

St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic Centre for Learning (VA)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135481
Local Authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	360725
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sue Harrison 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 of pupils on the school roll	962
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Robson
Headteacher	Mr Martyn Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cumber Lane Whiston, Liverpool Merseyside L35 2XG
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 34 lessons, delivered by 34 teachers, and held meetings with governors, staff and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including department self-assessments, the school's development plan and 158 parents' and carers' questionnaires, as well as questionnaires from staff and students.

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

- How far inspectors' judgements matched the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning.
- The extent to which curriculum planning and pastoral systems contribute to improving outcomes for students.
- The extent to which students achieve their full potential.

Information about the school

St Edmund Arrowsmith was part of Knowsley local authority's reorganisation of secondary schools in 2009/10. It moved to a new site and was renamed as a Centre for Learning in January 2010. The school is oversubscribed, and a significant number of students transferred into St Edmund partway through the 2010/11 school year. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Virtually all students are from a White British background. The proportion of students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above the national average. The school has specialist status in technology.

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?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This is a good school because of strong leadership, an excellent curriculum and the outstanding care, guidance and support students receive. The caring ethos of the school is backed up by very effective systems to monitor students' progress and quickly put in place extra support where necessary. The majority of students make good progress at the school. Levels of attainment have been rising and are now above average. However, the proportion of more-able students gaining the highest grades in GCSE examinations is too low.

Attendance and behaviour are good. Students, and parents and carers, stress how safe students feel in the school and the purposeful environment this helps to create. Teaching is well planned to support learning and there is regular assessment to help students understand the level they have reached and what they need to do to improve further. Students enjoy many of their lessons and are well prepared for examinations. The best lessons encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and discuss topics to increase their understanding, but this is not sufficiently widespread across the school.

The curriculum is exceptionally well matched to needs, with an extensive range of academic and vocational courses available at Key Stage 4. Students enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities that help to develop skills that prepare them well for leaving school. They show good levels of respect for each other and contribute well to their local community. Their understanding of other cultures is less well developed. Transition arrangements to help new students settle in the school are outstanding. Students receive excellent pastoral support to help them succeed and extensive opportunities to get extra help with work.

Leaders and managers have effectively maintained the focus on improving standards, while at the same time having to organise the move to a new building. Staff are highly motivated and very committed to the students. Parents and carers are very positive about the quality of education and support provided. The school has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development and has good capacity to make further improvements. It provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the strategies to stretch the most-able students in order to increase the proportion of high grades they achieve.
- Further improve teaching and learning by increasing the opportunities for students to interact with each other and develop their problem-solving and research skills.

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- Extend the opportunities available to students to develop their knowledge and understanding of other cultures.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students have a positive attitude to learning. They enjoy most lessons and are keen to do well. In lessons where they are encouraged to participate, they answer questions enthusiastically and work well together in groups. The majority of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress against their starting points on entering the school. Attendance and behaviour are good, and students feel extremely safe in the school. They get on well together, show respect for other people and contribute well to their local community through work in primary schools and other projects. Students raise funds for a number of charities in this country and abroad. However, their understanding of other cultures is too limited. Students acquire a good range of skills to help them when they leave school, both within lessons and through their enthusiastic participation in a wide range of enrichment activities. A high proportion continue in education or training after leaving school. They have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and a large number take part in sporting or fitness activities.

Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. By the end of Key Stage 4, levels of attainment have been rising and are now above average. In 2009/10, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was slightly above the national average. Attainment has risen further this year. Inspectors found the standard of students' work to be good in most lessons. They also found improved results already achieved by Year 11 students in modular mathematics examinations and those who sat their English GCSE earlier this year. In arriving at their judgements, inspectors also took into account significant improvements this year in the attainment and progress of students in science lessons. Although attainment across the school is good overall, the most-able students do not always gain sufficiently high grades.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly to ensure work is well matched to students' needs. In the most successful lessons, teachers use an imaginative range of teaching styles to motivate and enthuse students. For example, in a Year 11 dance group, students worked collaboratively and creatively to choreograph a dance related to the theme of conflict. The school's technology specialism has increased the effective use of computers in the classroom.

Assessment to support learning is generally good. Teachers are skilful at helping students to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Students are aware of the level they are working at. Teachers are good at giving oral feedback to students at key learning points in lessons to help them know how they are doing. Opportunities for students to reflect on and review their work with their peers are used well in some lessons, but this is not consistent across the school. Assessment of students with specific needs is used effectively to target additional support in class.

As a result of good teaching and assessment, students are successful at acquiring skills and knowledge to prepare them for examinations. However, lessons do not always give them sufficient opportunities to research and interact with each other, discuss their findings and develop their confidence as independent learners. There are excellent examples of good practice in some lessons, for instance in a mathematics lesson where students were encouraged to solve problems with minimal help from the teacher and to

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share their thinking. This enabled them to develop a thorough understanding of the topic, which was enhanced by excellent use of practical visual aids by the teacher.

The curriculum is outstanding because it is continuously reviewed and adapted to provide personalised curriculum pathways at both key stages. At Key Stage 3, students benefit from project work that integrates a number of subject disciplines. Excellent links with primary schools ensure that the students build on previous learning. Year 9 students are able to start on work for GCSEs and other accreditation. The range of courses on offer at Key Stage 4 is outstanding. As well as GCSE and BTEC, students can take a range of other qualifications including NVQs, diplomas and the Young Apprenticeship scheme. Vocational options encompass courses in childcare, hospitality, retail, business, and hairdressing and beauty therapy. The school is able to offer this range as a result of outstanding links with colleges and work-based learning providers. External links are also used to provide extra opportunities for gifted and talented students. However, the school recognises this is an area for further development.

