

St Edmund Roman Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100951
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	307534
Inspection dates	14–15 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Charlotte Butler
Headteacher	Ms Gail O'Flaherty
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2005
School address	297 Westferry Road Poplar London E14 3RS
Telephone number	020 7987 2546
Fax number	020 7538 0332

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size school. Pupils come from a cosmopolitan mix of different ethnic backgrounds, with the largest being from African and Caribbean countries. The number of pupils learning English as an additional language is high. Although the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, the proportion with complex needs is high. Mobility is very high. There is a breakfast club and the school provides additional support for families with social needs.

The school is in a 'soft federation' with Our Lady Roman Catholic Primary School. The headteacher is currently also serving as executive headteacher of that school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Edmund's is a good school. It has some outstanding features. It is well run and children get off to an excellent start in the Foundation Stage. The headteacher, governors and leadership team have been successful in addressing parents' initial concerns over the shared leadership arrangements with Our Lady school. They have been careful to ensure that St Edmund's has not lost out. To the contrary, new systems, including responsibilities shared among staff through curriculum teams and more formal systems for keeping track of and recording pupils' progress, have strengthened leadership and management in this school. Monitoring of lessons is rigorous and has resulted in consistently good teaching. Consequently, pupils make good progress from a generally low starting point to attain currently average standards in English, mathematics and science. That is true both for those who spend all their time at St Edmund's as well as for the many who join the school partway through their primary education. A parent described how their daughter 'has thrived since moving to St Edmund's', explaining that, 'She is challenged, which we feel is very important in her advancement.'

Pupils respond well to a curriculum that is outstanding because it stimulates them to learn and do their best. It is enriched through teaching French throughout the school, and through lessons in Latin in Years 5 and 6, as well as the chance to experiment with textile art and to learn to play the ukulele. The school's focus on specific topics and themes to cover in depth, such as the River Thames and the human body, has helped to immerse pupils in their learning, so that they develop a hunger to learn more. This is beginning to encourage pupils to find things out for themselves and to develop as independent learners, which school leaders recognise as a key priority in moving pupils' achievement to the next level and helping to raise standards. There has been progress along this road but school leaders acknowledge that there is further to go. Opportunities are sometimes missed, for example, to involve pupils more in assessing their own and each other's work. There are some examples in the school of good marking that gives pupils clear pointers as to how to improve their work, but some of the teachers' marking only provides words of encouragement without specific guidance to help pupils improve further.

The good quality of care, guidance and support also contributes to pupils' good personal development, so that pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem. As a result, they greatly enjoy their time at school. Families benefit from very good extra support to help them through personal difficulties. Throughout the school, there is widespread use of 'mind-maps' to plan and record personal responses. This even extends to school leaders' strategic planning. Within classes, this approach encourages pupils to reflect on and express their emotional response to what they are learning. Very much in keeping with the Catholic Christian ethos of the school, this, in turn, results in pupils considering the needs of others and looking out for ways of helping those who have even less than they do.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Parents are rightly full of praise for the excellent progress their children make in the Nursery and Reception years. As one wrote, 'Our son has learnt so much in the short time he has been at St Edmund's.' Another described how her daughter's 'progress in reading has been extraordinary'. Parents especially appreciate the way staff are 'so attentive and thoughtful towards each child's needs'. Although standards by the end of the Reception Year have previously been below average, they are much higher this year. In part, this is due to children

joining the school with a broader range of abilities than in previous years, but it is also the result of very effective teaching, resulting in children making excellent progress. This is due to the very effective way in which the staff team works together and the way each child's progress is very carefully tracked within the stimulating learning environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all marking gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Raise standards and achievement in lessons by giving pupils more opportunities to develop their independent learning skills and, in particular, to assess their own and each other's progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average. In 2007, the Year 6 test scores were well above average, but the preliminary results for 2008 indicate that they are not as high this year. Assessments in Year 2 have reflected broadly average standards in almost every year since the last inspection. Nonetheless, this represents good achievement in relation to pupils' below average starting points. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with quite complex needs, are well supported so that they also make good progress. That is also the case for the many pupils who join the school at an early stage of learning English. The good progress pupils make in their key literacy and numeracy skills prepares them well for the next stage of their education and the future world or work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Knowledge and understanding of the cultural diversity of the school are strong. The school council is active and feels that its views are valued. It has shown initiative, such as interviewing the school cook about healthy dinners and ensuring an improved range of fruit available at lunchtimes. All pupils take frequent exercise in school and have a good understanding of why they should eat a balanced diet. Good behaviour, good attitudes and respect for each other and staff are demonstrated throughout the school. Pupils develop good teamwork skills and, as one pupil said, 'This school is good because we all help one another.' Pupils enjoy school, feel safe and know who to turn to for help. Pupils grow in confidence because of the good care and support they receive. They make a significant contribution to the school and wider communities with the production of their half-termly school magazine and the recent award-winning road safety film devised and produced by the pupils themselves. They also support a number of charities. Attendance remains below average because the poor attendance of a small minority of pupils continues to give cause for concern despite the school's best endeavours to promote improvement.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are lively with teachers ensuring that all pupils are interested and engaged. Good use of questioning helps to draw more detailed responses from pupils to develop their speaking

