



De La Salle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104834
LEA St. Helens
Inspection number 277229
Inspection dates 21 September 2005 to 22 September 2005
Reporting inspector Ms Jane Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Mill Brow
School category	Voluntary aided		Eccleston
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		St Helens, Merseyside WA10 4QH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 20511
Number on roll	1197	Fax number	01744 20543
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Brother Alban
Date of previous inspection	4 October 1999	Headteacher	Mr W Daunt

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and additional inspectors.

Description of the school

De la Salle School is a popular, voluntary-aided, Catholic comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. There are 1,194 pupils on roll, with nearly equal numbers of boys and girls. The wards in which the pupils live vary in their social and economic characteristics; 9% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average. Few pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and none have home languages other than English. Some 8% of the pupils have special educational needs, including 13 pupils who have Statements of Special Educational Need; these figures are about half the national averages. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above average. Most pupils stay at the school for the full five years, and almost all progress into further education, training or employment. The turnover of teaching staff is low; the school is fully staffed. The headteacher took up post in January 2003. The school gained specialist status for the performing arts in September 2003 and it meets 11 national standards for 'Healthy Schools' and the 'Investors in People' standards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The education provided by De La Salle School has some outstanding features but also some important areas that require improvement. Overall, its effectiveness is satisfactory, rather than good which was the school's view. The self-evaluation accurately identified some key strengths, particularly in the pupils' personal development, but had a rosy view of the quality of teaching and learning despite the warning signs of some slippage in the pupils' achievements in national tests and examinations during the last two years when many pupils did not do as well as might have been expected. The school has responded robustly to address underachievement and the evaluation identified relevant priorities for improvement strongly focused on raising standards. The headteacher and senior leadership team are demonstrating the necessary capacity to address the issues.

The school's Catholic ethos underpins its work and promotes the development of the whole child. Pupils contribute positively to the school and wider community. They are well cared for; the Enrichment Centre provides outstanding support to those who are vulnerable. The curriculum is satisfactory overall: a range of relevant courses is offered to the older pupils, but there are also shortcomings. The performing and visual arts are real strengths and there is a rich programme of extracurricular activities. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Over the last two years, a number of management structures and procedures have been introduced; some are in the early stages and have yet to bear fruit. The role of middle managers is underdeveloped but improving. Improvement on the key issues identified in the inspection report of 1999 has been barely adequate overall: weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation remain.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's self-evaluation identifies various areas for development. The key priorities are to:

- raise achievement, particularly in English;
- improve the quality of teaching;
- promote opportunities for the pupils to learn independently and actively;
- use the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation to inform planning for improvement and to hold managers to account for the performance of their areas of responsibility.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The inspectors agreed with the school's assessment that achievement and standards are satisfactory, despite pupils' underachievement in tests and examinations.

Above average standards were attained in the 2004 national tests for 14 year olds, although falling short of the school's challenging targets. Crucially, many pupils made less progress than might be expected considering the standards they achieved at primary school. Early analysis of the 2005 test results showed slight falls in the

proportions of the pupils who reached the standard expected of their age, Level 5, in English, mathematics and science, and low numbers attaining the higher levels in English.

At general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), the results in 2004 were better than those in 2003, and were above the national average. Some 63% gained 5 or more A*-C grades, and almost all of the pupils were awarded at least 5 or more A*-G grades. In relation to their performance at ages 11 and 14 years, many might have been expected to do better. These results, however, were achieved in the face of significant disruption to the school's work following a serious fire. The provisional results for 2005 are weaker and short of the school's targets, although still above the national average. Girls achieved markedly better than boys, but the school has not ascertained the underlying causes, although the effectiveness of support for particular groups of pupils has usefully been explored. The pupils perform much better in some subjects than others.

By contrast, the pupils' current achievement is more positive and is satisfactory overall. A number of subjects, including the visual and performing arts, make a strong contribution to the pupils' progress. Pupils learned some new knowledge and skills or deepened their understanding in most lessons, but made rapid progress in only a quarter. They make very good progress in their personal development. The school has recently become better placed to improve the pupils' academic achievement: for instance, assessment systems are stronger and how pupils are identified for extra help or challenge has been reviewed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school evaluates personal development as outstanding. The inspection judgement is that it is good overall with some outstanding features.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. They gain a balanced view of society, underpinned by Catholic beliefs and values. Pupils value their lessons in 'education for personal relationships', which they find interesting and worthwhile.

