

St Edmund's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118912
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339322
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	851
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Smye-Rumsby
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Atkin
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at students' attainment over the past three years, at schemes of work, school policies, the school improvement plan, reports from advisers working with the school and 265 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents.

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

- the effectiveness of leadership and management in setting ambitious targets and disseminating good practice to raise levels of attainment.
- the impact of recent changes to sixth form provision.
- the school's performing arts specialism.

Information about the school

St Edmund's is a wide ability, relatively small Catholic school in an area where about 35% of students attend grammar schools. It has recently become federated with St. Richard's Catholic Primary School, and a joint governing body was established in September 2008. The executive head has management responsibility for both schools, and in April 2009, a head of school was appointed to St Edmund's. The school has a wide catchment area with a high level of social deprivation. Some sixth form provision is shared with two local grammar schools and a specialist maths and computing college. Most students enter St Edmund's with average or below average levels of prior attainment and the proportion of students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties is higher than the national average. Most of these have either moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social issues. The school has a growing representation of students from continental Europe, many with limited English.

St Edmund's has specialist status for Performing Arts and has been awarded the Gold Artsmark three times. It participates in Creative Partnerships Kent and has recently been identified as a School for Innovation in this programme. St Edmund's has gained Investor in People status, a Sportsmark award and the Healthy Schools award.

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

The most striking and engaging aspect of St Edmund's is a strong and supportive community spirit, underpinned by the school's Catholic ethos. There has been a pattern of low attainment in recent years but students' rates of progress have steadily improved. The school now provides a satisfactory quality of education.

The move into federation with St Richard's Catholic Primary School, bringing changes in governance and leadership structure, has prompted a thorough review of teaching and learning and of the curriculum. Closely mentored by the school's National Challenge Adviser, senior and middle managers have developed a well-grounded and detailed plan to raise attainment. Greater responsibility and accountability have been given to subject leaders. The capacity of middle management to set challenging targets and drive improvement is currently uneven. Not all are ensuring that information about students' current levels of attainment and progress is used consistently to establish priorities and shape planning. However a more purposeful use of such information is now percolating through departments. The positive impact can be seen in subjects such as performing arts, art and design, English, modern languages, science and physical education. Good practice in lesson planning and classroom management is also spreading. There is steady support for students who struggle with elements of the curriculum, including those still in the early stages of English acquisition. Expectations are not, however, always sufficiently high to ensure that more able students are appropriately challenged. The best lessons are characterised by energy, pace, a variety of approach and an enterprising use of resources. Students respond willingly to the demands made but they are not, on the whole, independent learners.

Students are emphatic that the school's greatest strength lies in the support and guidance offered by their teachers, whether through additional help with a difficult topic or sensitive care when they are troubled. A Year 10 student spoke for many: 'The school is a caring environment. I feel everyone is made welcome and that's what I really like about St Edmund's.' This support extends to parents and carers; for example, Polish-speaking members of the modern languages department provide translations and very practical advice for families unfamiliar with English systems. The school has established outstanding support for and participation in the wider community, in which students play a key role.

Recognising that levels of attainment have been too low for students of all abilities, the school's leadership is restructuring the curriculum, focusing more strongly on the

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development of key skills and offering a greater range of vocational and practical options. The positive impact of this shift can be seen in students' performance in recent BTEC assessments which played to their strengths. In these, students achieved results higher than the national average. Literacy levels, however, remain low, which limits students' ability to cope with assessments that call for fluent and accurate written responses. Attainment and progress in mathematics have also been weak. Nonetheless, the provisional results for 2009 indicate that the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE subjects at grades A* to C including English and mathematics rose above the government's baseline target. This improvement reflects the well-directed investment of time and resources made by the school to support students seen to be at risk of underachieving. The positive impact of curriculum changes, more rigorous mentoring and a more realistic and focused approach to advice about options is clear in the sixth form. Year 12 students are now confidently and competently tackling courses that match their interests and abilities. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve. Leadership and management have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and key areas for development. Recent initiatives are well judged and are beginning to increase student engagement and improve achievement.

St Edmund's performing arts specialism makes a significant and exuberant contribution to students' experience. The approach is vigorously inclusive; whatever their innate talents or ambitions, students are caught up in the creation and presentation of dance, drama or film, as performers, technicians, administrators or publicists. Standards are high. Collaboration between staff and students reinforces mutual respect, builds students' self-esteem and develops skills that will serve them well in later life. St Edmund's is a hub for community activity, taking projects into schools and encouraging local groups to use on-site facilities such as the recording studio.

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?

- Improve standards of literacy across the curriculum and in all year groups to raise levels of attainment in activities calling for written responses.
- Ensure that a greater proportion of teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - raising expectations for students of all abilities
 - ensuring that lesson planning and classroom management support a variety of learning styles and encourage more independent learning.
- Ensure that all staff use data effectively to inform their planning and to track the progress of groups and individual students.
- Through sharing of good practice and rigorous monitoring, develop the capacity

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of middle management to set consistently challenging targets and drive improvement in all subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

- Overall attainment in recent years has been low despite strengths in subjects related to the performing arts specialism and a significantly better than average rate of improvement in English. Attainment and progress in mathematics have been poor. This was in part due to staffing issues, not yet entirely resolved. The school's most recent data indicate that interventions by an advanced skills teacher and careful subject leadership are leading to improvement.
- Whereas most groups show similar rates of progress overall, including those with English as an additional language or with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, more able students do less well than expected.
- Rates of progress have shown a sustained upward trend over the past three years.
- Provisional results for 2009 indicate that strategies to tackle low attainment are effective; government GCSE targets have been exceeded. Despite the limiting effect of poor literacy, increasingly consistent analysis of students' performance and a more systematic use of that information by most subject leaders are driving improvement.
- Students achieve average or better results when able to work collaboratively, solve problems through practical investigations and present their findings through casebooks, performance or information and communication technology.
- The marked improvement in attendance rates for Year 11 – from 88.8% in 2007/08 to 92% in 2009 – is evidence of students' greater enthusiasm for the options and opportunities offered.
- Attendance rates overall are satisfactory.
- Behaviour observed in lessons and around the school was generally good. Students treat each other and adults with consideration. Students say that they feel safe and that the relatively rare instances of bullying, mostly name-calling are promptly and effectively dealt with.
- The proportion of fixed term exclusions is below the national average and care is taken to ensure that work is sent home and guidance given to those excluded. Reintegration into school is carefully monitored.
- Students understand the need to keep healthy. They appreciate changes introduced by the new caterers and are proud of St Edmund's 'Healthy Schools' award.
- Participation in sports and activities such as dance is strong.
- Students' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding, including fund-raising for charity, work with local primary schools, the student chaplaincy, mentoring and 'hands on' participation in projects in

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Africa.

- Through work experience and the range of activities undertaken within the performing arts specialism, students develop skills that will serve them well after school. Poor literacy levels, however, limit their readiness for the world of work.

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	3
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

- Inspectors saw examples of well-planned, well-paced and productive teaching that successfully engaged students' interest, created confidence and used a range of assessment methods to promote learning.
- Some marking of written work, in English, for instance, combined encouragement with clear guidance and discussion on how to improve.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is uneven. Some lessons lacked pace and variety, allowing students to lose concentration or remain passive. Not all planning, and a relatively small proportion of teaching, took account of differences in students' ability and learning styles.
- Students who struggled with aspects of the curriculum were well supported but the more able were not often challenged and extended. Expectations were not consistently high.
- More systematic analysis of information about students' patterns of attainment and rates of progress has led to well-judged curriculum changes.. In Years 7 and 8, students clearly respond well to cross-curricular work and are benefiting from opportunities to tackle problems

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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collaboratively, to experiment and debate, to present their conclusions for review and to assess their own performance constructively. Evidence of sustained improvement in learning has led to the extension of this approach into Years 7 to 11 and the sixth form. Students now have six possible pathways through Key Stage 4, including a move to BTEC courses to tackle low attainment and a 'fast track' with early GCSE entry in some subjects.

- Work related learning is sensibly being extended to complement a broader range of vocational and practical courses.
- Partnerships with other schools, with local businesses and a range of arts-related organisations are successfully enhancing the school's curriculum provision.
- Pastoral care is well organised and effective. The progress and well-being of vulnerable students are closely monitored and the school makes good use of the local network of support from a range of agencies whenever appropriate.
- The positive rapport between students and staff generally and the work of learning mentors ensure that students feel well supported and cared for.
- Although the marking of written work is not consistently good, the overall quality of academic guidance is improving, strengthened by the introduction of a 'traffic light' system to signal strengths and areas for development.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

- Much of the responsibility for ensuring that plans to raise attainment are effectively implemented lies with subject leaders, monitored by the senior leadership team. While marked improvements can be seen, success in tackling a legacy of low attainment is still uneven. The senior leadership team is taking appropriate action to drive improvement, such as the deployment of advanced skills teachers, in departments that are slow to meet challenging targets. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have access to the full curriculum and are being given the support needed to progress as well as their contemporaries. Management of the performing arts specialism makes a very positive contribution to this.
- The new governing body is clearly keen to play an active role as critical friend; however, it is still taking shape following St Edmund's federation with a local primary school and so its impact has, as yet, been limited.
- The school works well with partners, including local schools, the church and

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arts organisations. Its performing arts specialism brings in a range of practitioners and has established productive links with arts organisations in Kent and beyond.