and listening skills. Good quality relationships underpin the learning environment, so that pupils are not afraid to 'have a go' or to say so if they do not understand. Staff use a variety of strategies to make lessons interesting, including varied, practical activities and investigative work, which has helped to raise standards since the inspection in science and mathematics. Support staff provide well focused extra help for those who need it. Teachers manage their classes well and move lessons on at a good pace, although sometimes introductions go on for too long and this limits opportunities for pupils to work independently and use their initiative; something that has been identified by school leaders as a key priority in moving learning on. Pupils are not always as involved as they could be in assessing their own and each other's progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils develop their skills and their talents in a curriculum that is highly stimulating and creative and one which makes learning relevant. Attention to creative work, particularly in art, can be seen in the high quality vibrant displays throughout the school. The many exceptional textiles and metal sculptures, to which all pupils contributed, demonstrate this. The curriculum in the Nursery and Reception classes is very well planned with an appropriate mix of support and challenge. The outdoor provision enhances the opportunities for the children to explore and learn in a variety of ways. For older pupils, the curriculum includes opportunities for a wide variety of different learning experiences beyond the realms of their everyday lives. The many visitors and excursions, such as to Joss Bay, help to build pupils' enthusiasm and enjoyment of school. Many extra-curricular activities are also provided, including origami, multisports and a computer club for girls, and these are much appreciated by pupils and their parents. In this inclusive, well-equipped school, school leaders and staff go to great lengths to ensure full access to the curriculum for those with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are learning English as an additional language.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Very positive relationships across the school, coupled with the high priority placed on treating each child as an individual, ensure that support, care and guidance for all pupils are good. Policies and procedures to ensure pupils' health, safety and welfare are made clear to all staff and are carefully implemented. Many pupils have emotional or social barriers to overcome before they can settle to learning calmly and confidently. The school provides a good range of additional support for them and their families. The good links with social services and other agencies helps ensure that vulnerable pupils are well cared for. Pupils are well prepared for moving to secondary school. However, there is still some inconsistency in the quality of academic guidance given to pupils. Not all marking gives pupils clear enough guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The recent move to building three staff teams to take shared responsibility for what are referred to in the school as 'the core curriculum', 'the foundation curriculum' and 'everything else', has given all staff a greater stake in the decision-making process. It has also helped to spread and

share expertise, enabling the school to better plan for and cover any changes of staff. The headteacher and leadership team have an accurate picture of how well the school is doing and of where there is scope for improvement. They monitor the work of the school very closely. Their observations of lessons have helped to ensure more consistently good teaching. Similarly, analysis of past performance identified that pupils were not previously doing as well as they should in science investigations and mathematical problem-solving. Changes were introduced to the curriculum to tackle these shortcomings and these have accelerated pupils' rates of progress. These illustrate the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

The school has relied until recently on informal systems of monitoring and recording. These have generally worked because this is a school where the staff know the pupils well. The recent introduction, however, of more systematic procedures, for example for tracking pupils' progress as they move up the school, has helped to strengthen provision. However, there remain some gaps, such as in the way in which action is evaluated against the 'mind-map' format school development plan. Governors are supportive of the school. They have helped in the drive for school improvement and have set clear parameters to ensure that any disruption caused by the paired working with Our Lady is minimised.

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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?	2
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well 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	2

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

01 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Edmund Roman Catholic School, London, E14 3RS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. St Edmund's is a good school where you are making good progress. The children in the Nursery and Reception classes are now getting off to an excellent start.

Your school is well run and the teaching is good. One of the things that stands out most in your school is the super range of different activities you get to do. We were really sorry that we missed the chance to hear Year 5 playing their ukuleles but we certainly got to enjoy all of your artwork on display. The way you learn topics is really making learning fun for you. That, and the way in which all the staff help you and look after you, is why you like coming to school.

We were pleased to see how well behaved you are and how well you get on with each other. We know that your headteacher and other school leaders are keen to see you develop your skills so that you can do more things for yourselves. We agree that that will help you to make even faster progress, so we have asked the school to give you more opportunities for this and to be more involved in assessing your own and each other's work. Some of your teachers' marking gives you very clear guidance on how to make your work better, but not all the marking is as helpful. We have also therefore asked your teachers to make sure that all their marking is as good as the best. You can help too by carefully following their advice and continuing to do your very best.

Yours sincerely,

Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector