

# Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St Edmund's Catholic Secondary School, Portsmouth

URN: 116505

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. Philip Egan, Bishop of Portsmouth on:

Date: 21-22 June 2023

## Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school.....

1

## Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.....

1

## Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education.....

1

## Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.....

1

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference



The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop



The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

## Summary of key findings

### What the school does well

- Staff, governors, and students are proud of this outstanding school. The culture of continuous improvement, driven by the inspirational head teacher and his team, permeates the school community, where exemplary practice is typical.
- Behaviour is exemplary; students are courteous and able to work together, collaboratively, to advance their learning.

- Students make excellent progress in religious education, demonstrating an accurate understanding of core concepts and the ability to discuss, apply and evaluate their learning. Teaching and leadership of religious education is outstanding.
- Chaplaincy provision is exceptional, driven by the passionate and energetic lay chaplain whose impact permeates the school community for the good of all.
- The school has a strong ethos of belonging, with frequent references to family being used to describe the culture. This is reflected both in the number of long-serving staff, and the effectiveness by which new staff are inducted into the school.

What the school needs to improve:

- Leaders must ensure Catholic social teaching is embedded across the school.

## Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade:.....

1

### Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school .....

1

### Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school .....

1

### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school .....

1

Students are rightly proud of their outstanding Catholic school. The mission statement is clear and understood and the school community values, embraces, and actively contributes to the school's Catholic life and mission. This is evidenced by the pride students take in belonging to their school, their recognition of what makes the school distinctive and their contribution to service. The school has a strong culture of celebration, marking achievement in many forms, including recognising spiritual development, and maturing in faith. The badges and certification are for all, and are proudly worn by the students, for whom they tell the story of their journey through the school. 'The support we receive, as well as the opportunities, are just so much better than anywhere else', said one student. 'This is less a place of work, and more a family where we look out for each other', said a member of staff with many years' experience. Students' behaviour is exemplary, reflected both in courtesy and respect, as well as their ability to work together in lessons, where they demonstrate a consistently high degree of maturity. The school's diversity is a source of strength, with students routinely demonstrating real fellowship with each other, both in class and around the school. One non-Catholic student said, 'I feel respected here and that it is ok to be who I am'.

Staff commitment at all levels is exceptional; they readily serve the community and participate in activities and routines which promote the school's high standards. Staff survey responses reflect an overwhelming support for the school's approach and the clear leadership that underpins it. For one parent, 'I cannot speak highly enough of St Edmund's as a school'. For another, 'The school has become family to my children.' One spoke of the school as being 'a special place with family values.' A senior member of support staff said 'We are all one staff here. We don't feel some are more important than others, even if we are not involved in teaching.' The provision for relationships, sex, and health education meets all statutory requirements and is firmly rooted in Church teaching. The school environment coherently reflects the school's Catholic character,

including a very well-used chapel and a range of prayer settings and displays throughout the school. The school's green space at the heart of the site enhances the setting and reflects a Catholic worldview of care for the community. The pastoral care of students is excellent, with the work of the chaplaincy complimented repeatedly. Staff are positive role models and, in their dealings with students, they show respect and compassion for the individual.

Leaders, including governors, are relentless in seeking to secure improvements to the school, the site, and the overall student experience. The inspirational headteacher's presence, witness and constant attention to detail are crucial drivers to this school's success. Staff and parents demonstrate a high degree of confidence in how the school is led, and the opportunities it offers. Leaders work to secure a cohesive curriculum, together with an absolute commitment to the quality of teaching, leading to outstanding results over time and making St Edmund's a much sought-after school with a regional profile for excellence. Leaders have ensured the school is both proudly embedded in its inner-city community, as well as actively committed to its relationship with the cathedral parish. Leaders actively support the Bishop's vision, and students take an active part in supporting the liturgical life of the parish. Catholic social teaching is evident in different ways, and to different extents, throughout the school. Leaders recognise this as an area for greater consistency, and are working to secure this.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

1

### Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....

1

### Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....

1

### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....

1

The school's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in the religious education department where students respond extremely well to outstanding teaching. Students enjoy their religious education lessons and can engage in sophisticated forms of debate, employing technical vocabulary and forming cohesive arguments. One Year 7 student said 'I really like RE. I didn't used to but once I came here it changed. It is really interesting.' Behaviour for learning is exemplary, reflecting the trust the students have in their teachers, as well as a clear understanding of school expectations. Excellent standards at key stage 3 and 4 are evident over time in students' books, their response to questioning and in the outstanding quality of outcomes at age 16. Key Stage 4 students demonstrate that they are being thoroughly prepared for examinations but are also able to see beyond their time at the school. 'RE helps you not to stereotype others as you learn about what they believe in', said a Year 10 student. A year 9 student said, 'I really enjoy comparing how different religions deal with universal human experience, such as marriage'. Learning is sequential and progressive, aided by a clear curriculum model. Many students recognise the wider application of religious education as an academic discipline: 'I would like to be a lawyer and this helps you think about things more deeply', said one student. As a result of this, attainment and progress are above national and diocesan averages.

