

St Clere's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115356
Local Authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	338574
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Lindsay Hebditch HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1014
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ray Osborne
Headteacher	Mr Paul Griffiths
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 34 lessons and held meetings with the Chair of Governors, a local authority representative, staff and students. They observed the school's work and scrutinised a wide range of documentation including the school development plan, data on students' current performance and school policies and procedures, including those relating to safeguarding. Inspectors spent two-thirds of their time inspecting learning. In addition, 198 questionnaires from parents and carers were analysed, together with questionnaires returned by a representative sample of staff and students.

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

- the progress made by students in English, mathematics and languages
- how effectively teachers provide learning activities which meet the needs of students with special educational needs
- whether work is marked consistently so that students understand what they need to do to improve further
- whether leadership and management at all levels in the school have been effective in enabling it to meet challenging performance targets.

Information about the school

St Clare's School is an average sized foundation school which has specialist status for languages. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. More than a quarter of students are considered to have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is almost double the national average. The most commonly identified of these needs relate to moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and students whose first language is not English are below national averages.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Clere's School is a good school which has improved in all major aspects since the last inspection. The headteacher and senior leaders share a common purpose to raise standards and, with the wholehearted support of the staff, have worked tirelessly and successfully towards achieving it. However, they are not content to rest on their laurels and have detailed plans in place to make further improvements. The governing body and parents and carers support fully the direction in which the school is travelling. Self-evaluation is well informed, self-critical and accurate, contributing to the school's good capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment is above average and students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress. Students enjoy their learning and flourish in the safe and supportive school environment. They are proud of the school and their contributions to both the school and the community are outstanding. Teaching has improved since the last inspection and is good overall, although it is satisfactory in languages, where students' learning and progress are slower and there are fewer practical opportunities for students to learn. In the most successful lessons, teachers encourage the development of different learning styles and plan imaginative activities to match them. Sometimes teachers do not provide sufficiently detailed information about what they expect individual students to achieve and feedback to students does not always provide enough information about how work could be improved. Assessment is good, but information about students' progress is not yet used effectively enough to help plan the learning of individual students in lessons. The curriculum is good and provides a wide subject choice, including good opportunities to study modern foreign languages and to follow vocational courses. Care, guidance and support for students are outstanding and make a significant contribution to the good progress, high attendance and excellent punctuality that students display. Partnerships and community work make an outstanding contribution to the quality of provision and character of the school. Effective safeguarding procedures ensure that students are well looked after.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning still further by:
 - making better use of information on students' progress to make lessons match more closely the needs of individual students
 - improving the quality and consistency of feedback so that students understand clearly what they need to do in order to achieve their targets.

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- Improve learning and progress in languages by:
 - using the target language more consistently in lessons
 - providing imaginative lessons which contain more practical opportunities for students to learn
 - sharing good practice so that the overall quality of teaching and learning in languages improves.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students join the school with prior attainment which is slightly below average but by the time they complete Key Stage 4 their attainment is above average. The attainment of boys in particular has improved significantly and now matches that of girls. Students make good progress throughout the school and in nearly all subjects. In English and mathematics, progress is more rapid and attainment is higher than at the time of the last inspection because the school tracks students' progress more carefully. Students make satisfactory progress in languages; recent and acute staffing difficulties in languages have led to the disruption of some students' learning. All groups of students make similar good progress; students with special educational needs and/or disabilities do well because the school has excellent systems for assessing their starting points and providing the learning support that suits them best. Students' quality of work is good and they take pride in their achievements. The attractive displays of their work throughout the school are good evidence of the wide variety of ways in which students at the school can, and do succeed.

The overwhelming majority of students say that they feel well cared for, supported and safe in school and their parents and carers strongly endorse this view. Students demonstrate an excellent knowledge of how to manage personal risk, understand how to act if difficulties arise, and discuss safety issues maturely in tutorials, lessons, and through the extremely effective student council. Incidents of bullying are rare and if they do occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively. Attendance is high and behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and speak knowledgeably about how to achieve it, although a minority feel that the school could do still more to help them. Participation in sports is a strong feature of the school.

Students make an outstanding contribution to the community and speak enthusiastically about the many ways in which they participate in community activities. Each 'house' adopts its own charity and students display a genuine sense of compassion and responsibility in their support of it. The school's annual 'Community Fun Day' is an extremely popular event and provides students with excellent opportunities to learn about different groups in their community. The school's outstanding international links, developed through its specialism in languages, enable students to gain a good understanding of the global dimension of community work, for example through the school's links with a school in Nigeria. The extension of the school's vocational curriculum and enterprise activities means that students develop good skills to equip

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them for their future economic well-being. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The large majority of lessons are good or better and characterised by hard work, good behaviour and plenty of enjoyment. Students are highly motivated, make good progress in lessons and develop their basic skills well. Teachers have good levels of expertise and so, for example, are able to help students to use technical vocabulary accurately. Teachers plan their lessons carefully; a growing strength of the school is the wide variety of learning styles that are encouraged and the way that teachers highlight them in lessons. Inspectors found that the pace of learning in lessons in languages was slower because there was insufficient use of the target language and fewer examples of stimulating and creative learning activities than in other subjects. Sometimes students' learning needs in lessons are not met fully. This happens when teachers do not explain in detail what their expectations are at the start of the main activity in a lesson, especially with regard to how students can reach the higher levels of attainment. Senior

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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leaders know this and are working hard to make this aspect of teaching more consistent.

