



St Edmund's Catholic School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118912
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 280433
Inspection dates 11–12 October 2006
Reporting inspector Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Old Charlton Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Dover
Age range of pupils	11–18		CT16 2QB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01304 201551
Number on roll (school)	732	Fax number	01304 202226
Number on roll (6th form)	107		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	John Penario
		Headteacher	Christopher Atkin
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 1999		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	11–12 October 2006	280433

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Edmund's is in a part of Kent where one in three students attend grammar schools. The school has almost 200 more students than at the time of the last inspection and the sixth form has over 100 students. The school has gained Investor in People status three times, a Sportsmark Award, the Artsmark Gold Award twice and specialist status in the performing arts in 2003. The school is a member of Creative Partnerships Kent.

Students come from a wide catchment which includes areas of high social disadvantage. A lower than average proportion of students is eligible for free school meals. Just over 5% of students are from Eastern European families and speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the school is satisfactory and it has many positive features. The curriculum is good, especially in the performing arts, which is the school's specialist area, as is the quality of care, guidance and support students receive. Students respond well to this so that their personal development and well-being are good. The key weakness is the underachievement in several subjects in Years 10 and 11. For this reason, the inspection evidence does not support the school's view that its overall effectiveness is good.

Most students behave well, enjoy school and mature into considerate young adults. This is because the school successfully develops their self-esteem and confidence within the supportive ethos of Christian values. The mixed-age tutor groups in Years 8 to 10 work well. Students whose home lives or learning needs are different from the majority are welcomed, respected and well integrated.

Standards are below average. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall but good in Years 7 to 9. In 2005 and 2006, the GCSE results were well below average and students underachieved in several subjects. Long-term staff illness, difficulties in recruiting teachers, and leadership and management issues, all contributed to this underperformance.

New subject leaders for mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) are improving achievement in these subjects in all years. Standards are improving in English and science and many students continue to achieve high standards in performing arts subjects, reflecting the school's specialism.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with much good practice. Imaginative, creative teaching is a feature of several lessons but such enthusiasm is less evident in others. Learning support assistants provide valuable expertise in classes by helping students with learning difficulties and disabilities to make the same progress as others.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is well respected and is aware of the school's weaknesses. Students value the caring atmosphere and appreciate those facilities and initiatives that make their learning enjoyable. What is missing is an all-pervading determination to raise standards, by tackling underachievement as early as possible through regular analysis of students' performance, and by observing rigorously whether teaching and learning are developing students' knowledge and understanding as effectively as possible. The school's capacity to improve and tackle these weaknesses is satisfactory.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Sixth form students behave very well and are a credit to the school. They receive the same good quality of care, guidance and support as in the main school and their personal development is equally strong. Students are prepared well for their future work or education. The curriculum

is good, with a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Although achievement is satisfactory, sixth form standards and results are below average. In 2006, the school attained its best ever results.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They are good in several subjects, including the performing arts and health and social care. Not all teachers instil in students the importance of learning independently. There is no sixth form base to help students acquire good study habits. Leadership and management in the sixth form are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics, ICT, design and technology and business studies in Years 10 and 11 to the level of the most successful subjects.
- Record and analyse information on students' performance regularly to track progress and improve standards.
- Sharpen the role of senior and middle managers in checking and improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning in raising standards and achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are below average overall and the school did not meet its targets in 2006. Starting from a low base line, students' achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 11. They make good progress in Years 7 to 9. The national test results in Year 9 were below average in 2005 but the percentage of students attaining the higher levels improved in science and mathematics in 2006.

With unsatisfactory progress in mathematics, ICT, graphics, resistant materials and business studies, students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 in 2005 and 2006 was not as good as in Years 7 to 9. The school acknowledges that, before September 2006, leadership and management of mathematics and ICT was inadequate and the teaching and moderation of coursework in several subjects were not well organised. The new subject leaders for mathematics, ICT and science are making a considerable impact on raising standards. The GCSE results in English were higher in 2006 than in 2005. Students achieve well in the performing arts and also reach high standards in physical education. The different standards attained by boys and girls reflect each year group's particular abilities, rather than a consistent pattern. In spite of the school's support, the looked-after students in Year 11 did not achieve their predicted GCSE grades in 2006 because of extreme personal circumstances and non-attendance.

Sixth form examination results in 2006 were the best the school has attained, with a greater number of students attaining the higher grades. As in the main school, students did well in performing arts subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' transfer from primary school is handled extremely well and parents comment that Year 7 students 'enjoy school immensely' and 'are extremely happy from day one'. During the inspection, over 200 primary school pupils played lively recorder music and were accompanied by the school band. Students are involved in the community, especially through physical education and the performing arts, sharing the school's specialism and developing their social skills and consideration of others.

Students' spiritual development was satisfactory in the last inspection but the headteacher has successfully developed the focus on the Catholic faith in school life. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are generous in raising funds for charities.

Students act sensibly around the school, which is cramped, with little outdoor space. When a faulty fire alarm necessitated evacuation into the playground, they stood stoically in the pouring rain. Most students work hard and concentrate in lessons. They are thoughtful and help each other, supporting those who lack fluency in English or have learning difficulties. They feel safe at school and are confident that the school tackles the few instances of bullying seriously. Punctuality is good but attendance dropped to below average last year. The school has implemented a wide range of measures to reduce absence.

Prefects, school council members and mediators play a part in the school's organisation but have limited autonomy and responsibility. Students' opinions are respected and the school responds to their views, for example through improving the food in the canteen. Students fully understand the importance of diet and exercise in leading healthy lives.

Through weekly citizenship lessons and tutor time, students develop an understanding of issues that will affect their adult lives and of the skills they will need for their economic well-being. They are encouraged to think carefully about their futures and to make informed choices.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with many good features, notably in the performing arts where teaching 'brings out students' true potential' as one parent observed. Teaching in several subjects has improved considerably since the last inspection. The performing arts specialism has influenced other subjects, for example

using role play in history. The school is working to improve its teaching and guidance about coursework for students in Years 10 and 11.

Teachers collaborate very effectively with learning support assistants so that students who lack fluency in English, or have learning difficulties and disabilities, make the same progress as others. Students are in attainment-based sets in most subjects and teachers occasionally give students in the same class different work that matches their needs. This is good practice that is not applied consistently. Several teachers try out different teaching styles or techniques, such as using 'brain gym' exercises to stimulate learning, but their impact in improving standards is not evaluated methodically.

In the Year 7 competence-led curriculum for lower ability groups, the same teachers work with classes for several subjects. This demands teaching expertise that is developing but not yet fully established. Some parents and students express concerns about behaviour in classes but it was good in practically all the lessons seen.

Students learn well when they assess their own or each other's work and explain things to one another, as seen working well in mathematics. Sixth form teachers do not do enough to encourage students to think for themselves and work independently. Teachers give students realistic targets but they do not always show them clearly how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The Year 7 competence-led curriculum helps the gradual introduction of vulnerable students into secondary schooling. The number of early entry courses makes good provision for higher attaining students in Years 9 to 11, allowing them to build up a broad portfolio of qualifications over three years.

The curriculum meets students' interests and abilities by offering a wide range of academic and work-based courses, especially for students in Years 10 and 11. Lower attaining students in Years 10 and 11 follow a well-planned alternative core curriculum. Young Apprenticeships courses serve the needs of other students. The number of vocational courses has increased but does not yet offer sufficient choice within the school or through partnerships with other providers. The ICT courses introduced in September are much better matched to students' abilities than those followed in previous years.

The performing arts specialist status has created new and exciting learning for students, for example in music and dance. The resources for the performing arts subjects are a significant strength. The curriculum is enriched by a very good programme of extra-curricular activities which students value and support. All these activities support students' personal development well.

