

St Edmund's College

Old Hall Green, Ware Herts. SG11 1DS

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 9 and 10 November 2016



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- A new subject leader has recently been appointed, who is implementing an effective range of structures and systems for planning, marking and tracking progress across the school.
- The headmaster and the new subject leader for religious education share a clear vision and determination to move the religious education provision to excellent.
- The RE curriculum is central to the education of the pupils of all faiths, and none, and to the mission of the school.
- Teaching observed was at least good with evidence of some outstanding aspects.
- Planning has been re-structured and is being implemented across the department, through revised schemes of work, which are matched closely to the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Achievement and progress over time are both good, with some groups making outstanding progress.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- The new marking and feedback systems are not yet fully consistent and need to be embedded across the department.
- The monitoring system, which is developing, needs time to be fully implemented.
- Opportunities for networking both locally and with deanery and diocesan partners need to be further developed, in order to access models of good practice in moderation of assessment and of progress.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The governing body, headmaster and the senior leader with responsibility for Catholic Life provide the inspiration and dedication for all aspects of the College's Catholic dimension.
- The high quality of relationships throughout the whole community create a family atmosphere which encourages care for each other and for neighbours near and far.
- There is an acute awareness among the pupils of the needs of others and a genuine desire to make a difference through prayer and action.
- There is an extensive range of opportunities for Christian service and leadership in school, locally, nationally and internationally.
- Prayer, reflection, worship and receiving the sacraments, are central to the daily and weekly life of the school and are woven into the fabric of the school, through the charisma of St. Edmund, the College's patron.
- The school has a very close relationship with parents, many of whom expressed their appreciation of the care and nurture of their children.
- Students and pupils are actively encouraged in both the preparation and leadership of prayer and worship

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

A new leader for religious education has been recently appointed. She has carried out a full and thorough review of the schemes of work for Key Stages 3 and 4 in religious education and the core religious education programme for Key Stage 5. This includes year group specific topics, which progress as they move through the school. A range of readily accessible artefacts, including the use of multi-media to explore world religion, now enhances the learning for pupils and students. The popularity of the AS/A2 Theology is increasing, now that the GCSE and A Level programmes have more emphasis on scripture and Catholic ethics. This stimulates an interest at earlier ages, whilst encouraging students to build on and deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding of the philosophy of religion. The relationships and sex education programme is systematic and embedded, with well-established links with science and PSHE.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The content of the religious education curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. There is a creative approach to the development of the varied topics on offer, across the key stages. In the short time since her appointment, the leader of religious education has overhauled the schemes of work, giving them a structure which empowers pupils and students to deepen their levels of knowledge, as they move through the key stages. She has implemented a range of relevant links including exploration of the world religions. There is a focus on Judaism this term, with evidence of artefacts and resources for the exploration of other world religions. This is evident in the work displayed in the classrooms, where pupils and students have access to relevant websites, such as Cafod and Traidcraft. They have also explored many opportunities for the social justice and Common Good, during this holy Year of Mercy.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

The overall attainment in religious education is good across the key stages. The GCSE results for 2016 (87% A*- C), were good and represented an increase of 7% from the previous year. The department team is working relentlessly to increase standards across all key stages. All pupils and students make at least good progress, with some groups and individuals making outstanding progress. This is particularly evident for pupils and students with little or no previous religious education. Evidence of progress was measured against appropriate benchmarks, from the national levels of attainment in RE. The diocesan baseline tests are used in Elements (Year 7) to provide an specific RE benchmark against which to measure progress. The new standardised tracking and monitoring system provides more robust analysis of progress and provides students and pupils with the opportunity to review their own progress twice a term. This not only allows them to know their current performance but also what progress they have made within this level.