Students appreciate the very wide range and variety of enrichment opportunities available to them, including the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, sports and fitness sessions to suit everyone, and activities such as the film and gardening clubs. A high proportion enjoy the music and drama activities offered. The school supports learning very well through the extensive number of opportunities for students to attend extra sessions at weekends and in holidays. Transport and meals are provided, where appropriate, to encourage attendance.

The caring ethos of the school is backed by excellent systems to provide pastoral support and academic guidance. The extensive links with primary schools, including shared teaching and a summer school for vulnerable pupils, ensure that students settle quickly at the start of Year 7. Thorough induction arrangements are in place for the higher-than-average number of students who join the school partway through the year. Staff know students well and the level of pastoral support is very good. Students also appreciate the support they receive from other services, including the school nurse and community police.

Monitoring of students' progress is very effective. Regular checks on how well students are achieving lead to early identification of issues, and action is taken swiftly to provide additional support. This includes fortnightly progress sheets for Year 11, which are shared with students and parents or carers. The senior leadership team is very visible around the school and a strong system is in place to promote good behaviour. Levels of exclusions are very low. A very effective mentoring system supports students who study off-site for part of the week. The senior leadership team supervises well the effectiveness of support arrangements for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Careers guidance is particularly effective because of the extensive opportunities the school provides in partnership with others to help students understand the range of options available when they leave school.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have maintained a sharp focus on learner outcomes and the quality of provision during a period of change, when the school was involved in the local authority's reorganisation proposals. The move to new premises partway through an academic year was particularly challenging and was well managed to minimise disruption for staff and students. High-quality care, guidance and support, and an excellent curriculum, have been maintained and developed further since the last inspection. Improvements in the tracking of students' progress are contributing to increased levels of attainment. Managers recognise that one of the next priorities is to increase further the standards achieved by the most-able students.

Teaching is monitored by regular lesson observations; inspectors agreed with most of the school's judgements, although they found a smaller proportion of lessons to be outstanding than the school's grades indicated. Governance arrangements have been strengthened since the last inspection by further training for the governing body to enable it to provide a good level of challenge to senior leaders. The governing body carries out its statutory responsibilities well.

Partnership work is strong. It is particularly good in terms of the curriculum links built up with primary schools and with colleges. Communication with parents and carers is good. Early contact with them contributes to the excellent induction arrangements for new students. The school frequently seeks feedback from parents and carers and uses their views to inform decisions. A high number attend review meetings to discuss students' progress. Parents and carers are well involved in agreeing the school's disciplinary procedures and the behaviour code of conduct.

Safeguarding is very thorough, including procedures for recruiting and training staff, arrangements for off-site work, and the promotion of students' awareness of health and safety. Extra supervision is in place when large numbers of students are using the stairs in the new open-plan building. The school effectively promotes equality of opportunity and students are very clear that discrimination is not tolerated. There is an excellent sense of community cohesion within the school and with the local community, but links with other communities at home and abroad are more restricted.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted questionnaires are very happy with the school. They praise its leadership and management, the commitment of the staff, and the extent to which students feel safe in the school. A high proportion felt that the school was meeting the needs of their children well and that parents and carers are helped to support learning. A very small minority said their children do not enjoy school or are not making sufficient progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic Centre for Learning (VA) 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 158 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 962 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	52	33	92	58	11	7	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	75	47	79	50	2	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	75	47	77	49	4	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	75	47	72	46	9	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	73	46	77	49	4	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	52	33	90	57	12	8	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	38	24	100	63	17	11	0	0
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)	62	39	82	52	1	1	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	65	41	84	53	6	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	64	41	78	49	6	4	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	29	90	57	10	6	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	75	47	79	50	2	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	82	52	66	42	6	4	1	1

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 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.



25 March 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of St Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic Centre for Learning (VA),
Liverpool, L35 2XG**

As you know we recently inspected your school and I am writing to tell you about our findings. We really enjoyed visiting your school. Thank you for telling us your views, and helping us to find our way around.

We agree with what many of you told us, that this is a good school. We were impressed by how well you get on together, and the behaviour of most students. It was good to see how you enjoy many of your lessons, that you work hard and are keen to do well. In a few lessons, we would like to see you participate more actively. We found that most of you make good progress at the school and, as a result, you are doing increasingly well in examinations, although in some cases we judge you could get even higher grades! We also found that you are learning other useful skills that will help you when you leave school and it was impressive to see the variety of activities you get involved in outside lessons. St Edmund Arrowsmith is a very friendly school and you and your parents and carers told us how well you are helped and supported to do your best. The curriculum on offer gives you an excellent range of courses to choose from as you move through the school. We found that you help each other and the local community really well but that you could learn more about other cultures. The school is well led and managed and we have asked the headteacher to make it even better by:

- ensuring that students reach the highest grades they are capable of
- giving you more opportunity in some lessons to discuss, work together and solve problems
- helping you to learn more about people from other cultures.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Sue Harrison

Her Majesty's Inspector

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