Sixth form students are well prepared for further and higher education and work. The range of academic and vocational courses is very good, developed through an extensive

partnership with local schools and colleges. The video conference link, which provides religious studies to six Catholic schools, is a successful use of modern technology.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The inspection evidence does not confirm the school's view that its care for students is outstanding. Teachers pay due attention to health and safety in lessons, but the students' toilets are unattractive and some are inappropriately locked during the day; they have been a cause of concern by students and parents for too long. Sixth form students rightly complain that they have no area where they can work and relax together. These two factors reduce the school's quality of care, which is good in all other respects.

Students feel confident about talking to staff if they have personal difficulties. Child protection procedures are fully in place and key staff are well aware of the needs of vulnerable students. Arrangements for safeguarding students are good. Students have ready access to help and advice from fellow students, who observe that they would like more training in mentoring younger students.

Teachers provide students with targets for improvement and some subjects track students' progress well. A wealth of information on students' performance exists but not all teachers are skilled at selecting the most telling statistics to highlight and deal with underachievement early. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive good support.

Careers advice is effective when students are making choices at the end of Year 9 and employment or further education choices in Years 11 and 13. The range of work experience open to Year 10 students gives them a valuable insight into the wider world of work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher and senior leadership team are committed to raising standards but this is neither explicit nor a sharply focused priority in the school development plan. Although exciting and worthwhile, time-consuming developments, such as building a Business Enterprise Centre, have not benefited the quality of education offered to students currently in the school. There are still not enough computers to enable subject teachers to gain access to them easily. This was an issue in the last inspection report.

The inclusion of all learners is central to the school's ethos and staff at all levels promote this and students' personal development well. A parent correctly describes 'the dedication and enthusiasm of the management team'. The sixth form is growing

and its leadership, being at full stretch, is only just managing to keep on top of the organisation and support required for students.

Senior and middle leaders check performance and observe lessons but the outcomes of these activities are not analysed rigorously to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The large volume of information about standards is used to set targets but there is a lack of incisiveness as to how students should improve their work to meet them.

Governors ensure that the school meets statutory requirements. The budget deficit of the previous year has been cleared. The governing body contributes much to the school's supportive, Catholic ethos. It does not challenge the school's performance with an urgency that would allow it to steer improvement planning more effectively.

The school has made satisfactory progress in addressing the issues from the last inspection. The curriculum is significantly better and homework is more effective. In contrast, standards in several subjects have fluctuated.

The school benefits from its links with many other schools and colleges. It is recognised as an effective provider of teacher training and uses this expertise well to recruit staff. With a full staffing complement and new subject leaders in place, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve and to raise its overall effectiveness further.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	2

The quality of provision

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

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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	3	
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?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We much enjoyed meeting you. I doubt any of us will forget the first morning, when you had to stand in the pouring rain when the fire alarm was triggered by an electrical fault. Your calm acceptance was impressive and you managed to smile despite your very wet clothes. We thought you also behaved well and worked hard in lessons.

There is much that is good about your school but we judged its overall effectiveness as satisfactory. The GCSE results in several subjects are not high enough. All we saw suggests that you are making better progress already. You can help by working hard and getting to grips with your coursework.

Your teachers work hard to make your lessons interesting and you value them. You certainly appreciate all the extra-curricular activities and the facilities and opportunities which the school's performing arts specialist status has generated. The courses you can choose from in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form are wide and varied. The music we heard on Thursday afternoon was great. The school cares for you well although we do agree with your concerns about the toilets and the lack of an area for sixth formers to use for work and relaxation.

We have asked the school to tackle the following things to make it better.

- Raise standards in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology and business studies in Years 10 and 11.
- Record and analyse regularly any information on your performance to track and improve standards.
- Sharpen the role of the senior leadership team in monitoring how well teaching and learning are improving your achievement.

I hope you all have a successful school year and enjoy the benefits that the Business Enterprise Centre will bring when it opens.