

St Edwards College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131320
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	328582
Inspection date	11 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Jane Austin HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1188
Sixth form	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Terry Sweeny
Headteacher	Mr J Waszek
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2005
School address	North Drive Sandfield Park Liverpool Merseyside L12 1LF
Telephone number	0151 281 1999
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the college and investigated the following issues:

- levels of achievement in all Key Stages
- the quality of teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of the target-setting and tracking systems in improving students' learning.

Other aspects of the college's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the college's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

At the time of the inspection students in Years 11 and 12 were taking public examinations.

Description of the school

St Edward's is a popular and heavily oversubscribed school of above-average size. It is the choir school for the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King. While maintaining its long tradition of educating boy choristers, the college formed its first girls' cathedral choir at the beginning of this academic year. In addition to choristers, 10% of pupils are admitted on the basis of musical talent. Although situated in an area of above-average social and economic advantage, the college draws pupils from a very wide area and range of backgrounds. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average. Almost all pupils are White British with small numbers from a range of minority ethnic heritages. A very small proportion speak English as an additional language but none are at the early stages of learning it. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well-below average while the percentage with a statement of special education needs is below average. The college is part of a collaborative with five local schools providing a range of courses for students in the sixth form. The college has received recognition as a high-performing specialist school and, in addition to its well-established work in languages and the performing arts, is participating in the Raising Achievement Transforming Learning programme. The college holds the Sportsmark and Artsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Edward's provides its pupils with an outstanding, all-round education. It, successfully, fosters an ethos that matches its aim to 'provide a broad and challenging education in which individuals are encouraged to fulfil their own potential, value the talents of others and live life to the full'. This success is reflected well in a parent's comment, typical of the very many positive responses received by inspectors: 'The college cares for the whole child and there is a perfect balance between academic activities and out-of-school clubs to ensure that pupils grow into fully rounded human beings.'

Pupils reach standards that are consistently exceptionally high at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4. In 2008, 89% gained at least five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics, compared with a national average of 48%. Pupils had considerable successes in the college's specialist areas of languages and performing arts, with large numbers gaining the highest grades. At Key Stage 3, in the core subjects, almost all pupils reached the expected level for their age and the vast majority attained higher levels than this. When pupils join the college their attainment is well-above average. From this starting point, they make excellent progress; there is a trend of outstanding achievement. The college reacted promptly and robustly to a slight dip in the rate of achievement in 2008, taking both effective short-term measures and longer-term strategic steps to ensure that pupils do as well as possible. The college's own data indicate that interventions to improve performance in GCSE and A-level examinations further are having a positive impact. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress comparable with that of their peers.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Assemblies, such as that led by a Year 7 form during the inspection, indicate that pupils develop the capacity to reflect on society in the light of their faith. They show keen awareness of the needs of others, through their extensive charitable fundraising and voluntary work; many make a substantial contribution to college life and that of the wider community. Older students' awareness of global issues and a willingness to do something about them is evident in the planned work in Sierra Leone. Through their exemplary behaviour and courteous attitudes to others, pupils show that they understand right and wrong: their social development is first-class. Relationships, both between students and with staff, are very good. Pupils work together exceptionally well, they listen to and respect others' opinions and, as one said, 'This school is a real community where people look after each other.' Excellent attitudes to learning contribute much to the industrious atmosphere in lessons and consequently to pupils' high achievement. Pupils enjoy school life; attendance is well-above average and this supports their progress very well. Pupils are, largely, confident that they have a voice in school affairs and point to examples where they have been listened to.

Pupils' excellent achievement, both personal and academic, is built on an outstanding curriculum. At Key Stage 3, a broad and balanced programme includes studying two and, for some pupils, three modern foreign languages. At Key Stage 4, pathways, while reflecting the longstanding academic tradition of the college, are becoming increasingly flexible in response to pupils' aspirations and abilities. A series of enterprise days provides appropriate opportunities for work-related learning.

The extensive extra-curricular and enrichment choices available and the very high rates of participation, make the curriculum exceptional. Many activities spring from the college's specialist

work, such as the extensive weekly instrumental tuition sessions, music groups and regular productions. A large number of cultural and exchange visits to Europe take place and the college ensures that all Year 7 and 8 pupils have the opportunity to participate in one of these. There is a very wide array of sporting activities on offer, both competitive and recreational, for teams, groups and individuals. About half the pupils take part in some extra-curricular sport. A significant proportion of pupils also participate in a range of service activities that equally reflect the college's ethos. There is a well-established tradition of students supporting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for instance through the Mencap Sunday Club.