Most pupils enjoy coming to school and attend regularly. Their behaviour is outstanding; pupils invariably act respectfully to their peers and staff. In many lessons, they tend to be passive, but they really come to life when teaching is more exciting. Bullying is rare and quickly dealt with. Pupils feel safe at school and describe it as like 'being at home'.

The pupils play an active part in the school community and are given opportunities to take positions of responsibility, such as becoming prefects and 'listeners'. The school council exists to allow the pupils' voice to be heard, but pupils report disappointment that it has rather 'fizzled out' and hope it will soon be restored.

Healthy lifestyles are encouraged through the two lessons a week of physical education for all pupils. The outstanding range of extracurricular activities, such as sports, summer schools and the arts, provide further opportunities for personal development in addition to activities in the local community. Although the school has made improvements in

the provision of healthy food at lunchtimes, the pupils would like even greater variety. A range of activities including work experience, enterprise days and careers lessons prepares pupils for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school says that the quality of teaching and learning is good, but inspectors judge it to be satisfactory. A reason for this difference in judgement is that the school's monitoring of teaching and learning places too much emphasis on what the teacher does, rather than how well the pupils learn.

The teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and provide the pupils with appropriate information and explanations. Much of the teaching is satisfactory but does not excite the pupils' imagination and interest. Activities are often straightforward and do not offer enough scope for the pupils, particularly the more able, to learn for themselves. The pupils are usually very tolerant of such teaching, remaining attentive but learning passively. They generally value the quality of teaching they receive but many prefer lessons where they are more actively involved, notably physical education, the performing arts, and health and social care.

Occasionally, teaching and learning are outstanding. In a dance lesson, the teacher gave instructions clearly, demonstrating and emphasising how movements could be improved. As the complexity and speed of the sequences became ever more demanding, the pupils continued to strive and to enjoy, using spare moments to repeat and improve their performance. At the end, one smiling though very tired participant's comment 'That was hard!' served to highlight the pupils' satisfaction with the excellent progress they had made.

The teachers generally give appropriate feedback to pupils on how well they are doing, including valuable spoken advice. The quality of formal marking varies; while some written work is well marked with clear indications on how it might be improved, other teachers provide few helpful comments. The pupils assess each others' work effectively in art but such techniques are not used enough elsewhere. The use of assessment criteria to help pupils gauge how well they are doing and identify what they need to do next, as well as to encourage them to strive towards higher standards, is underdeveloped. Improved systems to track and analyse the pupils' progress against their targets have recently been set up. The academic progress of pupils who have special education needs, however, is not monitored adequately.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's evaluation states that the curriculum is outstanding. While inspectors acknowledge the strengths identified by the school, they also note several weaknesses and judge the curriculum to be satisfactory overall.

In Years 7 to 9, most pupils are taught all the subjects required by the National Curriculum and they also have the valuable opportunity to study drama and dance. However, some pupils with learning difficulties in Years 8 and 9 are taught separately for several subjects. The planning for these groups is incomplete; this is unsatisfactory.

In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum has improved over the last two years. The increased range of vocational subjects meets the pupils' varied needs. However, there are some weaknesses. For example, pupils who do not choose information and communication technology (ICT) as a course option are taught it in blocks of time taken from their science lessons. Although this arrangement gives an adequate, though spasmodic, experience in ICT, it disrupts the pupils' progress in science.

Pupils of all ages benefit from the outstanding range of extracurricular activities that enhance their achievement and make a significant contribution to their personal development. The school's specialist status as a performing arts college has been used very effectively to promote and reach high standards in the arts and to give added breadth to the pupils' experience, both within and beyond the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's view of this area of its work is that it is outstanding. The inspection team judged it to be good with many aspects embodying the essence of Every Child Matters. Procedures for child protection are in place and relevant staff have received appropriate training. Arrangements for the health and safety, security and general well-being of pupils are good. The school keeps adequate records of accidents and fire drills, although there is some inconsistency in the way parents are informed about head injuries and in the systematic recording of occasional administration of medicines.

