

St Edmund Champion Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103537
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308349
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	983
6th form	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike McCormack
Headteacher	Philomena Steele
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2005
School address	Sutton Road Erdington Birmingham B23 5XA
Telephone number	01214 647700
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This specialist language college is of average size. A greater than average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. There are above average proportions of pupils from minority heritage backgrounds. The school recently completed a move to a single site, with some new buildings and facilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement of pupils and the quality of teaching and learning. Although standards in national tests and examinations in 2007 were broadly in line with national averages, the progress they represented was inadequate overall. Teaching and learning are inadequate overall, despite examples of outstanding practice, because lessons are not always addressing the learning needs and interests of all learners, regardless of ability, and marking is not consistently giving guidance on what pupils should do to improve. Nevertheless, recently introduced systems for tracking pupils' progress and changes to examination entry expectations, coupled with the evidence from school estimates of the progress of current pupils, indicate that the school is demonstrating satisfactory capacity to improve its provision.

Pupils feel safe at school and most enjoy their education. Attendance has improved since the previous inspection, and instances of serious misbehaviour have sharply reduced. An effective internal support unit is helping to improve the inclusion of pupils who are at risk of disaffection. The school's Catholic ethos is carefully developed through good teaching of spiritual, cultural and moral themes. The curriculum choices available at Key Stage 4 are widening to include better access to vocationally based options, and more pupils are being entered for examinations. The school council has an effective voice in making improvements to social provision, although many pupils expressed their disappointment about the quality of school toilets, and the fact that access to them was strictly limited during lessons. There is a sound range of healthy food and drink available at lunchtimes, and most pupils benefit from a good range of additional clubs, trips and activities outside normal lesson times.

The headteacher, in post for two years, has accurately identified the key strengths and weaknesses of the school. In particular, she has introduced a systematic way to monitor pupils' and students' progress, responded quickly to the underachievement evident in 2007 results, and begun to tackle the shortfalls in teaching and learning. Her determination to improve pupils' achievement is shared by senior staff, but the school has some way to go to develop consistent monitoring and evaluation of provision across all levels. Until recently, governors had a weak understanding of the school's performance; one consequence was the unexpected deficit budget inherited by the new headteacher that has seriously limited her ability to direct resources at improving provision.

The impact of specialist language college status has been mixed. There are good links with primary schools, better information and communication technology (ICT) provision across the school, and some international partnerships have been forged. Key Stage 4 standards in modern foreign languages have improved from a low base, but are still below the targets set by the school in its specialist school bid.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is currently providing a satisfactory quality of education for its students. Changes to sixth form admissions criteria, and the introduction of close monitoring of students' progress, are preventing a repeat of the 2007 underachievement at AS level. The guidance and support provided for students are now of good quality; paradoxically, this is a reaction to students' poor progress at AS level in 2007 which went undetected by the school despite intervention strategies for some students. The curriculum for sixth formers consists predominantly of A-level courses, which do not always match the needs of every potential sixth form student although some level 2 BTEC course are available. Study facilities for sixth form students are good, and they have good opportunities to develop independent learning skills. The students enjoy their studies and are rightly appreciative of the good care and guidance they receive from tutors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan lessons to meet the full range of needs, abilities and interests of pupils.
- Ensure lesson activities are sufficiently enjoyable and engaging, so that all pupils fully take part and can develop their independent learning skills.
- Ensure greater clarity and consistency of marking so that pupils know what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils arrive in Year 7 with broadly average standards of attainment; usually, this is just below the national figure, but for the current Year 11 due to take GCSE examinations in 2008, it was just above. During Key Stage 3, pupils did not make enough progress and as a result, standards in national tests in 2007 fell further below the national average. A similar picture of inadequate progress occurred at Key Stage 4 in 2007, despite the success of many pupils in gaining five GCSE passes at the higher grades. This threshold figure of 63% of pupils gaining five A* to C grades has been improving over time and is close to the national average, in part thanks to the impact of two thirds of pupils gaining an ICT qualification worth four higher grades. Despite this success, however, too many pupils did not gain their expected grades in other subjects. The proportion of pupils gaining five higher grades including English and mathematics was 37%, better than in previous years but lower than the national average. Standards in science at 28% Grade C were lower still. The school missed most of its statutory performance targets.

Progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4, even after taking into account pupils' circumstances, has been in the lowest 10% of schools nationally since the previous inspection. In particular, pupils of below average ability made poor progress. Overall, this represents inadequate achievement. Recent indicators from mock examinations and estimates show that some improvements to standards are in the pipeline, although not consistently in all subjects. The recently introduced pupil performance tracking system also indicates that the majority of pupils are now making the expected progress, most importantly those with below average abilities. These improvements provide sufficient evidence of the school's capacity to improve its performance.

Sixth form standards at A level are broadly average and represent satisfactory progress, although the 2007 results were lower than in 2006 and fell short of the school's own target. However, in Year 12 in 2007, results in AS-level examinations were well below average because of inadequate progress, and achievement in the sixth form overall was, therefore, inadequate. The changes made by the school as a result of this have as yet not had a chance to show in terms of impact on standards in the 2008 round of examinations. School records suggest students are on track to demonstrate satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The personal development of pupils and sixth form students is satisfactory. A good feature is the spiritual and moral development of all the pupils. This is a clear consequence of the good emphasis placed on them by the Catholic life of the school. The multicultural community of this school and its local setting are celebrated through a variety of events, assemblies and lessons. Attendance has improved as a result of the work of a full-time attendance officer and local authority support in dealing with those few instances where parents condone absence from school. The success for many pupils in gaining higher grade ICT qualifications is a helpful step in their preparation for their future economic well-being, which is satisfactory. Their preparation benefits from a good range of provision for work-related learning.

Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory, but some lessons are overshadowed by low-level disruption. The root cause of this is a poor match of task to the learning needs and interests of pupils. About a quarter of parents who responded to the inspection survey felt that behaviour was not good. Pupils say they feel safe, but some felt the school could be more effective in dealing with day-to-day harassment. They felt teachers had to spend too much time dealing with distracting behaviour. Movement around the school is generally calm. The playground is crowded, which can seem quite daunting to younger pupils, and frustrating to older ones looking to 'let off steam'. Work is in hand to release the tennis courts as additional recreational space. Pupils do not like the condition of the toilets, and particularly do not like the restricted access to them in lessons, which is unacceptable because it can leave pupils uncomfortable and embarrassed.

Pupils can eat healthily if they choose, and the majority of them do so. They appreciate the improvement in school meals, but also note the increasing cost. There are sufficient opportunities for pupils to take part in activities, clubs and trips; about a third of them do so on a weekly basis.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are inadequate. Although the school is developing effective procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and has taken action towards eradicating inadequate teaching, too many borderline satisfactory and inadequate lessons remain. These lessons give insufficient opportunity for active learning that will engage pupils and, consequently, they are disrupted by low-level nuisance behaviour, with some pupils paying no attention.

There is also good and outstanding teaching taking place, where teachers use good subject knowledge and questioning techniques to include and support all learners. They know their pupils well, so that the least able are supported well and the most able are challenged effectively. As a result, pupils are confident to contribute to the lesson, to evaluate their own work and that of others and receive help to identify how they can improve.

Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not provide adequate support or challenge, which results in pupils not progressing as quickly as they should. Class discussion allows just a few pupils to dominate the lesson, so less confident pupils are ignored. Teachers talk too much rather than enabling pupils to explain for themselves and pupils have less opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning and to evaluate their work. Too many teachers have low expectations of lower band teaching groups, and have not met the individual learners' needs, or provided sufficiently exciting tasks to engage their interest. Work is pitched at too low a level, with no firm expectation for all pupils to complete it to an acceptable standard.

Day-to-day assessment and marking are inconsistent. In the best lessons, pupils display a thorough understanding of how their work will be assessed and what is expected at each level or grade. However, too many pupils are unaware of how to achieve their targets or to improve their work. Marking is often infrequent, superficial and not followed up by the teacher, so pupils carry on making the same errors or omissions.

Sixth form teaching is satisfactory, with most lessons engaging students in suitably challenging tasks. Frequent assessment of progress is now ensuring that students are informed of how well they are doing, with 'mid-course' corrections taking place on a half-termly basis.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. There are continuing improvements to the range of opportunities at Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form, the result of developing partnerships with other local providers. Courses in ICT in Key Stage 4 have been limited in order to increase the variety of subjects for pupils. All pupils are now entered for examination courses, so that almost all are gaining some accreditation in eight subjects. However, the sixth form offer is still predominantly academic. Previously, some students embarked upon courses that proved to be ill matched to their prior attainment and learning, resulting in poor progress in Year 12. The school changed admission criteria to prevent this occurring again, but this is matching the student to the course, rather than the course to the student. The school is developing level 3 vocational courses for launch in 2008.