Teaching is of a very high standard across the department, with very good practice including evidence from more recently qualified staff, suggesting a consistency of approach. High and clear expectations of students are apparent, which are reasonable and uphold the dignity of the students. Lessons are very well planned, reflecting the current curriculum content, together with a range of appropriate activities to cement learning. Expert questioning is frequently in evidence, reflecting both good subject knowledge and a knowledge of the students and their needs. Recall is used effectively, with lesson starters as one way this is ensured. Space for deeper thought is

included, as is pair and group work. Assessment is clear and meaningful, with good feedback and evidence that it leads to improvement. Typicality was evident across the lessons observed. 'This is like all my lessons', said one Year 9 student, referring to the shape of the lesson and expectations on her. Good quality resources are consistently used to help students learn. Teaching assistants, too, are valued colleagues and add real impact through their clear understanding of what is needed in the lesson.

The excellent leadership of the head of religious education results in quality outcomes and a very high level of consistency. His work, which has led to progress in the department being the highest in the school, has come through a systematic approach to improvement over time, relentless high expectations, and with the support of senior colleagues. This work now encompasses preparing for the new *Religious Education Directory*. There is well-targeted professional development in the department, employing approaches developed both in-house, and from good practice elsewhere. The use of data to drive progress is evident. The time given to allow members of the department to learn from each other is a key element in the consistency of delivery in religious education. This is strengthened by ensuring optimal communication between the team, to ensure quality planning which is responsive to the specific needs of students. The religious education team share their effective approach through whole-school staff development. The department receives all the necessary resources it needs as a core department in the school. The curriculum offered across the school is now fully compliant with the Bishop's stipulation, and offers appropriate challenge. The department is working to embrace the new *Religious Education Directory* and the implications this will have on teaching and the curriculum.

## Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

1

### Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship .....

1

### Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school .....

1

### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship .....

1

Students' responses to, and participation in collective worship are excellent. One Year 10 student said, 'I like the fact that we can pray and reflect. It is part of what makes the school different.' Another said, 'Having the chapel and our chaplain, who is amazing, means there is somewhere to go if you need it.' During tutor time, students read prayers and scripture, behave with great respect and can contribute spontaneous prayer and worship. Questioning of students confirms this is typical and well established. There is wide agreement that prayer and liturgy are at the heart of the school. In one liturgy, the students sang and participated with enthusiasm. In another, excellent preparation and organisation helped create a respectful environment where students demonstrated the confidence to share their thoughts. In all cases, students were involved and engaged. One student said, 'I am not religious, but I value time to reflect.' Another, of a different faith said, 'In my faith, prayer is very important so I like that the school respects how important it is.' Students' behaviour in worship is exemplary. They speak positively about the way they can become involved in the Catholic life of the school in a range of roles, reflecting their strengths and interests. Students are not embarrassed to articulate their faith, partly because courtesy is normalised in this school. Another non-Catholic student said, 'Worship helps us to feel united and helps individuals deepen their faith.'

The school benefits from an exceptional chaplaincy provision. The lay chaplain provides an energetic and powerful witness to the staff, encouraging them, enabling them and, particularly for new staff, in welcoming them. The chapel, which is at the centre of the school, is very well used, with excellent resources, and is a place of welcome. The liturgical life of the school is enhanced by the support of local clergy who give of their time generously, and are very positive about the role the school plays in the cathedral parish. Staff think highly of their lay chaplain, not least in her support for them in designing and delivering liturgy. 'The chaplain and the chapel form the heart of the school, and everything then ripples out. That's what makes us different; that's what makes us.' Collective worship is supported by the senior leadership who fully value the place of

chaplaincy. Training and induction ensures that all staff are developing an understanding of the centrality of prayer and are supported in honing their skills in providing high-quality collective worship.

Leaders are embracing the challenge of ensuring students design, lead and evaluate liturgy. They recognise the national difficulty of the decline in mass attendance, especially after Confirmation, and have put in place a variety of approaches designed to engage students and develop young adult religious service. The school is committed to continuous improvement. Governors visit the school, attending whole school masses, assemblies, tutor groups and visiting key staff to triangulate the information provided to them by senior leadership. The head teacher wants the very best experience for the students, not only in securing their academic achievement but also in their human flourishing. Therefore, high quality prayer and worship are central to his vision. His presence around the school, frequent interactions with students and his ability to know them all by name all contribute to a community which seeks to put Christ at the centre.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Edmund's Catholic Secondary School
School unique reference number (URN)	116505
Full postal address of the school	Arundel Street, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO1 1RX
School phone number	02392 823766
Name of head teacher or principal	Simon Graham
Chair of governing board	David Knight
School Website	<a href="https://saintedmunds.org.uk">https://saintedmunds.org.uk</a>
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age-range of pupils	11-16
Trustees	Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	22-23 November 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The inspection team

Simon Uttley	Lead inspector
Lyn Bourne	Team inspector
John Wright	Team inspector

## Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement