, and the 'world of work' programme. Specialist status has been used to excellent effect to drive forward innovation in all areas. The school has developed very well in the area of ICT and is offering the new diploma in ICT from this September. Fast track options are offered in a number of subjects.

Alternative curriculum days have been developed to enhance aspects of the curriculum, such as citizenship and 'healthy lifestyle' days, and student views have helped shape their content and structure. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, which are very popular with the students and strongly support their enjoyment and achievement. Good practice is shared very well within the school and with many external partners.

Leadership and management are excellent. Staff work very well together and are strongly focused on doing what is best for every student in the school. Self-evaluation is deeply embedded and involves staff at every level. Managers have a very clear view of every area of the school, including strengths and areas for improvement. Intervention strategies are highly effective and staff are very adept at using data to monitor initiatives and judge their impact. Aspirational targets are used very well for both students and managers. There is a culture of challenge but also of support. Specialist status has been used to very good effect, not just in improving resources and the specialist areas, but also in developing an innovative approach to all aspects of school life, for example the innovation bursaries. Links with partners are wide ranging and very beneficial to the students and the school as a whole. Parents are very supportive of the school and their views are sought, for example in the whole school review in 2008. The school is developing feedback structures for parents, such as the e-portal, to ensure all are aware of the impact of their input. The school provides excellent value for money and is extremely well placed to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form. Students do very well in their studies, making better progress than expected from their prior attainment at GCSE in most subjects. The school is aware of those areas where progress is not as strong as it could be, and is working hard on improvements.

The standards reached by students in their studies are very high. They have been consistently above national rates for a number of years and for a number of indicators such as the overall pass rate and for the achievement of high grades. Students' personal development is very good. They enjoy taking part in many fundraising activities, having fun charities, and in working with younger students in the school. Teaching and learning are excellent. Students particularly like the variety of activities in each session and the improved use of technology. For example if a student misses a lesson they can download the powerpoint presentation from the session from the school's intranet.

The curriculum covers a wide range of GCE A and AS level courses, vocational courses and re-sit provision. There is also a core religious studies course and sports activities. Aspects of the curriculum are being developed further to ensure it continues to meet the needs of all individuals. Students are very appreciative of the wide range of trips and visits they go on, ranging from Liverpool to China to Iceland to Vietnam. They feel very well cared for and the fortnightly reviews are very helpful in keeping them on track with their studies. Leadership and management are very well organised. Managers are aware of the strengths of the sixth form and have already put plans in place to support areas where they feel improvements can be made.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the progress made by students in a small minority of subjects in the 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?	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**

Thank you for all of the help you gave to us when we were at your school. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing the work you were doing. As well as looking at your work we read the questionnaires completed by your parents; they were most helpful.

We think that your school is providing you with an excellent education. You are making very good progress, in the main school and the sixth form, and reaching very high standards in your studies. Your personal development is very good, you enjoy coming to school, feel safe and have a great understanding of the need for a healthy lifestyle. Many of you enjoy making a positive contribution to the life of the school through the school council, and the community, such as organising charity events. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Both you and your teachers really enjoy lessons and are keen to explore topics and develop ideas. The curriculum is excellent. There are lots of choices for you and lots of help for you to decide what subjects to take. The school looks after you well and provides you with the skills you need to do very well when you leave. The leaders and managers of the school know exactly what is going on and the things the school can do to be even better. The one thing we have asked them to do is:

- improve the progress made by students in a small minority of subjects in the sixth form.

Your school has remained at the same high levels seen at the last inspection and with your support can continue to make excellent progress in the future.