

St Edmund's Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116505
Local Authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	326411
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Calvin Pike

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 (total)	936
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joy Godbold
Headteacher	Mrs Isabelle O'Mara
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2006
School address	Arundel Street Portsmouth PO1 1RX
Telephone number	02392 823766
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Edmund's is a non-selective comprehensive school. As the only Catholic secondary school in Portsmouth, it is smaller than average but oversubscribed. Half its pupils are Roman Catholic, the rest are Christians of other denominations, belong to other faiths or are non-believers. The proportion of pupils identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just below the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is also just below that found nationally. The majority of pupils are of White British origin although, for an increasing proportion of the school, English is not their first language. The school gained Specialist Humanities status in July 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Edmund's Catholic School provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education for its pupils. Standards have risen gradually over the last three years to be in line with national averages at the end of the last academic year. Since September 2008 there has been a clearer, shared focus on monitoring pupils' progress. However, some inconsistencies remain in the teaching and learning within and across subjects and ability groups.

The care, guidance and support for pupils are good. A positive learning environment is created in most classes. Parents are generally supportive and agree with measures the headteacher and the senior team are taking to move the school forward but a small minority of the parents are not positive about the provision for the pupils. Generally pupils are happy at the school; most enjoy their education and behave well, but too many are persistently absent.

The school's specialist status is having a positive impact on the curriculum of humanities subjects. Provision in English is good and is an effective model for improvement elsewhere. The curriculum overall is good. Improvements in recent years have resulted from effectively tackling underperformance. However, the school has not been successful in all areas. For example, opportunities for learning do not always allow pupils across the range of abilities to develop the skills to become more independent in their learning. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving as a result of better monitoring by middle and senior leaders. Assessment systems are now in place to support good tracking of progress, but not all lessons take sufficient account of pupils' starting points and capabilities to support consistently good or better progress. The quality of feedback to pupils has improved since the previous inspection but practice is still uneven. Marking too often lacks advice on how pupils can improve their work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall with clear strengths. The headteacher has been effective in establishing structures to support change and has made good appointments to enhance staff quality overall. Recent improvements are driving change at a faster pace. Leaders are becoming more responsive to local and national initiatives. Leadership teams have yet to secure consistency in monitoring and improving teaching and learning across all subjects. Systems tend to concentrate on qualities of teaching rather than focus on improving learning for all pupils. Nonetheless, work in the current academic year shows good impact on the progress of targeted groups, and developing strengths in leadership and management together indicate the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards, notably in mathematics and science, and improve achievement.
- Make the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work more rigorous and challenging to give more incisive direction to strategies for improvement.
- Reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Most pupils begin St Edmund's with levels of attainment that are broadly average. Through the first three years, their progress overall is satisfactory. From 2006, the proportion of pupils gaining five good GCSEs has increased for three consecutive years to bring standards in line with averages nationally in 2008. Pupils' attainment in English rose quickly but the same pupils reached considerably lower levels in mathematics and science. There is some early evidence that standards are rising in English, geography and religious education as a result of the school's recently acquired specialist status in Humanities. White British pupils performed considerably less well than this group nationally in 2008. Pupils from most other minority ethnic groups did as well as or better than their peers nationally.

While the progress made by pupils overall has improved, it has been uneven, and average-attaining pupils did not achieve as well as they should have done in 2008. Boys who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, notably behavioural difficulties, made less progress than expected. Aware of these weaknesses, the school has made changes to the curriculum and has developed robust and effective mechanisms for tracking progress. Consequently, it can now demonstrate that an increasing proportion of pupils are making better than satisfactory progress. In many instances, progress is now good, but this remains the case for a minority. Consequently, overall progress and achievement both remain satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most pupils enjoy lessons and have positive attitudes to learning, especially when lessons are lively and stimulating. This is shown from attendance records that have improved appreciably and are now satisfactory. The great majority of pupils attend regularly, but there remains a small core of regular absentees. Fixed-term exclusions have dramatically fallen since the last inspection and are now very low. Most pupils are courteous, willing and helpful. Pupils are confident that any bullying will be dealt with fairly and effectively. They feel the school is a safe place where they can always find someone to support them. There is a strong sense of racial harmony. This view is shared by the majority of parents who are very supportive of the school. One said: 'The school passes on good values for life'. However, a small minority expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspectors found that most pupils behave well but in some lessons where tasks were not well matched to pupils' abilities, their attention wandered and occasionally noise levels became unacceptably high.

Pupils take their responsibilities seriously and appreciate the impact they have on the life of the school. They contribute to decision-making as elected school council representatives, as sports leaders and through formal roles to support younger ones. These activities, work in raising considerable sums for charities and the CPHSE programme together support their moral development and give them a strong sense of right and wrong. Pupils understand how to keep healthy and stay safe. For example, they were quick to explain the benefits of warming up at the start of a lesson to develop bowling skills in cricket. Many pupils participate in the range of physical activities provided. Pupils have good opportunities to reflect on ideas, including different faiths. They develop a good sense of their own heritage through art and music although understanding of cultures other than their own is limited. Pupils are positive about the good personal guidance they are given so that they are able to make informed decisions about their future education and training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

School systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning have been improved over recent years, especially since September 2008. These now involve regular, six-weekly teacher assessments that reflect how well pupils are progressing towards their individual targets. Although the impact of these measures is clear in some areas, not all teachers are using data to prepare lessons that accurately match pupils' needs. Consequently, although some good and outstanding lessons were seen, there is still too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning to ensure all pupils progress well.

