

Esher CofE High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125274
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	340752
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Sheila Browning
This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.	
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	966
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anna Edwards
Headteacher	Simon Morris
Date of previous school inspection	27–28 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation, including the self-evaluation form, safeguarding and other policy documents, the school improvement plan and records of students' progress. They also took into account the views of students, staff and 147 parents expressed in questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how successfully leadership and management are tackling the relative underperformance of average ability boys in Years 10 and 11 and that of the most-able mathematicians
- the impact of measures taken to improve the attendance of a minority
- the use of assessment in driving up student's progress
- the success of actions taken to support middle leaders in reducing the variance in subject performance
- the impact of the school's performing arts specialism and its leading partnership status on outcomes for students within the school and on the school's standing in the wider community.

Information about the school

Esher Church of England High School is significantly oversubscribed and currently has more girls than boys. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below that found in most schools, as is the percentage whose first language is not English. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Most of these students have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social, speech, language and communication difficulties. The school has specialist status for the performing arts and in recognition of its notable GCSE examination results and sustained improvement was awarded high-performing specialist status in April 2009. It is a Leadership Partner - School and a lead school for Gifted and talented students. The school holds several other awards in recognition of its work.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Esher High is an outstanding school. Students make excellent progress. Standards are extremely high across a range of subjects by the time they leave, and the provisional 2009 GCSE results have continued the trend of improvement over the last six years. The actions to tackle any relative underperformance are leading to substantial improvements. Average ability boys are making much better progress and subject leadership and provision have been strengthened, resulting in significant improvements and a narrowing of the gap between performance in different subjects. The school's analysis of data is sophisticated and strategies used to improve teaching, learning and provision are supportive, challenging and often innovative. Teaching is at least good and much is outstanding, which is why students make exceptional progress. Nonetheless, teachers do not consistently and effectively use sharply focused learning objectives in lessons to make clear what is to be learned, or always refer to the levels students should achieve. At times, the marking of students' work is not always sharply focused on how they can improve it. The outstandingly rich curriculum is responsive to students' needs and is significantly strengthened by the school's specialism in the performing arts. The headteacher has demonstrated exceptional leadership and the robust management systems, in-depth self-evaluation and monitoring procedures are exemplary. Leaders' outstanding ambition, and the school's recent track record of improvement alongside its relentless drive for improvement, ensures an excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

Parents, students and staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Typically parents' and students' comments ranged from, 'such a positive experience', to 'every day I look forward to coming to school.' Its Christian ethos and values ensure a culture of mutual respect which nurtures students' excellent personal development and supports their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers and all staff work hard to ensure all students, including the most vulnerable, receive sensitive and highly effective care, guidance and support. This is why students of all abilities do so well and make the best of opportunities provided. Students of all abilities are challenged and highly involved, whether as mentors, participating in the *Macbeth* performance, or as sports leaders working in Zambia or taking part in Young Enterprise activities. They are extremely happy and rightly proud of their school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen and increase the progress of all students by:
 - ensuring teachers consistently set sharp, focused and challenging learning objectives at the beginning of each lesson related to student’s own individual targets ;
 - ensuring that teachers’ marking indicates to students exactly how to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Achievement is exceptional, for all groups of students. Students who are vulnerable or with learning difficulties attain higher standards than might be normally expected. On the other hand, more-able and gifted and talented students thrive in activities such as radio drama, rock challenge, critical thinking activities and Latin. Students respond to challenges enthusiastically, concentrate hard and confidently research and work independently or in small groups. An outstanding example was seen in a Year 10 dance lesson, where students refined their dance sequences after critiquing a Year 11 dance and each others’ performance. Very occasionally, students get distracted when teaching is not engaging. In lessons they show high levels of basic skills and are especially adept at using new technologies.

Students have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. Student mentors and prefects support others while school councillors have advised on key policies, for example on drugs and behaviour. High numbers participate in clubs, over a hundred boys took part in ‘urban strides’ (a dance residency), and students enjoy ‘dynamic adventures’ (a physical exercise course), podcasting and science lighting projects. Breakfast club and the Blue Diner are well attended for healthy food options. Students have forged strong links with the local community too. They work with the local youth forum, day-care centres and conservation projects. During the inspection the choir was rehearsing for their next concert. Students are aware of other cultures and the wider community through international exchange programmes in Moldova, California and South Africa and during ‘Fairtrade Fortnight’. The school is doing all that it can be expected to do to improve the attendance of a minority of students and consequently attendance is above average and rising.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning Taking into account:	1
	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Excellent subject knowledge, positive relationships, use of new technologies and well-tried teaching methods are why students make such outstanding progress over time. Teaching in the performing arts leads the way in terms of setting high expectations and sharing some exemplary practices across the school. Well-planned lessons, challenging questioning and a variety of different learning styles are used extremely well to motivate students. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning has ensured teachers are well supported and encouraged to share best practice. The robust and consistent monitoring of students' progress ensures students achieve exceptionally well. Where needed, support and extension is targeted most effectively. The excellent opportunities offered in the learning zone reflect the school's inclusivity, as does the extended programme for those gifted and talented students. While some marking of students' work is exemplary in explaining exactly what students need to do to improve, this is not consistently the case. Through the assessment for learning pilot project, teachers have become adept in involving students in their learning. Peer and self-assessment are common features in most lessons. However, in some lessons learning objectives at the start of the lesson are not sharply focused on what and why students are learning or at what level.