Assessment is good. The school has effective procedures for tracking the progress of individual students, setting targets and dealing with underachievement. Teachers share information about attainment with their students but occasionally do not feed back, either in their discussions with students or through the marking of their work, in sufficient detail about what they have done well and how they can improve still further. The use of assessment to help plan the learning of individual students in lessons is underdeveloped, but is a feature of the school's development plans.

The curriculum places a strong emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and meets the needs of students well. Opportunities for students to practise their use of literacy have improved significantly since the last inspection; intervention programmes ensure students with additional literacy needs receive rigorous and highly effective support. Extra support for students in mathematics is satisfactory. In line with its specialist status, the school offers a wide range of modern foreign languages and reviews regularly the languages it offers. Information and communication technology courses allow all students to gain an appropriate qualification. In Key Stage 4, the school's four clearly defined 'learning pathways' ensure that the interests of all students are met fully. The strong vocational curriculum has been developed through very effective partnerships with local colleges and schools. Provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good because the curriculum is adapted thoughtfully to meet their needs.

Staff at all levels show very high levels of commitment to promoting students' well-being. They liaise effectively with one another, with parents and with a large number of outside agencies, to develop a wide range of excellent systems and strategies for providing care, guidance and support. Transition arrangements for students joining the school in Year 7 work smoothly and students settle into school routines quickly. The school has very successful strategies for maintaining high levels of attendance and punctuality, as well as for improving the behaviour of those students for whom this presents a potential barrier to their own and others' learning. It carefully monitors students' attendance and behaviour, and intervenes effectively when there is cause for concern. As a result, attendance is high and the number of students who have to be excluded is low. Mentoring programmes in Key Stage 4 ensure students make good progress; any underachievement is identified quickly and supported effectively. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive excellent support, both in mainstream classes, and in sessions with specialist practitioners, for example in the school's highly effective provision for hearing and visually impaired students. Individual education plans are detailed and user-friendly, enabling these students to participate fully in the life of the school and to make progress which is at least as good as that of their peers. Students receive excellent impartial advice about the next steps in their education or gaining employment.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The enthusiasm and commitment of the headteacher, ably supported by his senior leadership team, have driven the school forward since the last inspection. They have created a culture of high expectations that both staff and students support. Standards have improved. The school measures its progress against well considered and challenging targets and meets the vast majority of them because leaders and managers at all levels share the common purpose of raising attainment. The recent award of trust status demonstrates that there is a clear strategic vision for the school which embraces the needs of students, parents and the local community. Governors are very supportive of the school and monitor its performance well. Leaders and managers have high expectations of teachers and have supported them through effective professional development and performance management systems. Morale throughout the school is high. There are robust systems to monitor and evaluate teaching. Lead teachers, coaches and support plans are all used well to raise the quality of teaching where it is judged satisfactory. As a result, the number of good or better lessons has increased. However, the school sets its sights high and its self-evaluation report, rightly, identifies that there is still more work to be done in this area.

Parental surveys conducted by the school and as part of the inspection demonstrate a high degree of satisfaction. Attendance at school functions, such as parents' evenings, is good. The school provides termly reports to parents about their children's progress and consults them on major policy changes. Extensive and highly effective partnerships with local schools enhance the school's work by providing a wide range of opportunities to broaden the curriculum and contribute to the achievement and well-being of students.

The school has appropriate policies on promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination and is justifiably proud of its reputation as a school where all groups of students achieve equally well. The school's approach to community cohesion is outstanding. Its policy, audit and assessment of progress are comprehensive and demonstrate the impressive range of work that takes place at the school and in the local community. Links with the community are felt strongly throughout the school and beyond, for example through social cohesion conferences, work with 'Inspiration Youth Call' and initiatives with local faith groups. There are good procedures for safeguarding students and risk assessment. Records are comprehensive and all staff have received appropriate training. Value for money is good.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

One fifth of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Of these, the vast majority say their child feels safe and that they are happy with their child's experience at the school. However, a sizeable minority do not feel that the school helps their child to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors identified a wide range of strategies in the school to encourage healthy living and found that participation in organised sports is high. Some parents and carers do not feel well informed by the school about their child's learning. Inspectors found a variety of ways in which parents can meet and consult with staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at St Clare's 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 198 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,014 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	57	29	125	63	13	7	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	71	36	120	61	4	2	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	62	31	121	61	8	4	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	57	29	121	61	15	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	52	26	130	66	5	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	19	133	67	20	10	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	13	142	72	22	11	0	0
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)	43	22	127	64	6	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	46	23	134	68	9	5	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	58	29	116	59	10	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	34	17	126	64	18	9	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	52	26	125	63	7	4	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	71	36	116	59	8	4	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 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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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:	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. ■ 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 pupil's 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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Clare's School, Stanford-le-Hope, SS17 0NW

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views. The vast majority of you told us that you were happy at school and thought that the headteacher and staff were doing a good job. We thought that your high attendance was good evidence of how safe you feel at the school and how much you enjoy learning. One fifth of your parents also completed a questionnaire to tell us what they felt and we would like you to thank them on our behalf for taking the trouble to reply.

We have judged that St Clare's School has improved so much since we last inspected it that it is now a good school. You are obviously proud of your school and are making good progress in nearly all subjects. We agree with you that the care, guidance and support you receive are outstanding and this is preparing you very well for your next steps in education or training. We also thought that the work that you do to support the local community is outstanding.

Your headteacher has plans to make the school even better. To help with this, we have asked the school to:

- use information about your individual progress to plan lessons so that you do even better
- make sure that you know how to improve your work
- make lessons in languages more interesting.

You can play your part by continuing to work hard in lessons and asking your teachers if you do not understand how to improve your work.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Well done!

Yours sincerely

Lindsay Hebditch

Her Majesty's Inspector

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