Where expectations are high and there are plenty of opportunities to participate in interactive discussions, role play and group work, the pace of learning is fast and pupils are well motivated to apply themselves. Teachers use questioning effectively to engage pupils, incorporate specialist language, check levels of pupils' understanding and give immediate feedback. They employ information technology to help pupils develop their independent learning skills, such as the vocational science course where pupils are carrying out an extended project based around a themed water park. Where lessons lack pace and appropriate challenge, plans do not take sufficient account of pupils' starting points. Occasionally there is a lack of routine to establish order or create an appropriate learning environment in the classroom. As a result, some pupils, particularly lower-ability boys, quickly lose concentration. This is reflected in the limited overall progress of this group of pupils. The marking of pupils' work completed in lessons or at home is similarly inconsistent across the school, often providing too limited guidance on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum has improved since the last inspection and is now good overall. The continuous development of vocational courses over the last few years gives pupils a wide range of courses that meets their individual needs well. For example, the OCR courses in information technology and science, the Business and Technology Education Council courses in art and sport and the introduction to the new diploma in September 2009, have helped pupils demonstrate more independence in their learning. Many pupils confirm these practical courses meet their preferred learning styles but some older pupils feel they need better advice and guidance to help them choose more carefully from the wider range of options now open to them. The more able pupils benefit from early examination entry in a number of GCSEs, enabling them to access a more appropriate curriculum for progression to post-16 courses. Similarly, the recently established nurture group in Year 7 gives additional support for the most vulnerable pupils as they join the school. Increasing work-related opportunities in Key Stage 4 prepare pupils well for their future economic well-being. Pupils benefit from a good range of extra-curricular activities. Participation has increased in sports, music and drama clubs and through additional offsite adventure activities available through the 'Motiv8' and 'extended schools' initiatives that cater for all pupils, especially lower-ability boys.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils' well-being and personal development are enhanced by the good quality of care, guidance and support provided. Health and safety routines and risk assessments are all fully in place and conscientiously observed. Child protection procedures are clear and pupils at risk and looked after pupils are quickly identified and supported. The school engages effectively with external agencies to help ensure pupils' health and well-being. Support for gifted and talented pupils and for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is often good, although a few parents expressed concern about a lack of communication from school about their child's progress. The pastoral system provides good support for pupils. This is well monitored and most parents feel that their children are well supported. The school's own surveys and discussions with pupils show that they feel safe and secure. Careers advice, vocational guidance, Year 9 options and work experience are carefully organised and monitored. Academic guidance is generally satisfactory. There are good procedures in place to track the progress of pupils of all abilities and the information is used effectively by many teachers to provide pupils with challenging targets. However, this practice is not consistent, so that pupils do not always know what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher, supported well by her senior team, has led staff effectively in introducing structures to bring improvement and enhance the learning environment. The senior management team, which has been enhanced in the last year, is now focusing more closely on monitoring the impact of provision on achievement and standards. The impact of these changes is seen in a steady rise in attainment over the last three years so that it is now in line with average, in improved pupils' behaviour, reduced absenteeism and improved curriculum provision. Governors are very well informed, offer key skills and expertise and challenge the school appropriately.

Since the previous inspection, procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school have become more effective. Directors of Learning are now developing appropriate skills in leading their departments and sections of the school. Staff now have a clearer sense of the improvements required to move the school forward. They are supported by clear procedures for performance management. Standards are rising but monitoring procedures are not being used rigorously by all managers. Consequently, not all teachers are using pupils' targets and tracking information consistently to ensure lessons match pupils' needs and abilities. While self-evaluation is improving, some managers and new governors are not comparing performance sufficiently well with schools in comparable contexts. This leads to some inaccurate self-evaluation by the school where aspects have been judged to be good rather than satisfactory.

Equality of opportunity is promoted both through the formal curriculum and beyond. The school is a tolerant and welcoming community. It has forged strong partnerships with a range of other educational providers and external organisations that enrich pupils' experiences and help them prepare effectively for adult life. Secure steps have already been taken by the school to establish a strong contribution to community cohesion, and the school's leaders and managers have a clear awareness of how this area needs developing further, especially the need to monitor the

impact on pupils. The school provides satisfactory value for money and deploys its resources appropriately and efficiently.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

25 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Edmund's Catholic School, Portsmouth, PO1 1RX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting with you.

These are the main findings of the inspection.

- St Edmund's is a satisfactory and improving school.
- Standards are broadly average and the rate of your progress is satisfactory and getting better.
- Teaching is generally satisfactory and some teaching is good.
- You are provided with a good curriculum that the headteacher and the senior team are working hard to improve still further.
- Your personal development is good but too many pupils are persistently absent.
- Most staff care for and support you well and give you good advice and guidance.

The leadership and management of your school is satisfactory and your headteacher and staff now have good plans for how it can get better. The school's specialist status makes a positive contribution to your education. We have asked your headteacher and staff to focus more vigorously on ensuring:

- more lessons are consistently of good quality to support you in achieving well
- staff monitor and evaluate the school's work to better inform all concerned in making decisions about what to do next to improve the school further
- the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent continues to fall.

You can do your bit to help by working as hard as you can and attending school regularly. As you have told us, some of you could improve your concentration in lessons and a few of you could help the teachers, your fellow pupils and yourselves by always being cooperative in classes and around the school.

On behalf of the inspection team, every best wish for your future studies and your life beyond.

Yours faithfully

Dr Calvin Pike

Lead Inspector