

St Edmund's Catholic School

Old Charlton Road, Dover, Kent CT16 2QB

Inspection dates

2 April–2 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders' actions have not had time to embed secure improvement throughout the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning is too variable. Some learning activities do not take careful enough account of what pupils already know and can do, or of the gaps in their prior learning.
- Some teachers do not follow the school's assessment policy. Their expectations of the work that pupils, especially most-able pupils, can and should do are sometimes too low.
- Although standards are rising, too many pupils do not make good enough progress over time. This is especially the case in key stage 4 and for disadvantaged pupils despite concerted work to help these pupils to catch up from the legacy of poor provision.
- Governors have not held leaders to account well enough for the use of additional funding, including the pupil premium.
- Although attendance is improving, too many pupils are still persistently absent.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders' passion to transform lives through education is inspiring. It is shared by staff throughout the school.
- Leaders, supported well by the trust, have improved the overall quality of provision for pupils. They have a good understanding of the actions needed to secure further improvement throughout the school.
- Leaders have ensured that all pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum that meets pupils' needs well and builds on their learning over time. Learning in lessons is enriched by varied extra-curricular activities.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. This is supported well by caring and effective pastoral support.
- The trust provides effective challenge and support to leaders and governors. It holds leaders at all levels to account. The trust has also provided extensive financial support.
- The trust's school improvement team has been highly effective. The team has improved the quality of middle leadership, and of teaching, learning and assessment. It has established well-considered strategies to continue the journey of improvement.
- Pupils are proud of their school. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. They are typically polite and respectful.
- Parents, carers and pupils are very positive about the school, especially the support provided by staff at all levels.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school so that all are equally strong.
- Continue to improve the progress and attainment of all pupils, especially that of the most able and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Further improve attendance, including persistent absence.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal, along with the recently appointed leadership team, demonstrates high ambition for the school and its pupils and staff. Together with the executive principal and the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership (KCSP) they have improved the quality of provision for pupils. However, staffing changes and financial challenges have impeded the pace of improvement. Consequently, teaching, learning and assessment are not yet consistently good throughout the school, and pupils' progress is still too varied.
- Several new leadership and staffing appointments took place at the start of the current academic year. These have strengthened leadership capacity and brought about improvements to pastoral care and middle leadership.
- Staff share the principal's clear vision for the school and work hard to realise it. There is a strong sense of determination to transform pupils' lives and equip them with the knowledge and skills required for their future success.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are supported well by KCSP and are taking well-considered actions to build on the improvements they have already achieved. In particular, the KCSP school improvement team has been effective in improving the quality of teaching.
- Teachers value the support they are provided with, including working with colleagues from other schools in the academy cluster. Those who are new to the profession are supported very well to start their careers successfully. At every level, there is a strong sense of teamwork, underpinned by determination to ensure the best for the pupils in their care.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are typically supported well. Leaders make effective use of funding to plan appropriate provision and support for these pupils. Many parents responding to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, explained the positive difference that SEND support has made to their children. One parent added that 'my child is the happiest they have ever been in a school'.
- Pupils who join the school speaking English as an additional language are also supported well. A range of thoughtful strategies are in place, including the use of native speakers to communicate with parents where needed.
- Disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved following focused work funded by the pupil premium. However, leaders have not sharply analysed the impact of other projects funded by this additional money. In addition, as the use of the Year 7 catch-up funding has not been routinely evaluated, leaders are not fully aware of its overall impact on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, despite funding challenges. All pupils have the opportunity to study the examination subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. Leaders have ensured that all pupils can continue with expressive, creative or technical studies through the wide range of options offered in the timetabled enrichment lessons.
- A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities complement the formal curriculum and

successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain through an effective personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme and their religious studies lessons. These provide them with a wide range of knowledge and skills to support their development as individuals in a global society. Pupils value these lessons, especially the opportunities to raise questions in a safe space. Most feel that their school is an inclusive place, where differences are accepted.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is a strength of the school, and pupils benefit from personalised support and access to a wide range of providers. Leaders are well on the way to meeting the nationally set out benchmarks for this aspect of pupils' learning.
- Parents are very positive about the school, especially the improvements they have experienced. Many parents comment on how happy their children are and the dedication of the staff. One wrote that their child is 'learning and achieving well and well supported by all staff who are clearly passionate in their subject and about the pupils' standards of education'.

