

Our Lady's Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119798
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	339535
Inspection dates	23–24 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Sonya Williamson 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1035
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Wyn Lambert
Headteacher	Mr Brendan Conboy
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 35 lessons and an assembly, and held discussions with governors, staff, school improvement advisers and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at safeguarding documentation, students' work, teachers' planning, school improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings and 185 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How well teaching raises the achievement of students
- Whether the curriculum is appropriately matched to students' needs
- How well the school cares for, guides and supports students
- The impact of leaders' and managers' monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school
- The impact of developments in the sixth form.

Information about the school

The college is of average size. Average proportions of students are eligible for free school meals, and levels of deprivation and student mobility are also broadly average. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds or whose first language is not English are below those found nationally. Although the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average the number of students with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The college has specialist status for sport with science as a second target subject area. It holds the Sportsmark, Artsmark and Sport Partnership Mark. It is part of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and the Youth Sports Trust and holds National Healthy School Status (with Physical Activity and Ethos standard). Students are drawn from an area in which several schools operate selective admission policies.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Our Lady's Catholic College provides a sound education for its students. The large majority of students are happy to be here and feel safe: this view is endorsed by their parents and carers. The college has a significantly improved reputation in the local area that is particularly enhanced by the increasingly effective sixth form. The sixth form students have a very good work ethic, are good ambassadors for the college and very good role models for younger students. Students enjoy the good resources the school provides such as the sports hall, dance studio, climbing wall and improved outdoor areas. The college's specialist status clearly helps to enhance provision.

Although attainment is low overall this reflects students' below average attainment on entry and limited access to examination courses in previous years. There is variability in attainment between subjects. For example, attainment is better in science but is low in English and has recently declined in mathematics. Students' achievement, learning and progress are satisfactory overall; college data show signs of rapid improvement in the proportions of students on track to achieve challenging targets and the progress of students in the sixth form is very good.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. However, there is an increasing proportion of good teaching and a small proportion that is outstanding. Where weaknesses in teaching persist they are linked to teachers not engaging students' enthusiasm for learning, not planning sufficiently well to meet the different needs of students, as identified by assessment, and not being sufficiently aware of potential underachievement. The curriculum has been considerably strengthened. It better meets students' future education and career needs as a result of the improved range of accredited courses in Key Stage 4 and good developments in Key Stage 3 such as the nurture group. Students particularly enjoy the increased access to courses including dance, drama and information and communications technology.

The Catholic ethos of the school is one in which students are cherished and very well cared for. Students, especially those that may be vulnerable, are very well supported and they receive good guidance at times of transfer from one stage of education to the next. However, attendance is low, the number of exclusions from the school is high and systems to secure improvements in behaviour and attendance are not yet sufficiently sharp.

The governors, headteacher and senior leadership team are increasingly successful in embedding the vision for the college's continued development. There is good engagement with parents and partnership links are effective. Improvement plans have well chosen actions that are designed to bring about better outcomes for students but

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they focus mainly on changes to provision rather than improvements in outcomes. They do not make sufficiently explicit reference to what types of progress checks will be made and how frequently. The outcomes from evaluations are not sufficiently well shared with staff. The college shows satisfactory capacity to improve. This is demonstrated by the rapid improvement to the sixth form, the increasingly effective use of targets to drive improvement and the extent to which targets are met. In addition, the strategies used to develop increased strength in teaching and learning are bringing about secure improvements.

About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly in mathematics and English, and improve rates of progress
 - by ensuring that learning tasks set by teachers are better matched to students' levels of attainment
 - by developing teachers' understanding of best practice in how to assess learning
 - by ensuring that teachers are aware of any potential underachievement and what they need to do to address it
 - by engaging students' greater enthusiasm for learning
 - by sharpening strategies to reduce exclusions
 - Raise levels of attendance overall and reduce the number of students who are persistently absent
 - by evaluating which strategies used to reduce absence have been most successful in the past and embedding the use of these approaches
- Improve the quality of improvement planning
 - by ensuring that success criteria are linked to measurable outcomes for students
 - by extending the type and frequency of monitoring activities and making sure that staff understand what changes are expected as a result of evaluations

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students join the college with levels of attainment that are consistently below average. By the end of Year 11, overall standards are below average. However, this masks considerable variations, some of which are the consequence of the small number of accredited courses followed by a significant proportion of Year 11 students in previous years. In 2008, performance in the school's specialist subject, physical education, and its second target subject, science, was above average. In 2009 overall, the unvalidated

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GCSE results are lower than those for previous years but reflect the relatively low attainment on entry for this cohort. Standards by the end of Year 9 are rising slowly from below average overall to broadly in line with national expectations in 2009.

The achievement and enjoyment of students across the college, and their learning and progress, are satisfactory but good in the sixth form, having improved rapidly. There are no significant discrepancies in the achievement of different groups of students. The introduction of a broader range of courses and types of qualification at Key Stage 4 is swiftly improving students' motivation and their rates of progress. This is evident in the much improved results in a range of information and communication technology courses and the current rates of progress of students following the BTEC dance course. The college's own data show that there has been a marked improvement in students' overall rates of progress towards their challenging targets in Key Stage 4. For example, GCSE results in science for Year 10 students show a larger proportion of the cohort hitting their targets. The college met its challenging statutory targets for 2009.

Students move around the college sensibly and safely. In crowded, well-supervised areas such as the dining hall, they are orderly and courteous. Students feel very safe in college. Behaviour in lessons is more variable. When teaching is well matched to students' learning needs and activities are enjoyable and productive, students respond positively and conduct themselves well. However, in less stimulating lessons students quickly lose interest and low level misbehaviour occasionally interrupts learning. The college has worked hard to create an ethos where good behaviour is the norm. Nonetheless, rates of exclusion are high. The behaviour support unit and internal inclusion unit are going some way to support improved behaviour. The Fair Play Plan has helped to provide a consistent system of sanctions that is clearly understood by students although rewards are less evident.

Rates of attendance are low but improving. The college has worked hard and with some success to reduce the number of students who are persistently absent and to secure their safety. Students generally adopt healthy lifestyles. Their participation in and enthusiasm for sport are particularly good. There are satisfactory opportunities provided for students to contribute to the school and wider community. Opportunities for students to contribute their opinions are growing. Students' workplace skills are developed appropriately in relation to key skills generally and preparation for work interviews in the sixth form.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The college, in part through its chaplaincy service, provides an increasing range of opportunities such as retreats, which foster students' spiritual development effectively. On a regular basis collective worship makes a positive contribution to this, particularly when students participate in leading it. For instance during the inspection, students made a good contribution to worship on the theme of St Therese of Lisieux. Charitable fundraising helps students understand their social responsibilities beyond their immediate community. Students' cultural development is comparatively weaker, although the growing number of international students studying at the college provides a window onto other people's cultures and experiences.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Although teaching is satisfactory overall there is much that is good and a small proportion that is outstanding. Outstanding science, dance and drama lessons seen during the inspection exemplified the very best practice in motivating students to achieve their best. Relationships in classrooms are positive and teachers have good subject knowledge. The range of learning activities planned is varied although a minority of teachers talk for too long rather than encouraging interactive or independent learning that increases students' enthusiasm. Lessons are increasingly well structured through a focus on the use of learning objectives in teachers' professional development activities. However, teachers do not consistently plan assessment opportunities into their lessons or plan different tasks for different students based on their levels of attainment. In the best lessons, teachers are aware of students at risk of underachieving and make good interventions to support them. Support staff make good contributions to ensure the progress of vulnerable students or those new to the school but their inputs are not often specified in teachers' planning.

The curriculum has many strengths. It has developed well since the last inspection,

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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particularly with the introduction of vocational courses matched to students' interests. Adaptations made to the Key Stage 3 curriculum are effective. The emphasis on transferable learning skills is being rolled out across the year groups. Science, information and communication technology and recently introduced subjects make particularly strong contributions to the curriculum and are very well received by students. Extra-curricular provision and its take up are good. The sixth form curriculum meets students' needs very well.

The school fosters a welcoming learning environment where all feel valued and treated with respect. There is close attention to the needs of vulnerable students and those who, for whatever reason, may be going through a hard time. The school can demonstrate its careful and sensitive attention to students' welfare through liaison with families and support agencies where appropriate. Every consideration is given to easing the passage of those with personal difficulties as they join the school or move on to other things. Students say that they are well advised on choices that affect future career pathways.

Strategies to improve attendance are sound and are beginning to reduce the number of persistent absentees. Students say that the prizes offered for good attendance are enticing. However, the college has not evaluated the effectiveness of the measures they are taking to raise attendance with particular groups of students and their families. Provision to help students to catch-up after periods of absence is not always systematic. There are appropriate procedures for checking on students' need for support with literacy, numeracy and other basic skills; these checks lead to intervention that is well tailored. The modified curriculum for young students in a nurture group provides good encouragement and builds students' confidence well, though occasionally one or two could be challenged with slightly harder tasks. The childcare provided in the 'breakfast club' is sound; it is appreciated by students and their families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders, managers and governors are ambitious for the continued improvement of the college and they are increasingly successful in making progress towards their vision. They are well supported in this work through partnership links with external agencies, the local authority, other schools and national government initiatives. All these aspects have contributed to the very rapid improvement of the sixth form and to increasing

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success in meeting challenging internal and external targets. Senior leaders have recognised inconsistencies in the quality of subject leadership and are taking good steps to address it through both challenge and support.

The beginning of 2008 saw a renewed vigour in the work of the governors and the senior leadership team. They targeted the key areas for improvement and began a programme of focused professional development. Although the improvement plans are rooted in well chosen changes to provision they are not linked closely enough to outcomes for students. They include monitoring responsibilities but do not consider a wide enough range of checking activities. Recent plans to involve a wider range of staff, as well as parents and students, in monitoring and an increased emphasis on accountability show a better understanding of what is needed for the rate of improvement to pick up even further.

Good work is underway to support teachers in the development of their assessment practice. This is bringing about steady improvement and is gradually being rolled out with an increasing number of departments. However, opportunities to disseminate best practice more widely are not always created and this slows the pace of change.

Governors have ensured that safeguarding procedures are robust and that the work of the college promotes equality and tackles discrimination appropriately. For example, all subject leaders are required to analyse the performance of different groups of students when considering examination results. Governors also realise the need to further promote community cohesion. Good work is already having a positive impact on students' understanding of socio-economic differences and the characteristics of their local area. International students attending the college and international links have the potential to extend students' global awareness.

The school engages increasingly well with parents and carers. The virtual learning environment is a good development and questionnaire responses indicate that very high proportions of parents feel well informed about the work of the school and that the school helps them to support their children.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Outcomes for students in the sixth form are very strong. They have improved rapidly. The most recent published results from 2008 show that the progress students made from their starting points at GCSE was better than in three quarters of sixth forms. Results in 2009 show that progress for more than 30 chemistry students was in the top 1% nationally: progress was in the top 10% for six subjects.

Student numbers are rising steadily: retention rates are high and attendance is good. Students speak with great appreciation of the high quality of much of the teaching. They are articulate, ask probing questions and debate issues cogently. In lessons and in their social activities, they thrive and are highly supportive of each other. A strong work ethic has been engendered, and the supervised quiet study area is valued as a place where students can make good headway with their independent learning.

The curriculum has been broadened. New courses, such as the BTEC in public services, meet the aspirations of students well. Students say they have been well advised about subject choices and progression into higher education or employment. They have ample opportunities to express a view about the quality of the provision. Students have a mature outlook and adopt responsible practices. They are proud of the contribution they make to the life of the community.

The strong outcomes and rapid improvement demonstrate that leadership and management are exceptionally effective.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are largely happy with their children's experience at the college. Preparation for children's futures, leadership and management and the attention given to safeguarding were all highly regarded. A very large majority believe that their children enjoy school. Several parents' written comments, reflecting inspection findings,

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referred to the way the school is improving and their confidence in leadership and management. A small minority of written comments identified issues about inconsistencies in behaviour management.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Our Lady's Catholic College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 168 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,035 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	251	32	487	63	34	4	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	264	34	481	62	26	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	279	37	414	55	45	6	4	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	221	29	483	63	42	5	5	1
The teaching is good at this school	218	28	499	65	36	5	7	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	187	25	484	64	59	8	7	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	168	22	509	67	56	7	13	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	218	30	446	60	34	5	8	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	211	28	481	63	45	6	9	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	225	30	404	54	86	11	25	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	166	23	444	61	74	10	15	2
The school is led and managed effectively	261	34	462	61	17	2	12	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	295	39	425	56	34	4	3	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Inspection of Our Lady's Catholic College, Lancaster, LA1 2RX

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we visited your college recently. We really enjoyed our conversations with you in lessons and in other groups. The school council explained how things are changing for the better and gave me lots of good examples of how you support different charities.

Your college provides you with a satisfactory education. You are cared for very well, especially those of you for whom things are not always easy. You told us you feel safe in college and we agree that the safeguarding procedures are strong. Your parents have positive views of the college. The curriculum is now very varied and you told us how you particularly enjoy new subjects such as dance and look forward to the wide range of choices on offer higher up the school. Your opportunities to participate in sport are very good. You participate in sport well and this will help to keep you healthy.

The standards you reach are not always as high as those in other schools nationally but you do make satisfactory progress. Although teaching is satisfactory overall there is a considerable proportion that is better and this proportion is increasing. The leaders and managers have identified well what needs to be improved and how this should happen. You seem to be aware of these improvements since your questionnaire responses say many of you enjoy college and learn a lot in lessons. Some of you want to know more about how well you are doing and some of you have concerns about standards of behaviour. Inspectors noticed that your behaviour around school is courteous and that you behave best when you find your lessons exciting. The sixth form in your school is very good and it is very well led. Sixth form students told us how much they value both the academic and social experiences and the good quality of the teaching and the curriculum.

To help your college improve further I have asked that attendance, attainment, particularly in English and mathematics, and progress all improve. You clearly have a part to play in this. You need to come to school more often, particularly those of you who regularly fail to attend. You won't progress as well if you miss lessons. I have recommended that teachers match tasks better to your needs, check your understanding during lessons and support you when you are falling behind. Although leaders and managers have the right plans for improvement we have asked them to be more rigorous in the way they check whether the improvements are actually making a difference for you and to consider how exclusions are managed.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

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