- The school liaises effectively with multiple agencies to support vulnerable students and uses its own resources imaginatively to establish productive links with potentially hard-to-reach families.
- Appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place and whole-staff training is a regular part of the school’s programme. Individual case studies demonstrate the thoroughness of care for vulnerable students. There are proper procedures for risk assessment.
- Promotion of community cohesion is effective, both within the school and beyond. Regular audits of action and impact shape planning to ensure that students understand and contribute not only to the local community but to national initiatives and to projects abroad. St Edmund’s has active links with schools in continental Europe, Africa and America.

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

Sixth form

- This is ‘a tale of two sixth forms’. There has been a pattern of poor achievement, with its legacy apparent in the current Year 13. Students have taken courses which called for strengths in interpretation and written argument without secure systems to analyse and respond to underachievement or to monitor whether students are using time and resources efficiently.
- For Year 12 there has been a step change. With new leadership, there are clearly set out priorities to raise achievement by centrally tracking and monitoring students’ progress towards challenging targets.
- Building on 2009 BTEC success in performing arts, in health and social care

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and in sport, most Year 12 students are following courses that call for practical problem-solving, invention and learning through doing.

- Involvement in a local sixth form consortium ensures breadth of choice. Regular reviews ensure that parents and carers are productively engaged in the process.
- Facilities for independent study on site are now good.
- Improving attainment is complemented by more organised and constructive sixth form participation in the school and the local community. Year 12 students respond well to opportunities to take on responsibility, mentor younger students and work with local primary schools.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	3
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

- Most parents responding to the survey are happy with their children’s experience of school.
- A few expressed concern about the management of disruptive behaviour and about lack of staff continuity in some departments, principally mathematics, but most judged teaching to be good and the overall management of the school to be effective.
- Inspectors found behaviour in and out of lessons to be good, with a few instances of unfrontational silliness when teaching was not sufficiently engaging.
- The school acknowledges that staffing issues have presented challenges in some subject areas but inspectors found that sensible expedients had been implemented, including targeted support for groups at risk of underperforming.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St. Edmund's Catholic School 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 265 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 851 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	75	28.7	159	60.9	23	8.8	4	1.5
The school keeps my child safe	60	23.0	185	70.9	11	4.2	0	0.0
The school informs me about my child's progress	48	18.4	160	61.3	28	10.7	4	1.5
My child is making enough progress at this school	48	18.4	154	59.0	26	10.0	2	0.8
The teaching is good at this school	49	18.8	171	65.5	11	4.2	2	0.8
The school helps me to support my child's learning	40	15.3	165	63.2	26	10.0	2	0.8
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	16.9	169	64.8	26	10.0	2	0.8
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)	56	21.5	156	59.8	17	6.5	5	1.9
The school meets my child's particular needs	63	24.1	159	60.9	16	6.1	2	0.8
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	57	21.8	123	47.1	41	15.7	18	6.9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	16.1	145	55.6	35	13.4	2	0.8
The school is led and managed effectively	51	19.5	165	63.2	11	4.2	4	1.5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	69	26.5	162	62.3	11	4.2	3	1.2

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 all 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

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>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 pupils' 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.

21 September 2009

Dear Students



Inspection of St Edmund's Catholic School, Dover CT16 2QB

We greatly appreciated your cheerful readiness to answer our questions and show us your work when we visited your school. I welcome this opportunity to let you know about the judgements we reached.

St Edmund's is providing you with a satisfactory education. Although a few of you felt that poor behaviour was not always well managed, the overwhelming majority share our view that your school's greatest strength lies in the care and support you are given by staff and in the school's sense of community. We were impressed by the extent to which your performing arts specialism has brought improvements not only in the school's facilities but also in the courses you can choose and, increasingly, in the ways in which you are taught. Recent changes in the curriculum and organisation have improved the choices for those of you in the sixth form and encouraged you to play a more positive role in the life of the school. Similar changes to the curriculum across Years 7 to 11 are enabling you to make steadily improving progress, although the levels of attainment remain low.

To maintain your school's improvement, we have asked your headteacher and his staff to:

- help you to improve your reading and writing skills so that you all deal more effectively with tasks that require you to express your ideas on paper rather than through discussion or performance
- make sure that all teaching is as good as the best, with all teachers expecting high standards from you and teaching in a way that helps each of you fulfil your potential, whatever your style of learning
- make sure that all teachers successfully use the available information to plan lessons and track your progress
- encourage subject leaders to learn from each other about ways in which to help you raise your levels of attainment in all subjects.

I look forward to seeing your school go from strength to strength.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools

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