The quality of teaching is good

Overall, teaching in religious education is consistently good, with some outstanding features in lessons. Pupils are keen learners and are engaged in group and partner discussions. They are confident and articulate in sharing their views. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and are able to state the Catholic Church's teaching when challenged by pupils, as evidenced in a lesson observed on the role of the Virgin Mary. Teachers deepen pupils' religious literacy, including the recently introduced use of religious 'big words,' to improve their religious vocabulary, across Key Stage 3. Pupils and students across the school are encouraged to make links between previous learning. Questioning is effectively used by the teachers to probe the theological thinking of the pupils and

students. The newly introduced marking and self-evaluation systems are having an impact, but are not as yet being consistently applied across the department. The responses to the teachers' comments by pupils and students, are not always effective nor challenging, to enhance their learning in religious education. Feedback also includes verbal discussions between the teacher and the pupils and students about their learning and progress. The range of teaching strategies observed supports and engages pupils and students in their own learning, which empowers them to learn well in their lessons. The leader has introduced the use of special covers on the books, and are encouraging improved presentation, raising the status of religious education across the whole school.

The leadership and management of religious education

are good

The school has re-structured the leadership of religious education in recent times. The newly appointed leader has overhauled the schemes of work. She has implemented key strategies for improving the quality of teaching to impact on learning. She is monitoring the quality of the provision on a regular basis. This has resulted in significant improvements being made and her partnership with the ex-interim leaders is now leading the provision of religious education forward at a more rapid pace. They are fully committed and dedicated, to further raise the profile and importance of religious education across the school.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Ensure that tasks set, marking and feedback are bringing about improvements to pupils' and students' learning which challenge the more able whilst empowering others to reach, and, where possible, exceed their targets
- Ensure that the monitoring cycle includes swift follow-up actions to any identified areas for development
- Develop a range of networks for empowering accurate moderation across the local, deanery and diocesan models of good practice

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has fully met the requirements identified for Key Stage 3. The chaplaincy is now well developed, including its active committees with cross-denominational representation. The mission statement has been reviewed and is represented through a 'photomosaic' in the shape of the Cross, reminding all in the community of the centrality of faith and teaching in their daily lives. Retreats and opportunities for students and pupils to celebrate their faith in action are effectively planned. The theology underpinning their acts of service, which utilises their gifts and talents, gives pupils and students a clear grasp of why they think and pray beyond themselves, including those pupils and students of non-Catholic tradition and of no faith.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

Religious education receives the full 10% at Key Stages 3 and 4, with 5% at Key Stage 5, as required by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Religious education is at the heart of the school and the core of the curriculum. This includes increased emphasis on cross-curricular links through PSHE and science. The governing body, with the headmaster and leader of the Catholic life of the school, offer outstanding guidance to ensure that religious education is extremely well supported. The recent re-structure of the department is testament to the improvements in the quality of planning, assessment and teaching of religious education. The generous budget for RE and the Catholic life of the school is evident in the rich quality and range of resources, including for the exploration of world religions, in-service training and the vibrant work of the chaplaincy. The college is fully committed to providing highly effective continuing professional development opportunities for all staff, through a well-planned cycle of in-service, networks and external professional development.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding

The experience of Catholic worship, prayer and liturgy, central to the daily life of the college, is outstanding. There is a clear outline of liturgical and worship opportunities for all pupils, students and other members of the school community, woven into the annual calendar which follows the liturgical year. These include regular adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, opportunities for Catholic pupils and students to receive the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sixth form students are commissioned as Eucharistic Ministers on the annual feast of the Immaculate Conception. There are extra liturgies planned for the boarders, including Compline. Parents are invited regularly to attend the schedule of Masses and other liturgical events. The celebration of the college feast day includes a special Mass in honour of St. Edmund for the whole school community, followed by year group celebrations. The annual retreat week offers opportunities for staff and pupils to strengthen their relationship with God and to take time out to reflect and pray. The Year of Mercy logo and prayer, created by the pupils and students, are prominently displayed around the school and on the special corridor, through the 'Door of Mercy', leading to the Pugin Chapel. Through prayer and reflection opportunities, pupils' spiritual growth is enhanced and is central to their lives and to becoming leaders, within their college community and beyond.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice

are outstanding

The commitment to the Common Good is outstanding. The excellent relationships, evidenced through mutual respect, empathy and genuineness, between both the pupil, and the pupils and the

staff, are at the heart of this strong, caring, family community. The staff are excellent role models, knowing and valuing all pupils and they nurture the outstanding behaviour throughout St Edmund's. The pupils and students have a great concern for social justice, and appreciate the importance of this to the Christian mission of the college in spreading gospel values. They have an excellent understanding of the theology which underpins these. There is a plethora of opportunities for service and fundraising locally, nationally and internationally and the pupils embrace these with great enthusiasm. Examples of fundraising include: the annual charity week during Lent supporting a different charity each year; pupils leading assemblies on Cafod, in preparation for Harvest Fast Day, supporting local foodbanks and the annual Christmas lunch for the elderly. Some sixth formers annually travel to India to work in a school in Bangalore and fundraise with their peers during the preceding year to provide much needed resources for their hosts. Others similarly travel to Douay, Madrid, Thailand and Lourdes. On their return from these voyages they lead assemblies to share their rich experiences with the younger pupils.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

The partnerships between parents, the school and the wider parish communities are outstanding. They are made welcome at Masses, key celebrations and refer to the school as, 'an amazing place for Catholic practice.' The evidence from the wide range of testimonials, letters of appreciation and other correspondence reflects the gratitude and appreciation of their stakeholders for the nurture, warmth and excellent provision from the college. The outward looking nature of the school includes their extensive networking both at home and abroad, such as their links with schools in Madrid, India and the community at Douay, in northern France. The school has worked in partnership with the diocesan advisors and officers, and actively attend relevant in-service. The annual past pupil celebrations, including the Remembrance services and the forthcoming 450th anniversary celebration of the founding of the college, demonstrates their full and dedicated commitment to their current wider community, as well as treasuring their historical legacy. The school motto, 'Avita pro fide' (for the faith of our fathers), is taken very seriously by all pupils, as a Year 7 pupil described 'the faith of our Fathers is our fundamental dignity'.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school

is outstanding

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the college are clearly outstanding. The leader of the Catholic life has a firm and dynamic grasp of all aspects of the Catholic life of the college. Her selfless commitment reflects the charism of St Edmund, woven through the well planned liturgical, sacramental and spiritual growth opportunities for the whole college community. The governing body and the headmaster ensure that the Catholic identity is widely celebrated. The pro-active governing body is significantly driving forward the school priorities, in close partnership with the dedicated headmaster and his senior team. This extremely strong Catholic identity and tradition, spanning nearly 450 years, includes the 'Old Edmundians' annual invitation to Mass and ongoing celebrations. This is also a dedication to continuity, reflecting the ways in which the school has developed its strong historical Catholic roots from Douay to the present day.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Develop further the excellent practice for all aspects of the Catholic and liturgical life of the college community as opportunities arise

Information about this school

- The school is an independent Catholic College day and boarding school in the locality of Ware, East Hertfordshire.
- The school serves a number of parishes both locally, nationally and from abroad.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 34%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 40% and from other faiths is 6%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 41%.
- There are 20 % of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom one child has a statement of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is average.
- This is an independent school.

Department for Education Number	9196115
Unique Reference Number	117633
Local Authority	Independent School

Type of school	Independent Day and Boarding
School category	Independent Catholic College
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	632
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr. Patrick Mitton
Headteacher	Mr Paulo Duran
Telephone number	01920 821504
Website	www.st-edmundscollege.org
Email address	Enquiries@stedmundscollege.org
Date of previous inspection	06 December 2010
Grades from previous inspection:	Grade I

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 11 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 2 assemblies and a number of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils, parents and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mrs Tina Cleugh

Lead Inspector

Mr Kieran Campbell

Associate Inspector

Mr Chris Cleugh

Associate Inspector

Mrs Angela Podmore

Associate Inspector

Diocesan inspection has four grades:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement
- causing concern

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