The school provides a sound range of additional trips, after school activities, sports and performing arts events, and in particular growing international links supported by its language college specialism.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and now good in the sixth form. Sixth form students speak highly of the advice they have received and the support they get for applications to higher education. Retention and success rates at A level are high. The school helps students

to develop effective study skills for independent learning in the sixth form, and tutors know their students well. Although small, numbers in the sixth are rising as it retains a positive ethos and is seen by pupils and students as a good place to study.

The procedures for safeguarding pupils are actively in place and the school pays good attention to risk assessments for trips and lesson activities. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs make better progress than their peers, because of good teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills. For example, in a good lesson for these pupils, the specialist teacher consistently and patiently insisted on a polite response from every pupil. She pitched work for different groups of pupils depending upon their learning need, and maintained a variety of activities. She expertly dealt with a potentially disruptive late arrival of one pupil without letting the rest of the group be distracted. This personal approach by the team of staff and classroom assistants for learning difficulties is boosting the self-esteem and confidence of vulnerable pupils. Extending this to more pupils is limited by budget restrictions to the recruitment of more support staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher has introduced rigour and evidence-based evaluation so that now the school leadership and governors are well aware of strengths and weaknesses. Her determination, energy and enthusiasm for raising standards are beginning to have an impact on the achievement of learners. There is much still to be done before these improvements are secure for all pupils, but the direction of travel is set fair. Her leadership team shares her vision of high standards and expectations for every single learner. Middle managers are becoming better partners in monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision in the school, although some feel in need of further support in helping to deliver whole-school policies consistently. The quality of teaching and learning has yet to improve enough to match the needs of all learners; progress in this area has been hampered by the prolonged absence of a senior team leader responsible for this aspect. Many teachers are not sure what the school requires in terms of planning lessons or of marking and feedback to students.

Governors have recently come to realise that the school's performance has been weak in some key areas. The headteacher discovered a serious deficit budget that had not been made clear prior to her appointment, but has successfully set about resolving this. However, this is seriously restricting her ability to devote resources to making the necessary improvements quickly enough. There are still shortfalls in the quality and detail of school performance indicators being recorded in governing body minutes. Several governors visit the school but as yet there is no regular programme of visiting the school in action, and so they have little first hand knowledge of what life for pupils is like at St Edmund Campion. Governors are not evaluating the impact of the disability equality schemes. About a quarter of parents who responded to the inspection survey feel the school does not take their views into account.

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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?	4	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

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?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
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?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of St Edmund Campion Catholic School, Birmingham, B23 5XA

Thank you for the time you gave to talking with us during our recent visit to your school. Your cheerful contributions, and detailed insights, helped us a great deal as we gathered evidence about what school life is like for you. Sixth form students gave us an up-to-date account of their good care, guidance and support.

The school is not providing a good enough quality of education at the moment. The 2007 tests and examination results were not as good overall as the school was hoping for, despite some sound features such as the improving number of higher grade GCSEs. This is because, despite the hard work of all of your teachers, too many lessons do not engage your interests, or match your talents. The headteacher has accurately identified these areas for improvement and is putting them right as quickly as she can. This includes a new way to monitor your academic progress more frequently, changes to sixth form admissions processes, and improved guidance for sixth formers.

In some lessons, a few students become distracted, then disruptive; this diverts the teacher into just managing behaviour, and some of you then lose out on the attention you would otherwise receive. Overall, too many students last year did not make enough progress. This means we are giving the school a Notice to Improve. We will visit the school in 6 to 8 months time to monitor the progress it is making. The school will be re-inspected in 12 to 18 months time to check that it has sorted out these issues, and we have confidence in its capacity to further improve.

We have asked teachers to make sure they prepare lessons that you will find both interesting and challenging enough to grab your attention. They need to ensure you all contribute to class discussions, and do tasks in lessons that help you develop independent thinking and evaluation skills. We also think that marking should give you direct advice on how to improve your work, and you should act upon that advice straight away. You can all help by paying full attention to teachers in all your lessons, so they do not need to waste time attending to minor distractions and disruption.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright Her Majesty's Inspector