Governance of the school

- KCSP has provided extensive and effective support and challenge to school leaders and local governors. As well as significant financial support, the trust's school improvement team has helped to improve the quality of teaching throughout the school. It has also held leaders at all levels to account while providing coaching and resources that have developed leadership well.
- The structure of local governance has changed this academic year. Early indications are that this change is already achieving its aims of improving communication and overall quality of governance. The executive governing body ensures that experience and skills from the local academy cluster are shared well.
- Local governors on the academy committee provide robust challenge to school leaders. They are deeply committed to the school and its ongoing improvement, undertaking frequent visits to assess different aspects of provision. However, they have not routinely held leaders to account for the impact of the pupil premium or catch-up funding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Safeguarding training for all staff and governors is regular and wide ranging. Leaders provide training relating to emerging local issues as required. They ensure that staff are alert to possible risks to pupils, including those posed by the holders of extremist views, and know what to look out for and what to do if they have any cause for concern.
- The records of the checks on the suitability of adults to work in the school are carried out properly and are suitably detailed. Governors and leaders recognise the importance of this work and routinely spot-check these records to ensure that they are accurate.

- Leaders and governors demonstrate a clear understanding of potential challenges within the local community. They work very well with other schools and external agencies such as the local authority, the police and social services, as appropriate.
- Pupils benefit from well-planned learning that helps them to recognise potential risks to themselves and their peers, including when online. They understand what to do if they have concerns, and are confident that these will be addressed effectively. Pupils value the availability of staff and say that they are listened to and taken seriously.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Leaders have systematically improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment but the strengths that have been developed are not yet securely embedded across the school. Consequently, not enough teaching is leading to pupils making good progress over time. This is particularly true for disadvantaged pupils and the most able.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have built strong relationships with pupils. Some teachers use these relationships well to persuade pupils to attempt work they find tricky. In these cases, pupils trust their teachers and attempt the work. However, sometimes, pupils will not even attempt to do work if they are not confident they can complete it successfully. This hampers their learning.
- Some teachers have a good understanding of what their pupils need to learn in order to make secure progress. However, too many learning activities do not take full account of what pupils can already do, or the gaps that they have in their prior learning. For example, in mathematics, some pupils completing calculations did not have the basic understanding of number that allowed them to recognise when their answers could not be correct.
- The most able pupils are not routinely challenged in their learning. Inspectors saw occasions when these pupils had completed the work set for the class and so sat and waited for everyone else to finish. Pupils told inspectors that they were sometimes given further work to do at these points, but this was not standard practice.
- Pupils' work in their books is often unfinished and varies in quality. Some teachers follow the school's assessment policy and provide pupils with specific feedback and time to improve their work. However, this approach is not systematically followed, and assessment practice overall does not routinely meet leaders' expectations.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good overall. Many use this knowledge well to help them to explain concepts to pupils and to ask questions to check pupils' understanding. However, some do not check that pupils fully understand key terms or subject-specific terminology used in lessons.
- Parents are provided with relevant and accurate information regarding their children's progress, plus what pupils need to do to improve on current standards. The large majority of parents find this information helpful.
- Pupils enjoy the homework projects that are set online. They say that these are relevant and help them to learn. They also enjoy the weekly enrichment lesson where they choose from a wide range of subjects, including Mandarin, woodwork and boxing. They value the choice offered as well as the chance to work with pupils from different year groups.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders effectively promote the gospel values and fundamental British values through the school's four core pillars of: 'academics, service and faith, cultural enrichment, and sport and healthy lifestyles'.
- Leaders support and provide for all aspects of pupils' welfare in a very effective manner. Strong systems and structures are in place to ensure that pupils are cared for very well. Pupils appreciate the support available; for example, they told inspectors that they welcome the introduction of mental health support, regarding it as a positive step.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and secure in school. They report that the rare cases of bullying and/or prejudiced behaviours and language are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. They are confident that staff are always available to listen to them and feel that they are taken seriously.
- Pupils are taught how to identify risk and keep themselves and their peers safe, including when online. They understand local and wider risks, as well as the warning signs to be alert to and the steps they should take if worried.
- Pupils benefit from a very effective careers guidance programme which helps them to plan for life beyond school. As a result, at the end of key stage 4, almost all school leavers enter further education or training programmes.
- Leaders closely monitor the pupils who attend alternative provision. Leaders are concerned that these pupils do not attend well enough. School staff visit the pupils regularly and work closely with various external agencies to try to improve their attendance. Staff also hold regular pupil-review meetings to evaluate these pupils' progress, personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils demonstrate positive behaviour, both in the classrooms and in other areas of the school. They interact in a calm and orderly manner, clearly showing mutual respect. They are courteous to, and are confident engaging in conversation with, visitors to the school. They wear their school uniform and new 'house' ties with pride.
- Attendance has steadily improved over recent years due to the systematic work by leaders. However, persistent absence among some groups of pupils remains stubbornly high. Recent work to improve the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils shows promising early results.
- Fixed-term exclusions are below national averages overall. However, the rate of exclusion of disadvantaged pupils is greater than that for other groups of pupils in the school. Leaders' work to address this shows early signs of success. No pupil has been permanently excluded since the school joined the trust.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Current pupils in key stage 4 are making weaker progress than those in key stage 3 due to the varied quality of teaching and the legacy of weak provision prior to the school joining the trust. This also affected previous pupils, as seen in the poor GCSE examination results in 2018.
- School information indicates that the progress of current most-able pupils lags behind that of their peers. This features across all year groups due to insufficient challenge and low expectations in some lessons.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress was poor in 2018 GCSE examinations. Current disadvantaged pupils are now attending school more regularly, and early indications are that their progress is starting to improve as a result. Disadvantaged pupils in Years 7 and 8 are making stronger progress than those in other year groups where progress has not yet caught up.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress from their starting points. They receive personalised support and teaching that meet their needs well. The trust has provided effective support that has further strengthened this aspect of the school.
- Pupils in Years 7 and 8 who speak English as an additional language make good progress from their starting points, but progress is more varied for those higher in the school. These groups experienced poorer provision before the school joined the trust. The support provided now is effective across the curriculum.
- Progress is stronger in English compared with other subjects because of the more effective quality of teaching. Texts studied in English are age-appropriate and are, in the main, challenging.
- CEIAG prepares pupils very well to plan for the next stage in their education after key stage 4. In 2018, a greater proportion of pupils than seen nationally moved successfully to appropriate destinations.