The innovative curriculum is key to why student outcomes are excellent. Ranging from the discrete performing arts in Years 7 to 9 to BTEC music technology, a creative and media diploma, to AS critical thinking and statistics – these are just some of the courses offered. Collaboration with other schools, organisations and links with local colleges via a 14 to 19 consortium have led to a wide alternative learning programme. A very popular diploma course in engineering and other work-related opportunities meet students' needs exceptionally well. The performing arts lead the way in projects from working with the Royal Shakespeare Company, to enterprise projects. A Saturday school, the Princes Trust XL course, 8Rs (a skills-based learning course for younger students), instrumental music tuition and a wealth of extra-curricular clubs, visits, visitors and residential trips enrich the curriculum.

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Outstanding pastoral and academic support, through tutors, mentors, advisors, and the inclusion team, supports students exceptionally well. Parents and students comment that arrangements for induction and next stages are excellent. As one parent commented, 'The "Eager for Esher" course enabled a smooth, stress-free move.' Students are confident that any problems that may arise will be sensitively solved. Vulnerable students have their needs analysed in a highly systematic way and are offered personalised support, outside advice and support from a host of external agencies. While the learning zone is effective in encouraging student reintegration, the school works relentlessly to be inclusive and works closely with parents and carers on all matters. The improved attendance of a minority is just one example of this. The school uses email and text systems to send out information to parents. They are invited to focus groups and a headteacher surgery and plans are in hand to extend their involvement.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The extended leadership and management team has inspired a shared and determined ambition that drives improvement forward. Robust and extensive monitoring, sharply focused intervention and support systems ensure that all staff are accountable and aspirational targets are set. Students are challenged and supported to achieve their best.

Esher High's exemplary work in the performing arts and innovative developments in leadership have led to it becoming a leadership partner school and it is a lead school for gifted and talented provision. It has extensive partnerships with local schools and uses its specialist status to the benefit of all. Highly effective monitoring of teaching and learning at all levels has led to sustained improvements. The 'leading in learning' project, involving middle leaders in coaching, mentoring and peer observations, is spreading best practice. Governors are actively involved and meet their statutory responsibilities extremely well. Leaders and governors take their responsibility to ensure safeguarding and promote equal opportunities and tackling any discrimination very seriously. Though governors have not analysed or measured the impact of community cohesion yet, the school promotes this aspect of its work well. Leaders have undertaken an in-depth analysis of the school's own and local community. This has led to some exciting work locally and globally, for example through the

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international exchange programmes, while links with a contrasting school in Bradford are underway.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents are extremely satisfied with the school, and few report any dissatisfaction. There was no consensus in the few negative points made. Several parents of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities wrote extremely positive comments about the provision. One parent spoke for many simply saying, 'Esher is well-managed, responsive, safe and my child loves it.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Esher CofE High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 147 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 966 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	101	69	44	30	0	0	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	89	61	56	38	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	72	49	64	44	8	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	66	45	67	46	8	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	64	44	77	52	3	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	56	38	83	56	4	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	49	33	87	59	9	6	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	60	41	73	50	4	3	1	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	61	41	80	54	0	0	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	61	41	73	50	9	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	31	86	59	4	3	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	84	57	58	39	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	93	63	51	35	3	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.



19 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Esher CofE High School, Esher, KT10 8AP

We would like to thank you for the very positive welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We particularly enjoyed speaking with you and seeing your work. We agree with many of you and your parents that Esher is an outstanding school.

You told us how much you valued all the extra opportunities you have to learn at Esher. You also told us about the outstanding pastoral support, curriculum and excellent teaching. We judged these to be outstanding too. These and your continued hard work are why you reach such high standards and achieve so exceptionally well. Well done! You behave well and you have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and safe. You are so very active and engaged in all that the school offers, especially in the performing arts but in many other areas too! You also contribute so much through your responsibilities as prefects, mentors and councillors and in the local community. You are very aware of the diversity within the UK and world today and are involved in all sorts of exciting projects.

The outstanding leadership team and committed staff led by your inspirational and dedicated headteacher want to continue to make improvements. We recognise that the school monitors your progress very carefully and that you are directly involved in this through the various assessments that you do. However, we think you could be helped to make even more progress if teachers always made it explicitly clear in lessons what you are about to learn and why and relate this more clearly to the levels you could achieve. Also, while we know some marking is excellent, we think it should always make clear what you need to do to improve.

You can help, too, by letting your teachers know if you are not totally clear about the learning objectives in lessons and if teachers' comments in your work do not pinpoint exactly what it is you need to do to improve.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning
Lead inspector

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