

Clacton County High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115360
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357742
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1679
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	338
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bert Foster
Headteacher	Jeff Brindle (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2009
School address	Walton Road Clacton-on-Sea CO15 6DZ
Telephone number	01255 424266
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 54 teachers in 54 lessons, four form tutorials and an assembly. Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, and the School Improvement Partner. They also met with panels of students from Year 8, Year 10, and the sixth form. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school records such as achievement data, systems for monitoring and evaluating teaching, and teachers' lesson plans. In addition to the survey of parents' and carers' views, to which 298 replies were received, a sample of students completed a written questionnaire and a staff survey was also conducted.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

How well do students achieve in their different examinations, in the main school and in the sixth form?

- Is students' behaviour now good, as the school proposes?
- To what extent has attendance improved since the last inspection?
- What improvements have been made to support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- How accurate is the school's self-evaluation, which judges students' achievement, and the school's overall effectiveness, as good?

Information about the school

Clacton County High is a large secondary school. The great majority of students are of White British heritage and a small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students registered with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion that are known to be eligible for free school meals are in line with the national average. The school has arts college status, with art, drama, and English as specialist subjects. There are collaborative arrangements for sixth-form courses with other local providers.

Clacton County High School was issued with a notice to improve at the last inspection in November 2009 when the quality of teaching and assessment, the quality of care, guidance and support, the effectiveness of the governing body, and students' behaviour were all judged inadequate. Students' attendance was also judged low. Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes to the school's senior leadership, with three new assistant principals joining the established Principal and Vice-Principal team. When HMI made a monitoring visit in May 2010, the school was judged to be making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Since the last inspection, Clacton County High has made sufficient improvements in the quality of provision and outcomes for students for it now to be judged a satisfactory school that provides satisfactory value for money. However, there are remaining inconsistencies in achievement, teaching, and in leadership and management. These are important reasons why the school's overall effectiveness is no better than satisfactory, rather than good as proposed by the school. Self-evaluation is over-generous in other areas, and this is further evidence that the school's capacity to improve is also only satisfactory.

Although broadly average in some measures, the overall standard of students' work is low. This is because there are some subjects, mathematics in particular, where standards require improvement before students' achievement can be considered any better than satisfactory. The proportions of students gaining two good science GCSEs, or gaining a good pass in a modern foreign language, are low. Conversely, though, the numbers opting for the specialist subjects of art and drama are above average. In 2010, students achieved very well in art, achieving high standards that are reinforced by the bold and imaginative art work displayed around the school. The arts play a significant part in raising the morale and self-esteem of individual students and, indeed, the school as a whole.

Teaching is satisfactory. There are notable examples of good practice, but there are also weaker instances. While satisfactory progress has been made in improving the teaching of mathematics, inconsistency remains. Inconsistent, too, is the development of students' literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. This is a key reason why the curriculum, despite some imaginative and innovative option choices including some through partnerships with other providers, remains satisfactory.

Two areas that have improved over the past year are students' behaviour and their attendance. Better organised support structures are in place for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities with clear and improved leadership provided by the new assistant principal, although these have yet to have a strong impact on teaching for these students in lessons. The quality of care, guidance and support is now satisfactory as are the arrangements for students' safety. Recent appointments have brought new ideas and enthusiasm to the senior leadership team and particularly to the sixth form. Similarly, recent appointments to the governing body have brought additional expertise and an increased determination to challenge the school's performance. Nevertheless, remaining areas of weakness in middle management and at senior leadership are currently limiting the school's drive towards its vision of good and outstanding outcomes for students.

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Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards so that they are at least securely and consistently in line with national averages, by
 - further improving attainment in mathematics for students of all abilities
 - increasing the proportion of students gaining two good science GCSE grades
 - increasing the proportion of students gaining a good grade in a modern foreign language
 - further closing the gaps in achievement between different groups, with particular emphasis on improving the achievement of boys and those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Continue to improve the quality and consistency of teaching by
 - ensuring that all lessons make good use of questioning to challenge students' thinking skills and encourage their contributions to class discussions
 - checking that all books are marked regularly and in appropriate detail
 - giving a greater emphasis on developing students' literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills in all areas of the curriculum, with particular attention given to the presentation and accuracy of written work
 - ensuring that all lessons include appropriate teaching strategies for students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including the effective deployment of learning support assistants.
- Improve the consistency of leadership and the school's capacity for sustained improvement by
 - holding senior leaders to account more effectively through more incisive self-evaluation, particularly regarding students' attainment, progress, and behaviour
 - resolving the leadership difficulties in mathematics by appointing an experienced, well-qualified, permanent head of department.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Although the percentage of Year 11 students gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics was close to average in 2010 and represented a considerable gain on the 2009 results, this figure masks variations between subjects. English language results were firmly average. Conversely, for the third year running, standards in mathematics were low, and results were also exceptionally low in geography. A much lower than average proportion of students took English literature, a situation that the school is seeking to remedy through changes in the Key Stage 4 curriculum organisation. While students made broadly satisfactory progress given their prior attainment and the context of the school, it is clear that inconsistency in attainment across the curriculum prevents their further progress. There are similar inconsistencies between groups of students; although not as wide in 2010 as they were in 2009, there remain noticeable gaps between

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the achievements of girls and boys, and between those with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities. The quality of learning observed by inspectors in lessons was satisfactory overall, but again with too much variation between classes and groups of students for it to be judged any better.

Attendance has risen to be in line with national averages, with a clear improvement during the first six months of 2010/11 compared with the same period last year. The number of exclusions for poor behaviour has decreased over the past year. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are still much more likely to be excluded than other students, but greater use is being made of the internal seclusion centre, meaning that these vulnerable students are kept in school and are able to learn under supervision, rather than being off site. Behaviour around the school is generally calm and the great majority of students are good natured, but the school's records show that there are still too many incidents requiring sanctions for behaviour to be judged any better than satisfactory. Students say that they enjoy school and feel safe, a view confirmed by the parents' and carers' survey. However, there are still some examples of unpleasantness between students which, while isolated and dealt with appropriately, indicate that students' safety and well-being are satisfactory rather than good.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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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How effective is the provision?

A minority of lessons observed during the inspection were good or outstanding. These are the lessons that challenge and inspire; for example, a Year 9 drama lesson where students showed high levels of concentration and commitment as they learnt how to express characters' feelings through the use of freeze-frame tableaux and direct address to the audience. However, there are not enough lessons where students play such an active part to promote their good learning. While teachers' subject knowledge is secure, too many lessons are dominated by teacher presentation. In the great majority of cases, students are content to sit and listen, and this approach is sufficient to help them make satisfactory progress. Where teaching is weakest it occasionally leads to casual attitudes, or low-level chatter which is distractive to learning. Some effective strategies have been used to improve teaching in mathematics, and there are now no endemic inadequacies in this or any other subject. What remains central to raising the quality of learning is to achieve consistency of teaching within subjects and across the school and, indeed, achieving a similar consistency of assessment. There is some splendid assessment practice, including in English, but equally there are instances of books marked too infrequently or too cursorily. The school is correct to identify that assessment, including the effective use of questioning to develop students' thinking and contributions to discussions, remains an important area for improvement.

There are some good aspects to the curriculum. With a large staff and student population, and through partnership work, the school is able to offer an increasingly imaginative programme of academic and vocational options to Key Stage 4 students to suit all needs and interests. Nevertheless, as these have not yet led to good or better achievement, and because provision for developing students' core skills has not improved significantly, the overall quality of the curriculum remains satisfactory.

The unusually high number of children who are looked after are provided for and cared for well by the school. The identification and diagnosis of support required for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have improved. The Learning Attendance Behaviour and Safeguarding (LABS) panels have resulted in improved attendance and behaviour, coupled with intervention sessions where vulnerable students are known to be underachieving. There is much less evidence of improvements in classroom support for these students. Teachers' lesson plans identify which students have particular needs, but these are not always matched by appropriate teaching strategies or effective deployment of learning support assistants to help different groups of students make similarly good progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

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How effective are leadership and management?

Arrangements for carrying out all necessary safeguarding checks and arrangements are firmly in place. There is an adequately detailed community cohesion plan which recognises the need to widen students' knowledge and experience of other groups in order to develop further their cultural and spiritual understanding.

It is very positive that the three new assistant principals have been delegated clear areas of responsibility. It is clear that their work is having a beneficial impact and has helped the school achieve satisfactory outcomes in areas such as attendance. Inspectors appreciated the professionalism and integrity of dialogue with senior leaders, including in discussions about examination data. The school is rich in data; senior leaders can point accurately to some improvements in attainment, although self-evaluation is less considering of students' different levels of prior attainment when they join the school, or the impact of individual subjects on overall achievement. Similarly, the importance given to the performance of different groups is adequate, but not better. This is an important reason why the school's promotion of equality and tackling of discrimination are satisfactory, rather than good.

Some effective strategies have been introduced to improve teaching, including through the 'Teaching and Learning' team and regular support from local authority consultants and advanced skills teachers who continue to support the school. Despite these strengths, the extent to which leaders and managers embed ambition and drive improvement is judged only satisfactory because the quality of leadership and management is not consistent across the school. Remaining weaknesses in middle leadership, including in mathematics where the school has still to appoint a permanent subject leader, reflect the inconsistencies in achievement between subjects. Recruitment difficulties across the school have not helped the inconsistencies in teaching that also affect students' achievement. At the most senior level, self-evaluation and direction lack sharpness and do not take enough account of detail; for example, the performance of different groups of students or subjects within the pattern of overall achievement. More robust holding to account of senior and middle leaders by the satisfactory governing body, and more incisive self-evaluation across the school, are keys to improving the school's capacity to improve and the school's performance.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

As in the main school, within a picture of satisfactory overall achievement there was noticeable variation between different subjects and qualifications in the 2010 examination results. Students taking the BTEC National courses made good progress, with the BTEC National Certificate students doing particularly well. At A Level, where the largest number of examinations were taken, students made satisfactory progress to reach standards that were broadly in line with the national average. Students' attendance is satisfactory, and they say that they enjoy being in the sixth form. They particularly value being able to contribute to the school community through the 'v-volunteer' scheme and through participating in lesson observations.

There is a greater proportion of good teaching in the sixth form than in the main school, although again there are inconsistencies. Examples of weaker practice include where there are limited opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills or participate in discussions. The consortium arrangements with other local providers offers an increasingly wide range of options, and these arrangements are managed effectively to ensure students' satisfactory safety and well-being. While satisfactory sixth form provision leads to satisfactory outcomes at present, inspectors recognise that both provision and outcomes are improving strongly. These improvements are due in no small part to the drive and vision of the head of sixth form; while leadership and management are satisfactory because of the satisfactory outcomes achieved, the sixth form is one area of the school where inspectors agree that there is good capacity for sustained improvement.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Although fewer parents responded to Ofsted's questionnaire than did at the last inspection, very few significant concerns were raised about the quality of provision or outcomes for students. The greatest concern was about the school's promotion of healthy lifestyles. Inspectors judge that the extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles is satisfactory, rather than good as the school's self-evaluation proposed. They also observed that a significant number of students brought carbonated sugary drinks into school from home. This is an area where closer liaison and education between the school and the home could promote better outcomes for students.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Clacton County 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 298 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1679 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	112	38	172	58	11	4	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	121	41	171	57	3	1	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	124	42	164	55	5	2	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	115	39	177	59	3	1	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	102	34	188	63	2	1	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	81	27	193	65	14	5	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	67	22	206	69	18	6	1	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)	99	33	182	61	2	1	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	97	33	194	65	1	0	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	104	35	177	59	9	3	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	74	25	200	67	9	3	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	95	32	194	65	1	0	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	123	41	172	58	0	0	2	1

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.

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.



11 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Clacton County High School, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 6DZ

Following our recent inspection, we have judged that your school no longer requires a Notice to Improve because it is now providing you with a satisfactory standard of education and care. This is because there have been satisfactory improvements in teaching, and in the quality of support that you are given. We have also noted improvements in your behaviour and attendance, for which you must take credit. Fewer of you are being excluded from school, and fewer of you are regularly absent. This is encouraging, because it is well known that good attendance and good behaviour are key factors that help students gain good examination results. I hope that you will be able to continue these improvements.

While the school is to be congratulated for making some improvements since the last inspection, there is still a way to go before Clacton County High can be considered a good school. We have asked the governing body and the school's senior team to take a number of actions, including:

- raising the standards that you achieve in your GCSE examinations, particularly in mathematics
- helping all groups of students to make as much progress as each other
- giving you more opportunities to contribute to discussions in class
- marking your books more regularly, and in more detail
- making sure that the governing body and the senior team have a much sharper picture about how well the school is doing.

Thank you for the help that you gave us during the inspection, and once again well done for the improvements in your behaviour and attendance. We wish you well with your examinations this summer and in the years to come.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

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