



English Martyrs Catholic School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 120306
Local Authority Leicester City
Inspection number 291697
Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007
Reporting inspector Paul Brooker HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Anstey Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Leicester
Age range of pupils	11–18		LE4 0FJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0116 2428880
Number on roll (school)	896	Fax number	0116 2514239
Number on roll (6th form)	152		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	J Brown
		Headteacher	Catherine Fields
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	24–25 January 2007	291697

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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

The school draws its pupils from across Leicester and beyond the city boundary. Numbers have increased since the last inspection. Pupils come from a wide range of different backgrounds. Most are White British, although almost one fifth are from other ethnic backgrounds, a higher proportion than is found nationally. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities is above the national figure.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school has a number of obvious strengths, some of which are outstanding. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

The school's strong Catholic ethos underpins the excellent care and support that it provides. The pupils' personal development is consequently outstanding. They mature as thoughtful, responsible and considerate young people who are keen to contribute to their own community and to the betterment of the wider world. The pupils have positive attitudes, are very well behaved and their attendance is well above average.

Achievement is satisfactory. Pupils make sound progress as they move up through the school. Standards of attainment are broadly in line with those seen nationally. The quality of teaching is satisfactory but varies widely from outstanding to inadequate. The uneven quality of learning reflects this variation in teaching. The curriculum is good. The school's specialism in performing arts makes a positive contribution to provision and to the pupils' personal development.

The school's leadership and management have strengthened significantly and are good. Staff, pupils and parents value the headteacher's personal qualities and bear testimony to the way in which she has nurtured a caring and supportive school community. Procedures for monitoring the school's performance are soundly based on good assessment data. However, self-evaluation, although systematic, is not sufficiently rigorous. The cohesive team of senior and middle managers has good capacity to extend its recent successes in raising standards. The school has addressed the issues from the last inspection and has made satisfactory improvement. Nonetheless, the poor accommodation continues to limit aspects of the school's provision.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is very good and its leadership is satisfactory. The sixth-form curriculum has been suitably broadened and is satisfactory. Many of the students choose to stay at the school, rather than go to a college, because they value the positive relationships and the strong support and guidance that staff provide. Sixth-form students are excellent role-models for younger pupils and make a very good contribution to the school and to the wider community. Students benefit from enrichment opportunities, including social and cultural activities, but the school's accommodation and facilities limit the range on offer. Opportunities for work-related learning are underdeveloped.

Standards of attainment are above the average for the local authority and broadly in line with those seen nationally. Given their starting points, students make satisfactory and often good progress in lessons because teaching is generally good and often outstanding. Achievement is consistently good in several subjects and is satisfactory overall.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use existing systems for monitoring performance to evaluate more rigorously the quality of learning and the impact of recent strategies to improve provision.
- Ensure that the best practice in teaching and learning is more widely replicated.
- Identify and improve those aspects of the school's inadequate accommodation and facilities that most seriously affect its provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is satisfactory because pupils make expected rates of progress as they move up through the school. The standard of pupils' work when they start in Year 7 is broadly average. Although there has been some fluctuation in the school's results, particularly in Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations, standards of attainment throughout the school are broadly in line with national figures. Examination results at GCSE and in the sixth form are significantly higher than the local authority average. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress and achieve well. In general, pupils from a minority ethnic heritage make better progress than those from White British backgrounds. Considerable staffing problems, particularly in the English, mathematics and science departments, have caused difficulties since the last inspection and explain the disappointing results in 2005. However, the school has strengthened its provision and has carefully analysed assessment data in order to address weaknesses. Although the school narrowly missed its target in 2006, the proportion of pupils who gained at least five higher-grade GCSEs increased significantly. School data indicate that it is on course to build further on these improvements.

The school makes good use of assessment information to set individual targets for pupils, to track their progress and to evaluate performance. The targeted intervention for underachieving pupils has been effective in raising standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of the pupils are outstanding. The school's Christian ethos underpins the pupils' personal development and fosters their individual abilities and talents. Pupils enjoy coming to school and demonstrate their commitment by their very high levels of attendance. Behaviour around the school is excellent and, although weaker lessons are occasionally disrupted by some silly behaviour, pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning and behave very well.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is outstanding. They develop into mature and reflective young adults who show a strong sense of

responsibility and a genuine concern for others. Pupils develop personal qualities and skills that prepare them well for the next stage in their education and for later life.

Pupils feel well cared for and know how to live healthily and stay safe. They are pleased the school responds quickly to any concerns that they have. Pupils gladly take responsibility and contribute well to the school and to the wider community. They work hard for various charities, both locally and abroad, for example raising money for orphanages in Siberia and for schools in Africa. The school council is a very effective catalyst for improvements, such as healthier canteen food and seating in the school grounds.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In general, lessons are properly structured and effectively managed. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good. Some teaching is outstanding and much is good, but the quality and pace of learning vary widely between the best and the least effective lessons. Confident and skilled teachers use their expertise well and have high expectations of pupils. They carefully assess pupils' needs and plan activities to engage and challenge all pupils, often with stimulating resources. Pupils respond enthusiastically in these lessons and, as a result, make good progress. Lessons are less effective when teachers' presentations dominate lessons and pupils are not encouraged to participate. The quality of learning is inadequate when work lacks suitable challenge and when questioning is weak. The quality of marking is variable. Many teachers give helpful written advice and clear targets, but others do not provide pupils with enough guidance about how they can improve. Assessment information is not always used systematically to inform planning or to check pupils' understanding.

Sixth-form students enjoy their lessons and appreciate the support and guidance provided by staff. Their progress is most rapid and secure when activities are carefully planned to engage them in learning. The best sixth-form lessons expertly develop students' independent learning skills.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is very good. Support staff and teaching assistants are very well integrated into the work of the school and are used effectively to support pupils' learning. The librarian promotes the pupils' literacy skills very well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum has been much improved since the last inspection and is good. It meets statutory requirements and is balanced, yet responsive to pupils' needs. There are, for example, wider opportunities for pupils to study vocational courses, some of which are provided by the local college of further education. A one-year sixth-form course has enabled students to bridge the gap between school and training or employment.

The curriculum reflects the school's specialist status as a performing arts college. In addition to developing specialised skills, the arts provision gives pupils good opportunities to grow in self-esteem and confidence. The range of extra-curricular activities is good and a significant number of pupils participate in what is offered. However, opportunities to take part in sporting activities outside curriculum time are limited because of the poor facilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school puts into practice its Christian values to provide excellent care, guidance and support for all of its pupils. Each young person is treated with respect and dignity and every child matters. The school provides a safe and supportive environment for learning and pupils' emotional well-being is strongly supported. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are rigorously adhered to and understood by staff. Pupils have a trusted adult that they can turn to should they feel vulnerable. Arrangements for monitoring academic and pastoral progress are excellent. Staff know the pupils' personal circumstances well, they are aware of how well they are doing and are quick to take action if there are problems. The school makes good use of external services to provide specific support and guidance. Parents value and appreciate the very strong support for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's energetic leadership has been a key factor in ensuring that the school has recovered from a difficult period since its last inspection. Her vision of developing the qualities and talents of every child and her commitment to achieving the best learning outcomes for all pupils have brought about significant recent improvements in attainment. The senior leadership team shares this vision and is equally committed to raising standards. Teachers with responsibilities speak of a 'common sense of purpose, of clear direction and of accountability at all levels'.

The school's arrangements for checking the progress of pupils are good. Well-established systems for monitoring the school's performance are soundly based on assessment data. There is much to encourage teachers to be innovative but the effects of these initiatives on pupils' learning are not fully evaluated. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory but not sufficiently focused or rigorous to guide improvement. Evaluation of teaching and learning does not accurately identify the best and the weakest practice.

The school improvement plan has five key priorities which are well understood by staff. Improvement planning across the school is coherent and is directed towards the personal and academic development of all pupils. Governors are well informed and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are not afraid to ask searching questions and are ambitious for the future of the school.

Action points from the last inspection have been tackled satisfactorily, although inadequacies in accommodation remain. Staffing and resources for learning are adequate. The dedication of staff, including the high quality support staff, and the strong commitment to raising achievement by the governing body and the senior team indicate that there is good capacity for further improvement.

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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	2	2
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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?	2	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 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	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	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 the contribution that you made to our recent inspection. Like other visitors, we were impressed by your friendly welcome and the fact that you were confident enough to be open and honest with us. We were particularly impressed by:

- some outstandingly good lessons
- your excellent attendance, positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour in lessons
- the excellent care, guidance and support that the school provides and the positive influence this has on you as you move up through the school
- the consideration and care that you show for others, for example through your many different charity initiatives.

Your school is a very supportive place for you to work and develop as young adults. Many of you and your parents singled out the influence of Mrs Fields and her success in making the school such a caring community. The inspection report reflects these strengths but it also highlights areas that could be improved. Most obviously, the school's accommodation is not very good and we have asked the school to continue to do the best that it can to improve your facilities. We have also emphasised the need to continue to improve results. To achieve this, the school needs to:

- be more rigorous in checking the quality of lessons and your learning
- focus on improving the overall quality of learning, so that more lessons are as good as the best.