Excellent teaching promotes outstanding learning. Teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. The great majority of lessons are well-planned to meet pupils' needs; occasionally, lesson activities are not matched well enough to pupils' prior learning and abilities. The best lessons move at a rapid pace, keeping pupils' interest alive through a variety of well-designed activities and effective use of time targets that add a sense of urgency. Frequent references to previous learning provide a firm foundation on which pupils can develop their understanding. Teachers encourage pupils to learn from their mistakes and give them the confidence to do so. Effective use is made of interactive whiteboards to focus pupils' attention, illustrate learning points and to reinforce understanding. Teachers provide active individual support that enables all pupils to make progress. Many teachers make very effective use of day-to-day assessment techniques to check for understanding; demanding questions stretch pupils and make them think. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to make pupils think for themselves by asking targeted questions. Teaching assistants provide effective support that enables pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate fully in lessons and to make similar progress to their classmates.

The college provides excellent care, guidance and support that pupils appreciate; they feel safe. One pupil spoke for very many when commenting, 'There's always someone there to help if you need it.' Pupils say the rare incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils' confidence in the college contributes significantly to their progress. The great majority of pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They are increasingly involved in assessing their own progress against challenging targets and setting personal goals for improvement. Pupils value the guidance they get at each new stage of their education. Safeguarding arrangements meet current government requirements.

The leadership and management of the college are outstanding. Leadership is characterised by, in the Principal's own terms, 'a restlessness for improvement'. The Principal and senior leaders have a clear, well-articulated vision for future developments, firmly rooted in present successes and a thorough grasp of the changing needs and aspirations of pupils. Planning is well-founded on priorities arising from an effective cycle of self-evaluation. Leaders are sure-footed and take decisive actions in response to any shortfalls in performance. The college's approach to community cohesion is a strength, reflecting its ethos of partnership and service. Students play a part in various aspects of the civic life of the city. The many music and performing arts events reach into the community. There are well-established, regular links with local primary schools in the college's specialist subjects.

A very large proportion of parents returned the inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of responses were very positive about the education provided for their children. A small minority of parents expressed the view that the college does not seek or take the views of parents into account sufficiently.

Governance is outstanding. Governors are very well-informed about the college and play an active part in determining its strategic direction. In addition to support, they provide a high level of challenge to the college's leaders. The college provides outstanding value for money and has outstanding capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Overall, the quality of provision in the sixth form is outstanding. The leadership and management of the sixth form, integrated with that of the whole college, are outstanding. Standards at AS and A2 level are consistently above average overall. The proportion of students gaining higher grades in A2 examinations in 2008 rose markedly to well above average. Performance in the applied A2 course was exceptionally high and there were notable strengths in some of the college's specialist subjects, including French and music. Overall, students made good progress but this masks variation in achievement between subjects. The college has taken rapid, well-considered steps to address this and its data on current performance indicate some marked improvements for current groups of students.

Almost all students go on to higher education; through its outstanding curriculum the college prepares them well for this. Students select from a good range of level 3 courses, the extent of which is increased by the college's partnership with the sixth form collaborative. As part of the college's specialism, all students learn a modern foreign language, either at level 3 or through examined enrichment courses. Students choose from a wide range of languages including Arabic, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin and Portuguese. In addition, many have the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification in information and communication technology (ICT). The extensive extra-curricular activities and opportunities for service through, for instance, the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust, add a significant dimension to students' personal development. Additionally, students have many opportunities to foster their leadership skills, for example as prefects, community sports leaders, mentors for younger pupils and as helpers in the delivery of modern foreign languages in partner primary schools. They are exceptionally well-prepared for the next stage of their education and life because they leave the college as mature, confident and articulate young women and men, who work well with others and have high academic standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of achievement at AS and A2 level.

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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?	1	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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	IE ²
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	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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 learners' needs?	1	IE ²
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	IE ²

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

Thank you very much for welcoming us to St Edward's when we visited recently. We appreciated having the opportunity to talk with you about life at the college, both formally and informally. Your views helped us reach our conclusion that St Edward's provides you with an outstanding, all-round education.

The main factors in reaching this judgement are:

- you, consistently, make outstanding progress and reach standards in national tests and examinations that are exceptionally high
- your behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary and your attendance is well-above average. You clearly enjoy college life and make a big contribution to it in a wide variety of ways
- the college provides an exceptional range of opportunities for you to participate in music and the performing arts. You also have the chance to learn a number of languages and in the sixth form these include some that are not commonly taught
- the choice of extra-curricular activities is extensive and very many of you take up these opportunities. Sport of all kinds, both competitive and recreational, has a high profile. There are also many trips and European visits that lots of you take advantage of
- there is a strong tradition of helping others and many of you are involved in extensive fundraising for charities and practical activities, such as the Sunday Club
- the college is led and managed very well so that things keep improving.

As you know from your own work, there is always something that can be improved. It's the same for the college. We have asked the Principal and his team to ensure that performance in all subjects in the sixth form is at least as good as the best.

Keep up the good work. We wish you every success in the future.