The Enrichment Centre provides outstanding support to vulnerable pupils, those with learning difficulties and for any other pupils who give cause for concern, due, for example, to pastoral or emotional issues. It operates very effectively in managing the process of inclusion for these pupils, and very good use is made of a wide range of internal and external staff. Parents are kept well informed and are invited to attend meetings in order to assist in monitoring and reviewing the progress of their children.

Good use is made of the referral centre to manage the occasional exclusion of pupils from classrooms, although the reasons for exclusion are not always recorded in the logbook.

The majority of parents are very supportive of the school and keen to convey to inspectors the valuable contribution it makes to their child's development. About 600 parents completed the Ofsted questionnaire. A minority noted a range of issues with which they were concerned. The most frequent were linked to perceived inconsistency in communications between school and home and lack of account taken of pupils' and parents' views.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school evaluated leadership and management as good, but inspectors judge that they are satisfactory overall.

Under the headteacher's leadership, the staff, parents and governors are united in a common purpose to enable the pupils to become well-rounded learners. This vision is underpinned by the school's Catholic ethos, and is reflected in its commitment to inclusion and care. The school is a welcoming place, enhanced by the extensive displays of work in the visual and performing arts. It runs smoothly: day-to-day management is effective.

The headteacher and senior managers are rightly concerned about pupils' previous underachievement, despite the significant levels of dedication that teachers and pupils bring to their work. They have refocused the school's work, recently implementing a number of measures to address identified issues and raise standards. They are demonstrating the capacity to bring about improvement. For instance, they have begun to use data analysis to gauge the effectiveness of teaching over time, to track the pupils' progress and detect underachievement, and to identify pupils for whom alternative provision might be appropriate. Previously, factors affecting the pupils' progress, such as staffing difficulties, were not identified or tackled quickly enough.

The self-evaluation accurately identifies many strengths and priorities for development. However, there are weaknesses in the quality of improvement planning at whole-school and departmental levels; for example, a lack of attention to important details such as how the school will know whether particular actions have been effective. The rate of improvement on the key issues identified in the previous inspection report has been uneven: some were not properly addressed prior to 2003. Accommodation in some areas has been modernised and ICT resources improved. Although many management structures and procedures have since been implemented, there remain weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation.

The school has a core of strong practitioners who are capable of leading strategies for improvement, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. The rigour with which middle managers monitor and evaluate the work of their areas varies. Few measurable targets are set to help gauge improvement or to enable senior managers to fulfil their line-management roles.

Governance is satisfactory. The governors are strongly supportive of the school and involved in its day-to-day life. They are well informed about the breadth of its activity. However, because the school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its work are not rigorous enough, governors are not always provided with the information they need to equip them to ask challenging questions about its performance.

The school's finances and resources are well managed. The new purpose-built accommodation for the performing arts is impressive and highly valued by the pupils. Some other accommodation, notably outdoor facilities for physical education and the dining accommodation, is unsatisfactory.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am writing to tell you about the findings of our inspection but, first of all, I would like to thank you for welcoming us to your school. In particular, thank you for talking to us so enthusiastically about your experiences at De La Salle School.

We think that the best features of your school are:

- the performing arts. This provides many of you with extra opportunities in dance, drama, and music as well as exciting lessons in those subjects;
- your behaviour. You have very caring attitudes towards others. You raise money for charities and some of you act as listening partners. You take responsibilities, like being a prefect, seriously. You are polite and considerate, and your behaviour in lessons is almost always of the highest standard;
- the way your teachers care for you and encourage you as you progress through the school. The Enrichment Centre gives some of you particularly good help;
- you are keen to eat and live healthily, and are sensible about keeping safe.

What the school could do better:

- although many of you work hard and achieve good standards in tests and examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11, your results are not always as high as they ought to be considering how well you did at primary school;
- you told us that you enjoy practical subjects: more hands-on activities in lessons would be a good idea. Sometimes, although you listen carefully to your teachers, you could join in more fully by offering ideas and answering questions;
- you do not have a lot of opportunities to learn for yourselves. Also, many of you do not know exactly what you would need to do to achieve the grade or level you would like;
- the school council should be as active as it once was.

There are many things about your school that you enjoy. We have identified what should be improved. We are sure that you will play your part in helping the staff and governors develop the work of your school further.