School details

Unique reference number	141217
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10088097

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	460
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Fr Philip Gilbert
Academy principal	Mr Mike Wilson
Telephone number	01304 201 551
Website	www.st-edmunds.com
Email address	office@st-edmunds.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Edmund’s Catholic School is a below-average-sized non-selective secondary school within the Kent Catholic Schools’ Partnership (KCSP) multi-academy trust. It joined KCSP in July 2016.
- The school is part of an academy cluster with two other trust secondary schools: St Anselm’s and Ursuline College. The cluster is overseen by an executive principal and an executive governing body. St Edmund’s Catholic School receives support from the schools in this cluster as well as directly from the trust’s school improvement team.
- Local governance is undertaken by an academy committee. This reports to the executive governing body, which in turn reports to the directors of the trust board.
- The school is designated as having a religious character. The predecessor school had its section 48 inspection in September 2014.
- The school’s 16 to 19 provision is currently suspended. Leaders took this decision as a temporary measure and aim to reopen it in the fullness of time.

- The proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- There are currently eight pupils in Years 10 and 11 attending alternative provision. This is run by Enterprise Learning Alliance.

Information about this inspection

- The first part of this inspection was conducted in April 2019. Through no fault of the school, two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors returned to gather further evidence in May 2019.
- The inspectors visited a wide range of classes in the school to observe learning, speak with pupils and look at their work. Many of these visits were made jointly with school leaders.
- The lead inspectors met with governors, including the governor who is chair of the academy committee and of the executive governing body. The lead inspector in May also met with a director from the trust board, the trust’s director of school improvement and the trust’s chief executive officer (CEO).
- Meetings were held with the executive principal, principal and other senior and middle leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors also met with groups of staff and took account of the views of the 38 members of staff who responded to Ofsted’s online staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of the 46 responses by parents to Parent View, along with 30 written responses.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lesson visits and during breaktimes and lunchtimes. They met with a group of pupils formally and listened to some read. They examined a large sample of pupils’ work in their books.
- The inspection teams considered a wide range of documentation, including information available on the school’s website and records relating to pupils’ attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. Information on governance, including minutes of governors’ meetings and notes from governors’ visits, was scrutinised. The school’s self-evaluations and improvement plans were examined, along with records of the school’s work to keep pupils safe.

Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector May 2019	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Yasmin Maskatiya, May 2019	Her Majesty’s Inspector
David Powell, lead inspector April 2019	Ofsted Inspector
Frederick Valletta, April 2019	Ofsted Inspector
Victoria Webster, April 2019	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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