

The English Martyrs School and Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111756
Local Authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	325452
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Georgiana Sale

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1670
Sixth form	330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Readman
Headteacher	Mr Joseph Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	5 October 2005
School address	Catcote Road Hartlepool TS25 4HA
Telephone number	01429 273790
Fax number	01429 273998

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The English Martyrs is a popular comprehensive school. It has specialist arts college status. The pupils come mainly from a number of Catholic primary schools spread over a wide area where the extent of social and economic deprivation is greater than the national average. The standards on entry to the school are above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

English Martyrs is a good school with many outstanding features, including the thriving sixth form. The highly caring and supportive nature of staff and students and the strong Christian values run through the whole school community. Community cohesion is outstanding and influences the immediate school community and beyond. Students say that they feel safe, supported and encouraged to achieve their potential at all times, both in and out of class.

The school's specialism in the arts pervades the whole school in a very positive way. It is reflected in the vibrant learning environment for the pupils, and in the wide range of arts related courses. High quality specialist teaching and learning ensure that students achieve very well in art and design, and music. Standards in the school's arts specialisms are well above average. Students regularly win national prizes and exhibit in major exhibitions, for example at the Royal Academy.

Students achieve well and make good progress because the teaching and learning are good. Students develop very positive attitudes and good behaviour. They are determined to make the best of the opportunities offered to them. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average, including students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language. Staffing problems have adversely affected students' progress in English. These have been resolved and standards in English are on the rise but have not yet reached the school's challenging targets.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students speak very positively about the school; they enjoy coming, they think they are taught well and they want to gain good results in examinations. Pupils behave well both in and out of lessons, and their attendance is above average and rising. They enjoy contributing to the school community and beyond; for example, through their charity work and working with feeder primaries. They treat each other with care and respect and thrive in the culturally and spiritually rich environment of the school.

Teaching is good. Students work hard in lessons, participate enthusiastically and are keen to answer questions. Teachers generally manage their classes well and they use praise and a wide range of strategies to motivate their pupils. All staff contribute fully to the school's provision, so that lesson and activities beyond the timetabled curriculum offer a rich diet and add to the students' enjoyment of their time at school.

The school places a strong emphasis on the importance of individual students and provides excellent support and care for all. The systems for academic guidance have improved since the last inspection and are now good. Students know how well they are doing and staff track their progress and take action if they fall behind with their work. Teachers use the data to help them plan interesting and challenging lessons and most of them give good advice to the students in their books about how to progress to a higher level. However, this is less evident in lessons.

The headteacher gives a strong clear direction to the staff, ably supported by his senior leadership team, middle managers and governing body. The school knows itself well, and there is regular and careful consideration of students' academic and pastoral development and consequent needs. There has been good all round improvement since the last inspection especially in the sixth form. Academic standards have risen because the school now uses data well to help students do their best. The school's good reputation as an arts specialist college has grown. Standards in the school's arts specialisms are also well above average. The increasing role of the middle leaders to drive improvement, the re-structuring of leadership roles and an

able governing body, coupled with the impact of the specialist status, mean that the school has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form where students flourish in a supportive and friendly atmosphere. Very good relationships and a real sense of community and support within the sixth form are key features in its success. Consequently, it provides a really secure environment for students to achieve well. Many continue on to university. Students are drawn to the sixth form by the specialist arts courses offered such as ceramics and music technology. Not all students come with good GCSE passes and attainment on entry is broadly average. A combination of outstanding teaching and learning, and excellent student-teacher relations ensures that students make outstanding progress and reach high standards that place the sixth form in the top 5% nationally.

The personal development of students is excellent. The students are mature, thoughtful, confident and well rounded young adults. Occasional lateness to lessons is the only shortcoming. The strong emphasis on discussion and sharing of ideas and independent learning prepares students well for further study.

