

St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic High School, Ashton-in-Makerfield

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106540
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	287544
Inspection date	25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	John Coleman 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend O'Brien
Headteacher	Mr P Phillips
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2001
School address	Rookery Avenue Ashton-in-Makerfield Wigan Lancashire WN4 9PF
Telephone number	01942 728651
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Edmund Arrowsmith is a larger than average school that serves a wide geographical area with largely average social and economic indicators. A smaller than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Specialist status as a technology college was awarded in 2000 and this was extended to include music in 2004. The school has achieved many nationally recognised awards such as International Schools Award, Investors in People, SportsMark, ArtsMark, Eco Schools Award and Healthy Schools Award. All pupils in the school are baptised Roman Catholics.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school accurately identifies its effectiveness as good. It is an improving school with some outstanding features. Strong impetus towards further improvement and innovation is vigorously sustained. For example, specialist school status is used effectively to improve resources, teaching and learning and pupils' achievements. It has good capacity to improve further.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has effectively created a confident and inspired senior leadership team. Morale is high. Leaders and managers at all levels appreciate the steer given by the senior team and show strong commitment to improving the school. There is an innovative 'skills centre' run as a limited company in collaboration with other local secondary schools. This is led by the school and broadens the choices available to pupils in Key Stage 4. Governors are supportive and well informed. A significant number of new staff have been appointed in the last two years. Recruitment procedures are thorough and demonstrate the determination of the governors and senior leaders to set high expectations. The rigour of monitoring by subject leaders is variable, and does not always result in improvements in pupils' achievements.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Relationships are excellent. Pupils enjoy learning together in a community which warmly cares for the education and well-being of everyone. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They say they feel safe and that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. One pupil told inspectors 'the way teachers treat you makes you want to do well'. Their awareness of healthy lifestyles is good. Pupils develop excellent social skills and take responsibilities readily, for example in the prefect system. The school is working hard to promote high aspirations; evidence in lessons, communications to parents and observations around the school show that this is starting to bear fruit. Parents' responses to inspectors in questionnaires show an overwhelming support for the school. Care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. There is a seamless cohesion to the pastoral and academic work of staff and the systems for identifying and supporting pupils, whatever their needs, are very effective.

Pupils achieve well. Standards have risen since the last inspection and are above average. GCSE results in 2006 were lower and dipped for the first time in four years. Pupils are making good progress and are in line to meet the school's targets for 2007. This is because the quality of teaching and learning is mostly good and there are examples of outstanding lessons. The highest attaining pupils are not always given challenging enough work to do and consequently their progress slows. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest GCSE grades is lower than could be expected in some subjects.

The curriculum is reviewed regularly. It meets the needs of pupils well because of the success of strategies to broaden the range of vocational pathways and to increase the opportunities for work-related learning. Pupils are also able to take GCSE statistics and religious education (RE) a year early in Year 10 and an AS level in religion and philosophy in Year 11. The impact of these recent curriculum developments has yet to be seen in pupils' results, since 2007 is the first examinable year for these initiatives. Curriculum days and lessons in thinking skills help pupils make sense of their learning. Industry and interview days prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education and employment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all lessons provide sufficient challenge for the highest attaining pupils.

- Improve the consistency of departmental monitoring.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Pupils joining the school arrive with standards which are broadly in line with those found nationally. There is a full range of abilities represented in each year group. Since the last inspection standards have risen. Pupils reach above average standards by Year 9 as shown by the scores from national tests for English, mathematics and science. Pupils gain above average results in GCSE examinations including in English and mathematics as indicated by the percentage of pupils attaining five A* to C grades. The upward trend sustained over four years dipped in 2006 though results remained above average, and this was anticipated by the school. Pupils are currently in line to achieve the challenging targets set for 2007. The proportion of pupils who reach the highest A* and A grades, in the core subjects especially, is below that in the school's results overall and is broadly average. Pupils make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also progress well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are confident, articulate young people who participate willingly and fully in the life of the school. Pupils show exemplary attitudes and behaviour in response to the mutually respectful relationships that underpin classroom management. This ensures that time in lessons is used well. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Opportunities for reflection and to express thoughts and feelings give pupils confidence in themselves and their ideas. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong. They get on well together and listen to each other. Pupils feel safe and cared for in school, confident that any problems will be dealt with effectively. Pupils understand how to stay safe. Good working practices are taught and enforced in workshops and safety regulations are met. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils' good numeracy and literacy skills prepare them well for the next stage of their lives - employment or education. Pupils have a voice that is heard, and notice is taken of this by the school. For example, the school council aired its concerns about school meals and took part in the selection procedures for the new catering provision. Pupils' contribution to the community is good; they undertake charitable work and sponsor a school in Soweto as part of the school's international links.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The majority of teaching and learning are good. There are some examples of outstanding practice. Teachers are knowledgeable about the pupils in their care and of the subjects they teach. It is no surprise that behaviour in lessons is outstanding since the relationships between pupils and teachers are so strong. Confident that teachers will listen, pupils readily offer their ideas and are receptive to the views of other pupils. Learning is outstanding in lessons where a high degree of pupil interest is generated by practical involvement in challenging tasks. This is illustrated by the high standard of finish achieved by pupils in technology classes and the pride it gives them in their work. Teachers plan diligently around objectives for pupils' learning. Some of these are broad intentions and make it difficult for teachers to assess the degree of

success. In particular, the highest attaining pupils are not always set work which is challenging enough and the pace of their learning slows as a result. Classrooms are well organised and managed, they are bright and motivating for pupils and this encourages learning. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and well matched to their needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and is well designed to meet pupils' needs. A strong feature is the very effective use made of the school's specialism to expand and develop the curriculum. Investment in technology resources has improved provision and led to increased pupil achievement. There is a widening participation of girls in technology subjects. Good collaborative arrangements with local secondary schools provide alternative pathways and work-related learning opportunities. There are, as yet, relatively small numbers of pupils choosing these options and the school has plans to further extend pupil choices. The curriculum provides well for pupils' personal development through curriculum days which add breadth and social, moral, spiritual and cultural content. A thinking skills programme helps younger pupils make sense of their learning. The curriculum prepares pupils well for their future lives, as seen in the good achievement of pupils in literacy and numeracy. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities which is appreciated by pupils. Enrichment is provided by a variety of visitors and opportunities for pupils to visit places of learning. An international initiative links the school with Soweto and exchange visits by staff have been used well to add to the cultural experiences of pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Provision for pupils' care, support and guidance is outstanding. There is a synthesis of academic and pastoral guidance and support that enables underachievement to be identified at an early stage. The school has a very effective network of staff such as form tutors, learning coordinators and mentors. Parents are involved in the review meetings of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The action that is taken in respect of these pupils links support with target setting and review. These factors are instrumental in the good progress pupils make. Exceptional care is offered to the most vulnerable pupils and there are strong links with external agencies. Appropriate measures are in place to safeguard pupils including the required checks on staff appointments. There are excellent transition arrangements to ensure that pupils move smoothly into school when they begin in Year 7.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The shared commitment and common purpose of the senior leadership team clearly demonstrate the confidence created by the strong direction provided by the headteacher. Specialist status has been effectively used by management to improve information and communication technology resources throughout the school. Partnerships with feeder primary schools and collaborations with local secondary schools are strong. The skills centre established with local schools is extending vocational opportunities for pupils.

Governors are well informed by the school's staff. They have a good appreciation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. An appropriate range of committees is in place to enable governors to discharge their responsibilities. In the last two years a significant number of new teaching staff have been appointed through rigorous procedures. It is clear that these staff have added considerably to the strengths of the existing teaching team.

Heads of department monitor the performance of both pupils and staff in a systematic way. There is inconsistency in the impact of this on raising achievement. For example, the attainment of the highest attaining pupils in the core subjects of the curriculum is not as good as in some other subjects.

The school knows itself well and inspection judgements are closely aligned with the school's view. Staff expertise is deployed effectively to meet pupils' needs, particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Much of the school's improvement has been supported by an effective programme of staff development that has included middle leadership training and coaching to improve classroom practice.

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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
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic High School, Wigan, WN4 9PF

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for talking to us about your experiences. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

- We judged that your school provides you with a good standard of education.
- The headteacher and senior staff of the school know what it does well, and why, and know what to do to make it even better in the future.
- You reach above average standards, make good progress and taking into account your starting points achieve well.
- Your behaviour and attitude to school are outstanding and this helps you to get the very best out of everything your school has to offer you.
- All the staff in school care for you very well and you feel safe and enjoy school.
- You are helped to develop as mature, responsible young people because the school teaches you right from wrong and respects and values your opinions.
- The governors and senior staff are increasing the number of courses to meet all of your needs and interests.
- You like school and attend well because lessons are usually good and interesting; you particularly enjoy learning when it involves practical activities.
- The number of pupils gaining A* and A grades in some subjects is too low and we have asked the school to improve this.
- We have also asked the school to improve the monitoring work of some departments in the school.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope that you will carry on working with your teachers to make St Edmund Arrowsmith an even better school.