

Loreto College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117558
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326648
Inspection date	3 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Seath 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	834
Sixth form	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Keiley
Headteacher	Mrs Maire Lynch
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2006
School address	Hatfield Road St. Albans Hertfordshire AL1 3RQ
Telephone number	01727 856206
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following areas in detail: achievements and standards, teaching and learning, and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from a number of sources including lesson observations, interviews with students and staff, examination of students' work and school documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but no evidence was found 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

This is a smaller-than-average Catholic Girls School. It has had specialist humanities status since 2005 and is oversubscribed. The catchment area compares favourably to the socio-economic national picture. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is larger than average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is small. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than that expected nationally. Prior attainment on entry is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Loreto College is an outstanding school with no significant weaknesses. It serves its students very well and almost all are successful either in progressing to further or higher education or to employment. This success is reflected in the high levels of positive and supportive responses in parental questionnaires. The school is very well regarded within the community that it serves. Excellent care, guidance and support, teaching which is at least good and an outstanding curriculum combine to produce an exceptional ethos of learning within the school. Because of consistently high standards and progress, rigorous self-evaluation and well-targeted actions for improvement, the school has demonstrated outstanding capacity to improve.

Achievement and standards are outstanding. Students enter the school with higher than average prior attainment. They make excellent progress as they move through the school and almost all attain standards that have been consistently well above national averages for the last few years. Around 90% of students gain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C; well above the national average. The school's own data indicate that this could increase further in this year's examinations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve in line with their peers because of the outstanding care, guidance and support that they receive. Students from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as others. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades A* and A is much larger than the national average, and is exceptional in some subjects. For example around half of students did so in religious studies, history, geography, drama, and art and design.

The care, guidance and support that students receive is outstanding, and results in outstanding personal development and well-being. Pastoral and tutorial care is excellent. A comprehensive network of services provides very effective support for those students who need it. Transition from feeder schools is very good, and students are made to feel welcome very quickly. Target setting for individual students is effective, and most have a clear idea about how they can improve. Child protection arrangements meet requirements. Health and safety is promoted very well through the newly developed personal, social and health education sessions. Students at risk of underachieving are quickly identified and support is put in place. Attendance is good, and the number of exclusions is very low indeed. Students benefit from an outstanding curriculum which is broad, balanced, and very successfully enables achievement. Equality of opportunity is well embedded in all that the school does. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities are outstanding and provision for gifted and talented students is increasingly well developed.

Teaching is at least good. In a significant minority of classes it is outstanding. In most classes the ethos of the school enables students to demonstrate outstanding learning and progress. Students participate keenly and discussions are stimulating and interesting. Lessons are well planned to cater for the needs of all, though teachers are not afraid to deviate from plans if opportunities present themselves. Resources are used well, and students work independently and effectively. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Students have a good understanding of their progress and most know what they need to do to improve. Assessment and the marking of written work are generally good, though not always consistently applied between subject areas. A well-developed literacy strategy means that teachers take opportunities to develop these skills across all subjects. However in some classes opportunities to correct spelling and grammar are missed. Students appreciate the effective work of learning support assistants.

Students are well-motivated and articulate. Their behaviour is exemplary. The school has high expectations, and students are clear about their role in this. Bullying and racist incidents are rare. Students feel safe and have a good understanding of right and wrong. Most have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, which is confirmed by the high rates of participation in sports and extra-curricular activities. Parents confirm that students enjoy their time at school. Students make excellent contributions to the community in which they live. A rich and varied school life ensures that community cohesion is outstanding within the school, the wider community and beyond. Students have a good understanding of the world around them and their rights and responsibilities within it. They are well prepared for future economic well-being.

Leadership and management are outstanding because they have led to students attaining consistently high standards and demonstrating exceptional progress. The headteacher provides clear and purposeful leadership and has the able support of staff and her senior management team. Teachers feel well supported and communications within the school are good. Good practice is celebrated and disseminated well. The school's lesson observation programme is exemplary and as a consequence it has an excellent understanding of its own teaching and learning. Self-evaluations are accurate and sufficiently self-critical. They involve staff at all levels. Resulting action planning is good, although actions do not always have clear deadlines and are not always ascribed to individuals. The school sets itself challenging targets which are usually met, and in some cases exceeded. Students have had significant benefit from the school's specialism which has successfully permeated school life. Access to and use of management information has improved since the last inspection, particularly for monitoring student progress. The school meets requirements for child protection and race relations. Value for money is outstanding.

Governors fulfil their role outstandingly well. They bring a good range of experience and skills to their role. They are well informed about the school and challenge the headteacher well. They hold managers and staff to account well for their performance and have supported the school effectively so that high standards have been consistently maintained.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

At the time of inspection there were no sixth form classes and very few sixth form students present in the school. No evidence was found to indicate that the school's self-evaluation of the sixth form was not correct.

The school sixth form is part of a consortium arrangement with nearby schools. The effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding because almost all students attain very high standards and make excellent progress. All who wish to progress to university, mostly to their first choice institution. Pass rates are very high, although with some variability between individual subjects in the proportion of students who gain the highest grades A and B. Retention in the sixth form is excellent. The outstanding curriculum offers a wide range of A- and AS-level subjects with very good tutorial and induction provision so that students have the relevant study skills on entry. The sixth form is very well managed, and highly regarded both by students and parents. To its credit, the school does not adhere to a strict sixth form admissions policy, but remains flexible with its entrance requirements. A minority of students join the sixth form from other schools. It is an inclusive sixth form that serves its students very well. Good vocational provision is offered, with plans to expand this further. Sixth formers are excellent role models for the rest of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Address differences in performance in the sixth form so that all provision is equally successful.
- Ensure consistent implementation of the school's literacy and assessment policies.

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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	2
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.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	IE 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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	IE 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

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**

4 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Loreto College, St Albans, AL1 3RQ

As you will know, I visited your school yesterday. I called in to many of your classes, talked with some of you, and met many of your teachers. I enjoyed my time at your school because your behaviour was exemplary and I would like to thank you for that. Your school has many strengths and one of them is you.

Your school is an outstanding one and I found many very strong features. You are well taught, exceptionally well cared for and you benefit from a very comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities. I was pleased to receive so many questionnaires from your parents which confirmed this, although a small number felt that communications between school and home could be improved.

The strongest feature of your school is the learning which you demonstrate. In class, you apply yourself exceptionally well to the work in hand and are always keen to contribute and discuss things. As a consequence you achieve high standards and make exceptional progress. The school has done a lot of work to make sure that it monitors your progress and sets targets for you. You can help with this by making sure that you understand what you need to do to improve further and by asking if you are unsure.

I have asked the school to work to make sure that all subjects in the sixth form meet the high standards of the most successful. The school will be working on this, and will need your help to be even more successful. The chances are that most of you will succeed at Loreto, and will go on to your first choice university or to employment.

I wish you all well and thank you for your contributions to the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath

Her Majesty's Inspector