Teaching and learning are outstanding as is the quality of care, guidance and support. A particular strength is the way that the school quickly recognises students who are experiencing difficulties of either a personal nature or connected with their chosen subjects. The curriculum is excellent; it offers a wide range of courses, including vocational courses for a range of abilities. The very extensive extra-curricular programme, the wide variety of visits, and a multitude of opportunities to take real responsibility, often serving others, all help to widen experience and develop confidence and self-esteem.

Leadership and management are excellent. High standards are sought. When standards fall in any subject the staff are quick to carry out a thorough investigation which results in an effective action plan.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the guidance given to pupils in lesson time so that they know what they have to do to progress.
- Raise standards in English to meet the school's challenging targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with above average standards and by the time they leave in Year 11 their achievement is good and standards are well above average. Relative to their capabilities, students with identified learning needs make good overall progress, as do students with English as an additional language. This is because their progress is closely monitored and a combination of pastoral and academic goals is used to help them do their best. Furthermore, good individual or group support is given by the well trained learning support assistants.

The standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 are well above those found nationally in English, mathematics and science. There has been a rising trend in the GCSE results and last year most students left with five good GCSE passes. All students left with at least one GCSE pass.

Progress during Key Stage 4 is good as confirmed by inspection findings and by the school's own evidence. Results are now back on track to meet most of the school's challenging targets for this year although standards are not yet high enough in English. The number of subjects in which students attain above average standards is growing and includes art, design and technology, French and religious education (RE). The quality of the school's provision for business studies was recently judged to be outstanding by a separate inspection led by Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students behave well in lessons and around the building making the school a welcoming place where relationships are warm and respect between adults and students is palpable.

Pupils develop a deep spiritual awareness through events and activities such as prayers and assemblies and RE lessons. Students say that this, together with a shared set of social and moral values, contributes significantly towards their strong sense of community. One student, new to the school from abroad, said that, 'English Martyrs feels like a new family for me'. Students have opportunities to learn about other cultures, for example through excellent links with a school in Gambia which some students have visited. Most students report that they feel very safe and that bullying is minimal and dealt with quickly.

Students clearly enjoy school and the opportunities it offers. They are keen to learn and there are high levels of concentration and participation in lessons. Attendance is above the national average. Students have an excellent appreciation of what contributes to a healthy lifestyle and sports clubs are a popular feature of extra-curricular provision. The students develop a very good understanding of what constitutes a balanced diet and develop cooking skills so they how to prepare healthy meals.

Students' contribution to both the school and wider communities is excellent. For example, older students lead teaching in local primary schools in subjects such as art and French. Students develop their workplace skills well; all Year 10 take part in work experience and students take up the many opportunities to become involved in leadership and team work. Their progress in core skills is good and the school has won recognition for its excellent enterprise education curriculum which all pupils follow.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good; some is outstanding. This is because the school has successfully placed a strong emphasis on raising the quality of learning in all lessons through better use of assessment data to match students' work to their prior attainment. This initiative has been supported by high quality training opportunities for teachers and support staff. The focused use of new systems in mathematics and English are having a significant impact on the consistency of assessment and in raising teachers' expectations.

Relationships between teachers and students are good; teachers are confident in their subjects and explain key points clearly. Teachers carefully explain the lesson's learning objectives, enhanced by the use of interactive whiteboards. This results in students clearly knowing what

to do and what to focus on. When this was combined with how the objectives for the lesson linked to students' own learning targets, students made very good progress.

In the best lessons, students are challenged to higher levels of thinking and creativity through good pace and skilled questioning. In most lessons, positive attitudes and high standards of behaviour create a good atmosphere for learning. In a small minority of lessons, teachers' management of students is less successful, and as a result, students lose concentration and learning slows.

Good levels of collaborative working are evident in many lessons. Good use is made of pair and group work, which is coupled in the best lessons with students assessing their own work against examination board criteria. However, this is not yet consistent across departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Specialist arts college status makes a very strong contribution to the good quality curriculum. The uptake in arts subjects is excellent, and the arts specialism has had a significant influence on many aspects of the curriculum. Extra-curricular arts related activities, some of which carry accreditation, are particularly appreciated by students of all abilities and interests. Specialist funding is used to support arts activities in partner primary schools, the Catholic Schools' partnership and other local high schools, helping to raise standards throughout the local education community.

The curriculum has widened over the last years and is well matched to the range of students' needs and aspirations, with a growing provision of practical and vocational subjects.

Opportunities for work related learning are well planned and welcomed by students. Personalised learning programmes are used effectively to meet the needs of those who have difficulty with learning or who are vulnerable, resulting this year in all students going on to either employment or training.

Changes to the curriculum for Personal Social Health Education are popular with students and are contributing significantly to students' outstanding personal development. An exceptional feature which contributes to students' preparation for the future is the extended curriculum. Students take part in a very wide range of visits, including trips to galleries and theatres, as well as journeys to Europe and beyond. The school achieved International School status in May 2008.

Information and communication technology(ICT) is used as a means to improve work and as a means of study in specialist programmes in individual subjects. ICT is not however planned or assessed well enough in Key Stage 4 to exploit to the full the standards reached by students at the end of Key Stage 3.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has very good systems to care for and support its students. All systems concerning safeguarding and child protection comply with national guidelines. Effective methods are used to identify, and respond to individual needs and there is a wide range of strategies to offer support. For example, students with English as an additional language benefit from working with a teaching assistant specially trained in supporting language development. Some students

with particular needs receive individually designed time tables to help their integration into school life.

Transition at all stages, managed by the pastoral support staff, is good. The school has close links with its feeder primary schools and many students will have visited four times or more before they enter Year 7. Careers guidance is timely and thorough and students describe this as a strength of the school.

Academic guidance to students is good. Students in all years have appropriate targets and tracking systems make sure that any underachievement is identified and appropriate interventions organised. Although well developed in some subjects, oral feedback in lessons is not always used enough to support students in improving their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Staff and students subscribe to the clear set of values that comes from the headteacher and the senior leaders. The headteacher is committed to promoting not only the students' academic but also their personal development. An outstanding contribution is made to community cohesion. Excellent links with local schools and within the community, plus the strong links with some countries abroad, extends very well student's understanding of the diversity of modern society.

A well planned cycle of self-evaluation ensures that senior and middle leaders know how well the school is doing and what the key priorities are for further development. Good systems result in challenging targets for improvement at school, subject and class levels. Middle leaders, supported by senior colleagues, demonstrate a sound ability to monitor, review and plan action. Senior leaders put in well targeted support to develop their middle leaders and hold them to account for their performance.

The good partnership between the school and governing body ensures that governors are well informed and have a clear picture of strengths. They are increasingly involved in strategic planning to bring about further improvements, challenging where appropriate. The school gives good value for money.

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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	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?	2	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
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 learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

18 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The English Martyrs School and Sixth Form College, Hartlepool, TS25 4HA

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and the other inspectors when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers and visiting some of your lessons.

We agree with you that English Martyrs is a good school. It is a special place because of the good care and support that it gives you and we were impressed by the wide range of arts activities. Your paintings and ceramics really took my eye! As well as helping you to achieve good results in examinations, the school helps you to become responsible, caring young people.

We were very impressed with the respect that you showed each other and the efforts you make to help those less fortunate than yourselves. You told us how much you enjoy your lessons and how friendly and supportive the teachers are. We were pleased to see your enthusiastic participation in all aspects of school life and can see why you enjoy the many after school clubs and other activities on offer.

For you in the sixth form the provision is outstanding. You set an excellent example for younger students. You all work hard in lessons and it is also good to see that you involve yourselves in a wide range of activities that help the school and the community.

You have a good headteacher and other teachers help to lead the school well. Your headteacher, governors and staff want to make your school better and we have asked them to do the following:

- improve the guidance they give to you in lesson time so that you know exactly what to do to progress
- raise standards in English.

I am sure you will help by listening to their advice and working especially hard in English.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection of your school. We enjoyed spending the two days with you and wish you a happy and fulfilled life.

Georgiana Sale

Lead inspector